Beginning the Search for Child Care

What are your family’s needs?
• How many hours you will need?
• What is the total amount you can afford to pay for child care?
• What is your desired location?
• What are your child-rearing philosophy and goals?
• What are your child’s needs: your child’s age, personality, and other special needs such as developmental delays (e.g. autism, Pervasive Development Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Down’s syndrome, developmental and/or cognitive delays, neurological disorders,), behavioral/emotional disturbances (e.g. ADD/ADHD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, Tourette's Syndrome), orthopedic or sensory impairment (motor function problems, hearing or visual impairments), FAS/FADE (fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol drug effect), health impaired (e.g. juvenile diabetes, HIV, asthma, heart conditions, epilepsy, arthritis, epilepsy, failure to thrive), English as a second language

What are your options?
• Do you want in home care, family day care, center care, short-term cooperative, preschool?
• Does the provider have multi-child discounts, sliding scales, and/or scholarship programs?
• Are there religious child care facilities, Montessori programs, or programs for children with special needs in the area?

Where should you look for child care?
• Ask trusted family, friends, neighbors, co-workers for recommendations.
• Search via internet, want ads, bulletin boards, Yellow Pages.
• Use a referral agency (www.optionsforworkingparents.com/our_programs.htm)

Telephone interviewing
• Introduce yourself, state how you got the provider’s name and your reason for calling. Ask for the director. Ask if they have 10-15 minutes to answer questions. Give the provider your name, as well as the name age and sex of your child and when care is needed. Then ask several preliminary questions to get a sense of whether or not the provider meets your needs (see “Questions to Ask Potential Child Care Providers”).

Face to face interviewing
• Even if you enjoyed the provider in the telephone interview, it is essential that you meet with the provider in person to gather more information, observe the providers in action, inspect the site, and let the providers interview you. Make
sure you have the provider show you the equipment and toys, where the children nap, and how they have child proofed the facility. Ask questions related to the facility atmosphere (e.g. safety and stimulation concerns), staff and child interaction (e.g. skills of employees), activities (e.g. structured versus unstructured activities), and tuition/fees/rules (e.g. fee policies.) See “Questions to Ask Potential Child Care Providers” for an extensive list of questions.

**Once you decide:**

- Make a follow-up appointment with the provider to review arrangements and to sign any necessary forms. Make sure you have a written policy and contract from the provider. If the provider does not give you something in writing, clarify the agreement in writing yourself and ask the provider to sign the document with you. You may want to schedule a two-week trial arrangement. If you take this extra time up front, you will be less likely to experience any unpleasant surprises later.

Adapted from Joan Sprain (2004) Regents of the University of Minnesota.