Questions to Ask Potential Child Care Providers

General questions:

- Do you have an opening?
- What ages do you accept?
- Is there a waiting list?
- How long is the waiting list and what is the expected turnover time?
- What is the total capacity in terms of number of children you will accept?
- What are your hours?
- Are you licensed? If so, for how long?
- How long have you been in business?
- How many children do you care for? What are their ages and sex?
- How many are full-time? Part-time?
- What is the child to caregiver ratio for each age group?
- What is your vacation and illness policy?
- What are your fees? Are there sliding fees, scholarships, and/or multi-child discounts?
- Are you a member of the food program (federally funded child care food program-CCFP)?
- What training or experience do you and your staff have?
- Do you smoke?
- Do you have pets?
- What is the application process?
- Do you offer drop-in daily and/or hourly rates?
- What is the philosophy of the center or home?
- Do you charge for sick days or when the child is on vacation? Do you close for holidays and if so which ones?
- What is the policy on sick children?
- When are the fees due?
- Is there a charge if you pick your child up late?
- How much notice is required for your child to leave the facility?
- Does the facility accept government subsidies?
- Does the facility provide receipts for income tax credits?
Age-specific information

- Do you hold infants during feeding?
- How much time do infants spend in the crib, play pen and/or walker?
- Describe how you would play with my infant.
- Describe how you deal with parent/child separation, particularly in cases of separation anxiety.
- What will I be expected to provide?
- What type diapers would you prefer? Can I use cloth?
- Describe how you discipline.
- Describe how you handle toilet training.
- Describe organized activities you provide for children.
- Are the educational programs designed to prepare a child for primary education?

Other important questions:

- Tell me about yourself. How did you decide to become a provider? What do you like most about being a provider? How long do you plan to be one? Does your family support your business?
- Can you describe what a typical day might be like for my child?
- How do you handle emergencies?
- Are you affiliated with a hospital?
- What is the procedure for contacting you?
- Do you have infant and child cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training? Do you carry liability insurance?
- Are children ever transported in a vehicle while in your care? If so, do you have a valid driver's license and what is your driving record?
- Can parents "drop in" for a visit?
- Are parents encouraged to volunteer and participate in center activities?
- Do you go on any field trips?
- Is there limited access to television?
- Do you or any of the staff speak a language in addition to English?
- Do you provide transportation from the center to home or from the center to school?
- Are meals included in the price? If so which ones (e.g. breakfast, snack, lunch, dinner)?
- Can you accommodate special diets (e.g. vegetarian, certain food allergies)?
- Describe the feedback I will receive about my child at the end of the day.
- What types of records to you maintain concerning my child's behavior?
- What is your snow day policy?
- How to staff support the emotional development of children?
- How many days did parents need to use alternative care this past year?
- What are some things you hope my child will learn here?
- What would you do if you and I disagreed about something?
- How much staff turnover has there been in the past year?
• How long has the staff been working at the facility (average tenure of staff)?
• Does the classroom staff have experience and skills in child-care methods and developmental learning?
• How capable are the providers at being able to resolve conflicts between children?
• Does the center have strict procedures for hiring caregivers?
• Are applicants interviewed by management, fingerprinted when required by state law and required to take a medical exam in compliance with state licensing regulations? Are background checks and written references mandatory?
• Can you provide me with a list of references?
• What health precautions do you take?
• What are your rules?
• Can I see your contract/license?
• How are complaints handled in the organization?
• How is the lighting and ventilation?
• Are safe, sanitary, hygienic conditions maintained?
• Is the staff prepared or trained for possible allergic reactions or other special needs?
• Are there several toilets and wash facilities available and are children encouraged to wash their hands?
• Is there an outdoor area that is safe to play in?
• Is there space for running about freely for active play and still other space where quiet play may go on undisturbed, both indoors and out?
• What is the emphasis of the activities? To have fun? To learn? Both?
• Are the learning programs designed for each age group?
• Do the activities emphasize physical fitness as well as mental development?
• How big are the activity groups?
• How noisy is it?
• Are the toys used in the activities safe and appropriate for the children’s ages?
• Do the children have sufficient rest?
• Will the children be watching television? Is so, what programs and how much time each day?
• What do you want to know about me (and/or my partner and child)?

Don’t feel shy about "drilling" the potential provider with questions. An experienced provider will be accustomed to all types of questions and will have well formulated and articulate answers. Try to visit the site on more than one occasion and observe different staff working with the children. Visit multiple sites in order to compare questions/impressions across sites. Take your child with you to see how s/he responds to the environment and how the staff responds to her/him. Pay attention to your observations and your instincts. If your child has special needs, make sure you have done extra research ahead of time regarding the unique arrangements your child will required. Questions should be even more detailed and specific to the needs of your child.
Questions to ask yourself:

- Are your questions, comments and visits welcome?
- Does the provider appear to love children and seem warm and friendly in general?
- Could you and your child develop a trusting relationship with the provider(s)?
- Does the provider demonstrate a balance between running a business and nurturing children?
- Does the center take your needs into consideration? Is the staff accommodating and flexible?
- Does all of the staff seem amicable and competent, or just certain members of the staff?
- Do the children seem happy?
- Does my child seem happy here?
- Are the activities the kind your child enjoys?
- Does my child seem to get along with the other children?
- Does the provider understand developmentally appropriate activities for the different age levels and does the provider seem dedicated to helping children learn and thrive.
- Does the provider seem to discipline children appropriately?
- Does the provider give praise in a manner that will enhance your child's self-esteem?
- Does the overall environment appear comfortable, safe and healthy?
- Do the children seem to get individualized attention?
- How does the staff physically handle the children?