

1.) Is the child care center licensed?

The state Department of Public Welfare (DPW) certifies child care providers. At least once a year, DPW inspects Child Care Centers, Group Homes and on a random basis, inspects Family Homes that serve four to six children. DPW is also responsible for investigating complaints about child care facilities.

You can find child care providers near your home or workplace using the Online Child Care Provider Search

<https://www.humanservices.state.pa.us/Compass.Web/ProviderSearch/pgm/PSWEL.aspx>

2.) What is your overall child care philosophy?

Does the child care center focus more on nurturing and providing quality care or does it have an academics component as well? How are the providers trained and what do they determine is “age appropriate?” What type of enrichment activities are done and how will parents be informed of these?

3.) Does the child care center follow a set curriculum or a schedule?

A child care center that follows a particular curriculum is more likely to provide a more stimulating environment for your child.

4.) What is the sick child policy?

A quality child care center has a sick child policy in place to determine when children are required to stay home. This helps slow the spread of the illness to the other children. Ask if the center posts warnings when a communicable disease is diagnosed in one of the children. This allows parents to watch for signs in their own children.

5.) What is your discipline policy?

This can be a really sensitive topic for parents, and it is important that you thoroughly understand what discipline approach is utilized and that you are comfortable with it. Most child care centers have written guidelines for review. Not only do you want to find out what they do, but you also want to clearly understand what type of practices are prohibited.

6.) What is the payment policy?

The cost of child care is a consideration for many families. The payment policy is another aspect to consider. Determine if the child care center requires you to pay when your child is absent for sickness or vacation.

7.) What is your staff turnover rate?

It should come as no surprise that staff turnover rates at child care centers are high. You want to know what the frequency of staff changes because it can affect your child’s comfort and sense of security if changes are too frequent. And, high turnover can signal a serious problem in the center’s operation.

8.) Can I make unannounced visits to see/observe my child?

Stay away from any provider who doesn't allow you to come and go or that has a strict visiting schedule. You should always feel welcome to observe your child during the day.

9.) Who can pick up my child?

Parents need to be sure there is a system in place for who is allowed to pick up children, especially in case of emergency when they may not be able to get there.

10.) What types of meals and snack do you serve?

Parents and providers often have different notions about what is a nutritionally balanced and suitable meal or snack. Parents must be sensitive to the fact that child care providers cannot tailor meals to individual children (unless parents bring the food); however, particular requests or items to avoid should be noted. Any food sensitivities must be stated and clearly understood (such as allergies). After that, ask what the policy is on occasional treats, junk food, and food preparation.

11.) Does your center participate in Keystone STARS?

Keystone STARS is a continuous quality improvement program. It has four STAR levels. Each STAR designation has its own research-based performance standards. These standards measure four areas that make a difference in the quality of care your child receives:

- 1. The educated and well-trained staff**
- 2. The environment your child is in everyday**
- 3. Leadership and Management**
- 4. Family and Community Partnerships**

As a program moves from STAR 1 to STAR 4, the requirements in these areas increase.

To find a STARS facility near you

http://www.pakeys.org/pages/stars_centers.aspx

12.) Do you offer part-time or flexible care?

Part-time jobs may only need part-time care. Some families may only need occasional care.

13.) Are background checks conducted on all staff members?

It's not enough to just know they are. Ask whether they are state or national checks and how often they are run on employees. Make sure you are comfortable with the response.

14.) What are your security/ safety policies?

Parents should look around at the overall environment and determine their level of comfort and its cleanliness and overall safety protocols. What is the supervision ratio? Is it well-ventilated, well lit and a comfortable temperature? Are toys sanitized on a regular basis?

15.) What kind of education does your staff have?

You want to look for child care centers that have employees with an associates or bachelors degree in a child related field.

For more information or questions regarding child care please contact Erica Ponczek, The Learning Lamp's Early Learning Director, at (814) 262-0732 or eponczek@thelearninglamp.org.