



## Guide to Choosing Quality Child Care

Choosing child care is an important decision. A safe and positive child care setting promotes healthy growth and development. It takes time, patience and understanding as to what to look for when selecting child care. You know the needs of your child and family. However, you may need assistance in matching those needs to available resources. That is why Steuben Child Care Project (SCCP) can assist you in making this important decision.

### **Step 1: Contact Steuben Child Care Project for Referrals**

SCCP maintains a listing of over 175 child care givers within Steuben County. Most parents are not aware of all the types of child care options in their area and what the differences are. SCCP informs parents on the phone or in the office on the types of care **at no cost**. By entering the parent's criteria into our database the counselor can search for matching child care services. Along with referrals, consultation is given to assist in choosing the best care for their children. All information is maintained with confidentiality. Educational materials will be sent to the parent matching the criteria given to the counselor. SCCP does not make recommendations or guarantee the quality of any program listed in our referral database. It is important that parents complete the steps in this guide to choosing a quality child care program that meet their needs.

### **Step 2: Call Child Care Givers**

Though SCCP makes every attempt to update the vacancy information on every provider in our database on a monthly basis, as well as thorough updates yearly, parents should call care givers to find out if they have openings for their child because vacancy information changes so often. You should also ask what days and hours they are open, what ages they serve, if they provide transportation, their location and the cost of care (some offer financial assistance, so be sure to ask). Also, ask what the parent should bring, for example, a pack-n-play, hi-chair, etc. Be sure to ask if they have a waiting list for the ages of the child (ren) you need care for and if there is an application fee. Schedule a time to visit.

### **Step 3: Visit and Evaluate**

Visit at least 2 or 3 care givers in person before you decide where to place your child (ren). Try to visit while day care children are there so you can see how the care giver interacts with them. Spend at least one hour in the room or rooms where your child would be and spend time talking with the owner or director. Look for the quality indicators below as you evaluate each program, place a check next to each quality indicator that the program demonstrates. If a program does not meet all of the indicators in this guide, it does not mean that they are of low quality. This is just a guide and you should go with your own instincts and choose a day care that best meets your family's needs.

#### **Environment**

- Good lighting
- Rooms occupied by children are clean, attractive, safe, roomy and comfortable
- Enough toys, games and materials so that children don't have to wait to use them
- Space for each child's belongings, including a change of clothing
- A safe outdoor play area, both shaded and open with a variety of age appropriate equipment free of hazards that offers space to run, tumble and play
- A book center with good picture books
- A parent information board
- Sturdy, child-size furniture
- Windows low enough for a child to look outside with appropriate safety barriers
- Games, arts and crafts, sports and dramatic play for children of all ages

- A separate crib, cot, or nap mat for each child
- Quiet, dark and separate nap area
- Are pets present in the facility? If so, will this impact your decision?

### **Program**

- A posted schedule of daily activities
- Good balance between planned activities that are age appropriate and time for free play
- Time for conversation, reading, listening to music, homework, or being alone
- Activities are interesting, fun and challenging where children can learn by doing and can succeed
- Children work cooperatively on projects and games to solve problems
- Children make music and/or listen to music, sing and laugh
- Infants, when not asleep, are out of the crib and included in age appropriate activities
- Care giver(s) play with, sing to, hold, and cuddle each child often throughout the day
- Care givers meet regularly to plan and evaluate their program

### **Policies**

- Up-to-date state license or registration is always posted
- Parents are actively involved, given opportunities to participate, and welcome to visit at any time
- Written discipline policy eliminating spanking, shaking, or hurting a child in any way
- Emergency procedures are posted
- Policy for handling sick children
- Holidays and hours of operation are clearly posted

### **Staff**

- Warm, nurturing, friendly, accepting and patient
- Care giver(s) with training and experience (regulated providers required 30 hours of training every 2 years; accredited programs have higher standards than State licensing regulations and usually a higher quality program)
- Director and head teacher with college level training in early childhood education (in a Day Care Center or School Age Child Care program)
- Care giver(s) work as a team (what is their staff turnover? Low staff turnover may indicate higher quality program since there has been stability and consistency in the program)
- Parents comfortable talking with the care giver(s)
- Care giver(s) comfort a sad or angry child in a loving way
- Care giver(s) offer positive guidance when a child misbehaves
- Care giver(s) enjoy working with the children
- Care giver(s) really listen to the children and parents
- Individual needs of children are being met
- Words of sincere praise and encouragement are given
- Care giver(s) encourage children to learn new skills
- Care giver(s) are energetic and in control, while being flexible and fun
- Care giver(s) are positive role models for children
- Refer to the handout "Types of Care" (or found on the website) for information regarding group size and child-to-care giver ratios. The lower ratio of caregiver to child allows more time to be spent with each child, which could lead to a higher quality program.

### **Nutrition**

- Well-balanced, nutritious meals
- Pleasant and sociable meal times
- Infants and toddlers are encouraged to feed themselves
- Care giver(s) sit at table with children during meal times
- Infants held during bottle feeding, and are fed according to their needs and individual schedules
- Bottles are refrigerated until needed, and used promptly

- Left over formula discarded at the end of the day
- Program accommodates special diet needs

### **Parent Involvement**

- Parents are allowed to visit any time
- Care giver(s) inform parents about their children' successes and about activities for the day (such as nap schedule, meals, etc)
- Parents make suggestions about menus, activities and program
- Parents are encouraged to participate in the program
- A parent newsletter and/or bulletin board
- Regularly scheduled parent meetings

### **Diaper and Toilet Routines**

- Child-size toilets and sinks
- Diapers changed without delay after they are soiled, and infants are thoroughly cleaned after the dirty diaper is removed
- Changing table surface disinfected after each baby is changed
- Care giver(s)' and baby's hands washed after changing each baby's diaper
- Toileting begins only when the child is physically ready, interested and able to understand the process of using the toilet
- Parents involved in the decision to begin toilet training for their children
- Toilet training as a positive, pleasant part of toddler's day

### **Health and Safety**

- Children are supervised by care giver(s) at all times
- A first-aid trained staff member at the center at all times
- A smoke free environment (even when children are not present)
- A well maintained supply of fire extinguishers, first aid kits, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors in the facility
- Toys and equipment are clean, sanitized and in good repair (for example: free from sharp edges, splinters, paint chips and loose parts)
- A written health record is kept for each child
- Children will be released to another person only if you have given written permission in advance
- Area that is used for food preparation and eating is clean and sanitary
- Written procedures for reporting suspected cases of child abuse and neglect by parents or care giver(s)
- Written policy stating that medication will only be given to children by a care giver who is certified to administer medication
- Written policy for handling sick children
- Diapering/toilet areas clean, free from odor, well-ventilated and removed from the feeding area
- Pads and blankets changed and laundered daily or more often as needed
- All children and care giver(s) wash their hands after using the toilet, before eating and as needed throughout the day

### **Warning Signs**

- The program does not encourage parents to visit or observe
- The children move about without any guidance or involvement for 30 minutes or more
- The care giver(s) spend most of their time scolding or yelling at the children

**\*Be sure to check with other parents for references about a provider(s) or call the Regional Office for a history of violations, 1-585-238-8531. The website listed below can also be accessed for history on the provider as to whether the provider has had any compliance issues.**

**Please note that you can obtain a copy of the NYS Child Care Regulations by contacting our office or visit the Office of Children and Family Services website at [www.ocfs.state.ny.us](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us).**