

# iBlankie

*every parent's security blanket*



## **PRESCHOOL & DAYCARE PROGRAMS: HOW TO CHOOSE CHILDCARE THAT IS A GOOD MATCH FOR YOUR CHILD**

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

This article discusses various types of preschools and daycare centers and offers specific guidelines to help you focus on finding a developmentally-appropriate program for caring for and educating your young child. The concept of a preschool/daycare that addresses the needs of the whole child, that is, the emotional, social, cognitive, verbal, and physical developmental needs of your child, is explored. The importance of a childcare program helping children learn through play is also discussed.

This article addresses the search for a good preschool or daycare, as well as the search for a preschool or daycare that is a good match for your particular child and your family. This article helps focus on your child's strengths and your child's needs to ensure a good match. A detailed Take-It-with-You Checklist is provided for your preschool and daycare visits.

## *YOUR CHILD*

It is important to take a detailed look at your child so that you can find not only a childcare situation that is a good childcare program, but also so that you can find a childcare situation that is a good match for your child. It is helpful to focus on your child's basic personality, as it is at this point in time, and on your child's learning style.

### *Personality: Who is Your Child?*

It is helpful to consider your child's basic personality, although this may change greatly over time.

#### *EMOTIONALLY*

Is your child an extrovert or an introvert? Or both? Does your child adjust to new situations with ease or is it a challenge? Is your child intense or more low-key? Does your child have a low tolerance for frustration or a high tolerance for frustration?

#### *SOCIALLY*

Is your child comfortable with other children? Is your child comfortable with other adults? Does your child easily move into group play or does your child need adult facilitation in joining a group?

#### *PHYSICALLY*

Is your child very active or more on the quiet end of the spectrum? Does your child enjoy gross motor/large muscle activities at the playground? Is your child able to do fine motor/small hand muscle tasks easily, or is that a challenge?

#### *VERBALLY*

Is your child verbal or quiet? Does your child enjoy listening to books?

#### *INTELLECTUALLY*

Is your child very curious? Is your child an analytical thinker?

## *Learning Style: In What Way Does Your Child Learn Best?*

According to psychologist Howard Gardner, Ph.D., there are multiple types of intelligences. These types of intelligences can also be conceptualized as learning styles or ways in which your child learns from the environment and interacts with the environment. It can be helpful to focus on these learning styles to match how your child learns with the learning environment in a group situation. Here are some learning styles to consider.

*Note: Most children and adults have several of these styles of learning, with one dominant style. There are some who think that it is difficult to identify the learning style of young children; for most children this is possible.*

### *VERBAL/LINGUISTIC*

Uses language to express meaning and understands others; likes to tell a story; likes books and being read to; enjoys word games and rhyming.

### *LOGICAL/MATHEMATICAL*

Has the ability to understand basic properties of numbers; likes to count, appreciates cause and effect; asks "why" a lot; explores patterns and relationships.

### *VISUAL/SPATIAL*

Has the ability to form a mental image of spatial layouts; draws, builds, designs, and creates with blocks and LEGOS; plays with machines; does puzzles, daydreams.

### *AUDITORY/MUSICAL*

Has the ability to recognize, memorize, and create songs; can differentiate between subtle sounds; is sensitive to sound; notices rhythms; enjoys playing with musical instruments.

### *BODY/KINESTHETIC*

Has the ability to use parts of the body to solve problems, as in sports, dancing or making things with hands; needs to move to learn; learns through touching things; needs to move around.

### *INTERPERSONAL/SOCIAL*

Has the ability to understand other children and adults and cooperate effectively with them; notices who plays with whom at school and why; understands social rules.

## *INTRAPERSONAL/SELF-KNOWLEDGE*

Has the ability to understand things about oneself; tuned into own feelings, preferences; often enjoys being alone; focuses inwardly on feelings and dreams.

## *NATURALIST*

Interested in plants and animals in the environment; very curious about nature and the weather; needs to be outside; feels a genuine connection with pets and other animals.

## *SPIRITUAL*

Has an interest in the universe and creation; thinks about the spiritual aspect of people and how people relate to their environment on a larger plane.

The majority of people have a strong visual learning style. Most young children are also kinesthetic, learning through exploration with their hands and their bodies; most boys, in particular, are kinesthetic learners. For some there is also a strong auditory learning style.

Identifying two or three ways in which your child learns and communicates best can facilitate finding a childcare program that can provide not only a good match for your child in promoting learning, but can also provide a comfortable childcare experience compatible with the way in which your child communicates with others.

## *MATCHING YOUR CHILD WITH A CHILDCARE PROGRAM*

### *Whole Child Needs*

In matching your child with the best childcare program, it is important that all of the needs of your child are addressed by the program: emotional needs, social needs, intellectual needs, verbal needs, and physical needs, such as small and large muscle and activity level. This is called meeting the needs of the "whole child."

## *EMOTIONAL MATCH*

Does your child seem comfortable? Will your child have the opportunity to feel capable and successful? Is encouraging self-esteem an important part of the program? If your child is an extrovert or introvert, will the staff tend to your child's emotional needs? Is the staff empathetic with the children and patient with their feelings?

## *SOCIAL MATCH*

Do the children seem like your child? Can you imagine your child having friends in this group? Are social skills and group play facilitated? Are conflict situations discussed as learning opportunities rather than opportunities for punishment (time-outs should NOT be used for discipline, especially in group situations—see [Discipline article](#))? Are there many opportunities for children to talk and share with themselves and with the staff?

## *COGNITIVE/VERBAL MATCH*

Will your child be intellectually stimulated? Does the staff ask open-ended questions, without right or wrong answers, to encourage thought and creativity? Are the child's verbal needs being met? Is talking encouraged? Are there books to look at and to read to the child whenever they are interested? Is the staff interested in conversing with the children?

## *PHYSICAL/ACTIVITY MATCH*

Are there activities that your child would enjoy? Are there ample opportunities for large muscle activities and outdoor time, which is especially important for active boys? Are there opportunities for fine motor/small muscle activities such as lacing, painting, drawing, playdough, sand play, etc.?

## *Learning Style Match*

Does the environment provide for the learning style of your child? It is very important that the childcare program provide a good match for the way in which your child learns best and communicates best.

For instance, if your child is a visual learner, is the classroom visually interesting, but not visually overwhelming; are there art activities? If your child is a kinesthetic learner, are there many opportunities, both scheduled and unscheduled, for movement, both inside the classroom and outside the classroom on the playground or on nature walks? If your child is musical, are there songs and musical instruments as part of every day's activities?

## *Parent Match*

What is the role of the parents at the school? What involvement is expected of you? Are there ample opportunities for communication between you and the staff? Are you always welcome in the classroom? How do teachers communicate with parents? Also, are you comfortable with the role of religion in the classroom? Are there prayers before snacks? How are religious holidays celebrated?

# *CHILDCARE PROGRAMS: CURRICULUM*

## *Whole Child Philosophy*

It is extremely important that the needs of the whole child be met and that there is not an emphasis in the childcare program on a particular set of needs that precludes another set of needs. A good quality childcare program should be fostering emotional, social, cognitive/intellectual, verbal, and physical development in equal measure.

Some childcare programs place too much emphasis on the cognitive or intellectual development of children, while neglecting the emotional and social development of the child. Research has shown that encouraging a child's emotional development and social development are key to raising a child with good self-esteem who is capable of learning in many areas and in socializing with peers.

A strong emotional and social foundation is the cornerstone of all learning for young children. There should NOT be a curriculum emphasizing intellectual development to the detriment of emotional and social growth; there should NOT be an emphasis on paper-and-pencil activities and academics prior to kindergarten.

## *EMOTIONAL NEEDS*

Young children are encouraged to be independent. Promoting a child's self-esteem is an important part of teacher-child interaction. Self-control and self-regulation are fostered. Staff realizes that it is developmentally appropriate for young children to forget rules and not always understand rules; staff uses discipline situations as opportunities for growth and learning. Staff realizes that children's behaviors change through the positive reinforcement of the desired behavior, not through punishment. Time-outs should NOT be a part of the childcare discipline plan. Children's feelings are acknowledged and respected and discussed; feelings are an important part of the curriculum.

## *SOCIAL NEEDS*

Staff provides facilitation for social situations and conflict situations. Children are taught how to have a friend and how to be a friend. Learning through social play is encouraged. Respectful communication skills are modeled and practiced throughout the classroom. Exclusionary play, such as "You can't play with us!" is guided into inclusionary play, "Everyone can play."



## *COGNITIVE/INTELLECTUAL NEEDS*

The children's natural interests are respected and explored. The curriculum is child-centered in that a child's curiosities are incorporated into the curriculum. Analytic thinking skills are encouraged. The staff asks children questions that are open-ended and thought-provoking, questions without a right or wrong answer. Pre-reading and pre-math activities are part of the curriculum, that is, learning through art and games and play. Formal pencil and paper tasks—academics—are not a part of the curriculum.

## *VERBAL NEEDS*

Communication skills are emphasized. There are many books to read and peruse throughout the day. Story time is an important part of the schedule. Children's conversations, fantasies and shared experiences are respected and valued.

## *PHYSICAL NEEDS*

There is ample opportunity for fine motor skills to be practiced and enjoyed. Large muscle opportunities are present both within the classroom, such as large blocks, a slide or climber, and outside at a large playground area. Children's physical needs to move and to move in order to learn are respected. There are many scheduled and unscheduled opportunities for children to use their bodies to dance, jump, creep, hop, etc.

## *Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum*

It is important that the childcare curriculum be developmentally appropriate. When working with young children, it is imperative to have realistic expectations based upon a child's age. Young children are not short adults; young children are not neurologically or behaviorally capable of the cognitive understanding or impulse control of older children and adults.

The brochures offered by The National Education for Young Children (NAEYC) that are listed in the [FAQ](#) section of this article detail the many behaviors that are realistic for toddlers and young children in a childcare setting. In addition, the series *Your One-Year-Old, Your Two-Year-Old, Your-Three-Year-Old*, etc., authored by Frances Ilg and Louise Bates Ames, discusses developmentally appropriate behavior at the various ages and stages of a young child's life.

It is important that childcare staff be cognizant of early childhood growth and development and provide curriculum and discipline strategies congruent with early childhood development. (Also see [Discipline article](#) for additional details).

## *Importance of Learning through Play*

Young children learn through play. Their toys are their words and their play is their conversation. Young children use toys and play in the same manner that adults use conversation—for catharsis, to deal with inner conflicts, and to problem solve. Play is empowering to children and essential to their learning process. To dismiss children's playing as *just play* is the same as dismissing an adult conversation as *just words*.

Play is also fundamental to child development on many levels. For example, drawing or painting is a pre-reading activity—a child painting a three dimensional sun on a two dimensional piece of paper is a precursor to learning that sounds can be represented as letters with meaning on paper. Sorting different colored apples is an important exercise in *like* and *different* and is considered a pre-math activity in terms of establishing sets and is a pre-reading activity, which will later manifest the letter *p* looking different from the letter *q*. Sand table play is an important hands-on activity involving weight and mass and volume that is essential for later deeper understanding of mathematical concepts.

## *How Many Hours? How Many Days?*

How many hours per day and how many days per week of childcare are optimal for your child? The answers to these questions are twofold and can often be in conflict: what works best for your child and what works best within the context of your family's needs.

In the best of all possible worlds, these are the recommendations for group care:

- 2 year-old: 2 mornings per week
- 3 year-old: 3-4 mornings per week, a lunch bunch once or twice a week
- 4 year-old: 4-5 mornings per week, a lunch bunch one, two or three times per week

If only addressing the needs of your child, it is important to note that most young children do not need intensive group settings and intensive group care, but thrive with some group care and a considerable amount of one-on-one time with a primary caregiver, be it a parent or another family member or a nanny. Most young children need that important individual attention in the comfort of their home for the majority of the week.

However, given the structure and financial needs of many families, two-career parenting or single parenting make the above childcare recommendations difficult for many. If both parents are working and a full-time nanny is not affordable or if the parent is a single working parent, then full-time childcare is the only option. Given this context, then it becomes even more critical that your child be in a good childcare setting because of the many hours your child will be spending in group care.

## *The Teacher and The Classroom*

### *TEACHER-CHILD GOALS AND INTERACTIONS*

For most young children, the teachers in the classroom are transferential mother figures that provide the anchor to their world. It is critical that the teachers are well-versed in child development and in realistic expectations for particular ages. Teachers should be warm and nurturing and flexible; they should be patient and interested when listening to children.

Early childhood classrooms should be child-centered, with the individual needs of the child being addressed, rather than teacher-directed, where the teacher is directing all of the activities and the interactions. The teacher arranges the materials and the classroom and a play-based curriculum and allows the children freedom within social limits and the loose schedule of the day.

Activities should allow for some group time (encouraged, but not required until about age four), some art possibilities (once again, encouraged, but not required until about four years old), some group reading time (encouraged, but not required until four years), and a good deal of free choice/free play time for children.

Social skills and communication skills are fostered throughout and the emphasis is on shaping behavior through positive interactions and encouragement. Important goals are for children to grow in independence and to learn social skills. Self-esteem is an important focus, as children with high self-esteem tend to be self-disciplined. The needs of the individual child, be they emotional, social, cognitive, verbal, or physical, are recognized, respected and provided for.

### *ACTIVITIES*

A typical childcare schedule includes a mixture of active and quiet activities, as well as group and individual activities. Since young children are often challenged by transitions, there is adequate time allowed for movement from one activity to another. There is a structure/curriculum/schedule to the classroom time, but there is a good deal of flexibility within that framework to allow for individual needs as they arise.

A developmentally-appropriate classroom is child-centered, rather than teacher-directed, so that children's individual needs usually take precedence over group needs.

## *MATERIALS*

Because young children are so concrete and so involved in the-here-and-now, the classroom environment greatly impacts their learning. The toys and equipment and activities and arrangement facilitate the important learning that occurs in the classroom. The learning activities and materials need to be concrete, relevant and developmentally appropriate.

Classrooms should be arranged in centers, with some nooks and crannies so that children are not visually overstimulated and so that the noise is not so distracting. Learning centers should include:

- Block Corner—large block area, with vehicles, dinosaurs, etc.
- House Corner—cooking and nurturing and dress-up opportunities
- Table Toys—board games and puzzles and fine motor manipulatives and crafts
- Art—area for easel painting, as well as a table for crafts
- Sand and Water Table—table for tactile experiences
- Book Area—cozy area for individual or group reading
- Music and Movement—place for music and movement, musical instruments
- Playground—large play area outside; perhaps a large indoor room for rainy days
- Optional: cooking, computers, field trips

## *CHILDCARE PROGRAMS*

### *General Guidelines*

A good childcare program is a program that is developmentally appropriate and that addresses the needs of the whole child, that is, the emotional, social, intellectual, verbal, and physical needs of the child are all supported.

It is important that a program be balanced in all of these areas; a childcare program that, for example, emphasizes the cognitive needs of the child over the emotional and social developmental needs will not provide for adequate development of the whole child; cognitive needs should not supersede self-esteem and communication skills. An academic program, especially with paper-and-pencil tasks predominating, is not appropriate at this

age. See the brochures listed in the [FAQ](#) at the end of the article for additional details on developmentally appropriate practices in childcare settings.

A developmentally-appropriate program also needs to address the physical needs of young children, especially active boys. There needs to be plenty of time devoted to movement and large muscle activities to satisfy your child's need to move and explore to learn.

A parent should also carefully examine the childcare program's website. Look carefully at the philosophy and mission statement—are all areas of the whole child philosophy addressed? Do the goals for children include self-esteem and independence and social communication skills?

Be sure that the school not only talks the talk, but walks the walk in terms of whole child and developmentally appropriate curriculum. During your visit, be sure to ask *"How does your program encourage emotional, social, cognitive, verbal and physical development?"*

A good childcare program also believes in children learning through play and fosters a great deal of free choice play with careful teacher supervision. A good childcare program is also developmentally appropriate.

### *BE AWARE*

If a childcare program is based on an educational philosophy that originated over seventy or eighty years ago, and that educational philosophy has remained unchanged, it is important to carefully observe that the whole child concept is a part of the educational philosophy.

Child development educational philosophy has changed and expanded, especially in the last several decades, and some of the childcare programs based on the older educational philosophies have not incorporated these important developments.

For example, some programs based on older educational philosophies may emphasize cognitive/intellectual development and fine motor development, but virtually ignore emotional and/or social and/or gross motor development. These programs, even if licensed by their particular educational organization (independent of any state licensure), may not be developmentally appropriate for educating the whole child.

## *Visiting and Observing Childcare Programs*

The printable [Take-It-with-You Checklist](#) at the end of this article has detailed points for your observation and offers important questions. You should not hesitate to ask any of the questions listed; you want to ensure that you and your family are comfortable and a good match for the program. Moreover, the childcare program is invested in accepting children and families that are a compatible match for their program.

You are encouraged to visit as many childcare programs as possible; every visit will help you define what you want for your child and your family. Certainly friends' and neighbors' recommendations and program reputations can be taken into account, but a program that works well for another child or family may not work well for your child and your family. When listening to recommendations, ascertain the details of who that child is and the details of what the parent liked about the program.

During a visit, observe the children's faces. Children should be engaged in activities, there should be a moderately high noise level of conversation and play, and there should be children smiling at times. The children are working and the play can be intense; also, temper tantrums and power struggles are developmentally appropriate and should be expected. How the staff responds to these conflict situations is important.

Discipline techniques should not include time-outs (see the [Discipline article](#)), but should involve re-direction and modeling and working with social and communication skills as part of conflict resolution (see the [Conflict Resolution article](#)). Behavior should be guided and shaped positively rather than with negative attention-getting and punishments. Time-outs should not be used.

Teachers should be warm and supportive. Would you like to spend hours with these teachers? Do the teachers seem happy and enthusiastic? Is the program mainly child-centered rather than teacher-directed? Is there flexibility regarding children's individual needs? Flexibility is the keynote in working with young children.

Also, be empowered to listen to your intuition as well as your head. Trust your gut.

## *Licensure*

In many states, there is a difference in licensing between preschools and daycare programs. Check with your state regulatory agencies to review licensing requirements for preschools and licensing requirements for daycare centers. In most states, although this is not always the case, both preschools and daycare centers are licensed by The Department of Health. In addition, for many states, only preschools and not daycare centers, need to be licensed by The Department of Education as the preschool curriculum needs to meet specific educational standards.

## *Preschool vs. Daycare*

As stated in "[Licensure](#)," preschool regulations and licensing and daycare regulations and licensing may differ state to state.

In general, daycare is usually full-day care; preschools are usually half-day (morning or afternoon), perhaps with a lunch bunch or extended day program until 1pm or so.

In many states, when there are different licensing requirements for preschools and daycare programs, the following differences between daycare and preschools may be the case:

- Class sizes may differ: Daycare programs may have higher allowable class sizes. Class size does matter for young children, as children may get less individual attention and teachers may be more into classroom management than quality care.
- Adult-child ratios may differ: Daycare programs may have higher allowable adult-child ratios, so that your child may get less individual attention.
- Staff differences: Daycare programs may have lower standards for the educational background of staff. This may mean less sophisticated staff. This may also mean that the staff salary at daycare centers may be lower than in preschools. In addition, there can be more staff turn-over at daycare programs than at preschool programs.

## *NAEYC Accreditation*

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a highly respected professional organization advocating for quality early childhood education. One of their functions is to provide accreditation to childcare programs that meet their standards. NAEYC accreditation is almost always the mark of a high quality childcare program.

However, a childcare program can be a high quality childcare program and not be NAEYC accredited. The NAEYC accreditation process is complicated, it can take several years, it needs periodic renewal, and it can be expensive, so some smaller quality childcare programs may not have the time or finances to apply for and maintain the NAEYC accreditation. Thus, NAEYC accreditation can be the sign of an excellent program; not having NAEYC accreditation is not an indication one way or another of the quality of the program.

To find a program near you that is accredited by the NAEYC, go to their website [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org) and enter your zip code.

## *Religious vs. Non-sectarian*

Many childcare programs are housed in religious institutions such as churches, temples or mosques. Since it is difficult to find space for preschools and daycare centers, many educational institutions rent space from these religious institutions. Some childcare programs in churches, etc., are independent and have a landlord-tenant relationship with the religious institution; some childcare programs are part of the church itself and may even be governed by the church board.

If a childcare program is housed in a religious institution, you will want to know about the relationship between the childcare program and the religious institution so that you have an indication as to the role of religion in the curriculum. It is appropriate for you to ask the school administration about the school-church connection for clarification.

## *Cooperative Preschools*

Cooperative preschools are preschools in which parents participate in the running of the school. The amount of parent participation runs the gamut. At some schools, parents' only involvement is an annual school clean-up; at other schools, parents may run the entire school, from helping in the class every week to running the entire school board.

For parents with the time to devote to their child's school, most coop schools are high quality—the staff are usually dedicated and long-term and there is more of a community school feeling than at some programs because of the involvement of the families. Coops are usually less expensive than regular preschools because parent volunteers may manage the operations of the school. Some coops also offer buy-out options, where parents can pay more tuition and participate less in the operation of the school.

## **SUMMARY**

Finding a good childcare program involves focusing on your child and focusing on finding *good* childcare that is a *good match* for your child and your family. Quality childcare encourages a child's independence and promotes self-esteem. A good childcare program addresses the whole child, your child's emotional, social, intellectual, verbal, and physical needs. A good childcare program provides a developmentally appropriate curriculum where your child can thrive in a group setting and where your child can learn through play.

Look below the FAQs for the printable detailed [Take-It-with-You Checklist](#) for visiting a childcare program.



## FAQ

### **Q. Is there a resource to help me locate a good developmentally appropriate childcare program in my area?**

To find a program near you that is accredited by The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), go to their website [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org) and enter your zip code. See a description of NAEYC accreditation above in this article. Note: there are many excellent programs that are not NAEYC accredited.

### **Q. Are there other resources for details about the curriculum for a good childcare program?**

The National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) offers several brochures (at a very nominal cost) at [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org) or 1-800-424-2460:

- [Brochure #509](#): A Caring Place for Your Toddler
- [Brochure #517](#): A Good Preschool for Your Child
- [Brochure#539](#): A Guide for Families: Using NAEYC Standards to find Quality Programs for Young Children
- [Brochure #576](#): Play is FUNdamental

### **Q. I have focused on my child and understand her learning style. She is very visual and musical. Do I look for a program that is visual and musical, or do I look for a program to strengthen the other areas where she needs to grow in order to strengthen these areas?**

It is important that your child's strengths be addressed and encouraged. Once a good match for her learning style is found at a school where there are many opportunities for learning visually and musically, she will be comfortable and her development can flourish in other areas.

# CHECKLIST FOR VISITING A CHILDCARE PROGRAM

## 1. PHILOSOPHY OF PROGRAM

- What is your educational philosophy?
- What are the goals for the children?
- Should include: Building self-esteem and encouraging independence; respecting individual differences; developing whole child: emotional, social, cognitive, verbal, physical needs; learning through play.

## 2. STAFF/CHILD RATIO

- What is your staff/child ratio?
- What are your staff qualifications?
- How long have the teachers been teaching at this center? Do they plan on continuing?
- Recommended: At least 1 adult for every 8 children; maximum recommended group: 2's—10 children; 3's & 4's—16 children.

## 3. TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

- Are the teachers warm and interested in the children?
- Are individual children's needs as well as group needs being addressed?
- Are there a lot of verbal interactions with the children as a group and one-on-one?
- Would you enjoy spending time with these adults?
- Does your child seem to like the teachers?

## 4. ACTIVITIES AND MATERIALS

- What are your activity centers?
- How are they used?
- How do they change throughout the year?
- Recommended: Blocks, house corner, table toys, art, sand and water, books, music and movement, outdoor play/playground; optional: cooking, computers, field trips.

## 5. CURRICULUM

- What do the children learn?
- How do the children learn?
- What is a typical day's schedule?
- How is social play between the children encouraged?
- How do you integrate pre-math and pre-science and pre-reading activities into the program?
- Is the development of the whole child encouraged—physical, emotional, social, cognitive, verbal?
- Recommended: Hands-on learning and exploration; opportunities for pre-math, pre-science, language, pre-social studies, pre-reading woven into many activities; NO PENCIL and PAPER DRILLS prior to age 5; ample time for free play; ample time for outdoor play; activities are both child-initiated and adult-initiated; flexible enough to accommodate individual children's interests, needs, and surprises that arise.

## 6. PARENT: INVOLVEMENT, COMFORT, COMMUNICATIONS

- What parental involvement is expected?
- Are parents always welcome in the classrooms?
- How do teachers communicate with the parents—by phone, text, notes, email, newsletter?
- Are there parent-teacher conferences?
- Are there parent education meetings?
- Recommended: Orientation meeting, newsletters, conferences, regular parent education meetings, weekly notes, emails

## 6. LEARNING STYLE MATCH

- "My child is a \_\_\_\_\_ child who enjoys doing \_\_\_\_\_. How would my child fit into your childcare program?"
- Recommended: There need to be multiple ways in which your child can learn in the program: visual learning, kinesthetic learning, music, art, fine motor challenges, gross motor play, and hands-on exploration. There should be toys and games and books in each of the recommended centers that will interest your child.

## 7. SEPARATION ANXIETY ISSUE, IF A CONCERN

- "What would you do if my child had trouble separating from me?"
- Recommended: Short answer: Comfort your child. Long answer: Look for additional strategies, words and techniques in the "[Separation Anxiety at School Drop-off](#)" article.

## 8. DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

- "What would you do if my child did not want to participate in an activity?"
- Recommended: It is developmentally appropriate for your young child (up to age 4) not to be required to engage in a specific activity at a specific time (circle time, snack time). Your child should be encouraged to participate in an activity, but need not join in. Observing from a distance is developmentally appropriate, also. If your child is not interested in a group activity, a staff member can ensure that your child is involved in an activity at another place in the room.

## 9. SOCIAL SKILLS

- "How would you deal with a situation in which a child was being teased or excluded from play because some children thought that child was different?"
- Recommended: Teasing and bullying behavior needs strong, positive limits from adults. A staff member should be clear ("You can't say that \_\_\_\_ can't play") and mediate the conflict and conflict resolution. In addition, positive inclusion and kind words need to be encouraged to shape the positive interactions ("I like the way you are including \_\_\_\_\_ in your play." "Your kind words to your friend are very helpful.")

## 10. SPECIAL CONCERN

- "I am concerned about my child's \_\_\_\_\_. How would you handle this issue?"
- Recommended: You need to feel comfortable with this answer and that it is consistent with how you deal with this issue at home.

## 11. DISCIPLINE

- "What is your discipline policy?"
- Recommended: Time-outs are NOT used. Time-outs can be shaming to children, especially in group settings, and they are not effective (See the Discipline article concerning positive discipline techniques and strategies.) There should be a written plan for shaping challenging behavior, be it biting or hitting or kicking, in a positive way. The teachers need to be teaching communication and social skills as a part of the discipline plan.

## 12. CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- "We are concerned about our child maintaining strong ties to our culture. How do you encourage multi-ethnic diversity in your school?"
- Recommended: The diversity plan should not be a "Mexican Day," for example, where there is one day set aside for a special culture or country. Multi-ethnic diversity needs to be a part of the daily curriculum and interactions—woven into talk about skin color, respecting differences, different languages, snacks and food, etc.

## 13. RELIGION

- "What role does religion play in your day-to-day activities and philosophy? Do the children in your program represent one religion or several religions? Are different religious celebrations observed or is one set of beliefs presented? Do you say a prayer before snack?"
- Recommended: You need to feel comfortable with this answer in terms of your own personal religious belief system.