



# Choosing Child Care: How Do I Find the Right Program?

4Cs of Alameda County | [www.4calameda.org](http://www.4calameda.org)

Choosing the right child care program can be confusing and difficult. But it's a really important part of your job as a parent. As you know, children grow and learn very rapidly in the early years. This is the time they're laying the groundwork for the future. The caregiver you choose will help guide your child through this critical stage of life. The right kind of child care can be a wonderful opportunity to enrich your child's life and help her get a great start.

Here's a guide to help you through the process of choosing child care. But your most important guides should be:

- **Your own feelings and instincts.** Pay attention to how you feel in any child care program you visit: Are you comfortable? Do you think your child would be happy here?
- **The caregiver's relationships** with the children and families. Is this what you want for your child and family?



## 1. DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT

Think through these questions:

- What are your beliefs and values about caring for children? What's important to you?
- How do you feel about pacifiers, infant feeding, toilet training, and napping?
- What are your views on discipline and education?
- What kinds of activities do you want for your child?
- What are your family's or child's special needs?

## 2. DECIDE WHAT LOCATION WOULD WORK BEST FOR YOU

- Close to your home?
- On your way to work or near your work?
- Close to public transportation?

## 3. GET A LIST OF CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

from your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency and from friends and family. In Southern Alameda County call 4Cs at 510-582-2182.

## 4. DO A TELEPHONE SCREENING

(See 4Cs telephone screening guide for more details)

Call potential providers – take notes on these points:

- Availability
- Location and hours
- Costs
- Licensing and accreditation
- Staff education and experience
- Staff-child ratio
- Daily activities/schedule
- Toilet training requirement
- Transportation
- Meals



## 5. VISIT A VARIETY OF PROGRAMS

(See 4Cs child care visiting guide.)

- It's a good idea to take notes here too – after you've seen several programs it may be hard to remember what you saw where.
- Pay attention to the way caregivers interact with the children.
- Watch the children: Do they seem happy and involved with activities? Is the atmosphere calm and friendly?
- Visit during different times of the day so you can see different types of activities.
- Look at the rooms where children spend most of their time. Do the children have access to interesting, safe, age-appropriate toys, books, and activities?
- Check out the kitchen, bathroom, and transportation vehicle (if there is one). Ask about sleeping arrangements and menus.
- Look at the playground. Is there enough outdoor play equipment for the number of children? Is it appropriate and safe?
- Ask how long the TV is on during a typical day.
- You may want to make your first visit alone so that you can interview the director or family child care provider. If you like what you see, take your child with you on another visit to see her reaction to the environment, teachers, and other children.

**6. INTERVIEW THE DIRECTOR OR FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDER** and each staff member who will care for your child.

- Ask about staff experience and education.
- Ask about program's philosophy, daily schedule of activities, and discipline methods.
- Let the provider know about your family, your concerns, and your expectations. Tell them about your child and any special needs he may have.
- Mention a specific situation, such as biting or hitting, and ask how they would handle it.
- Ask about sick child policies, vacation policies, and disaster plans.

**7. CHECK FOR REPORTS OF ANY COMPLAINTS** filed against any of the programs you are considering.

- Parents have the right to get complaint information on any child care program they are considering. If you ask, the program must show you copies of licensing reports, including complaint investigations.
- Call Community Care Licensing at 1-844-LET-US-NO (1-844-538-8766) or visit [cclcd.ca.gov](http://cclcd.ca.gov). You will need to provide the center or provider's name, address, and license number.

## 8. GET REFERENCES

from other parents in the program. Ask the center director or family child care provider to give you a list of names and phone numbers of parents who are using the program or have used the program in the past.

## 9. PREPARE YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD

(See 4Cs Tips on preparing your child for child care.)

## 10. COMMUNICATE AND GET ACQUAINTED

Take time to visit and talk with the provider about the program, your child, and your family. If possible, agree on a "test period" to see how your child adjusts to the program and to give yourself time to evaluate your decision.