

How to locate a quality program?

Over the past 35 plus years I have met hundreds of young, first time moms and dads searching for quality child care. They come in with notes and have done their research on-line. I can sense that they are focused, serious and have some anxiety. They understand that this is a major decision and want to get it right. Often times I believe some of their questions are focused on the wrong areas. In an attempt to help redirect them I always offer the following advice...

- 1.) Don't assume national-chain operated centers are better than smaller independent programs. Be sure to do your due diligence/research. Typically, they are large corporations who spend a lot on advertising and have been very successful in marketing their name and creating name recognition.
- 2.) Ask neighbors and local parents you encounter at the park, grocery store, etc where did their children attend daycare and what was their experience?
- 3.) Your first question for the center director should be... "what curriculum do you use and how can I research that curriculum on-line?" If you're told that we don't have a curriculum or that the center director or teachers have designed their own curriculum.... keep looking!
- 4.) Does the center have an open door policy? Can I pop in and check on my child at any time the center is open? This is a basic expectation, however, you would be surprised. A number of centers do not have an open door policy.
- 5.) New parents spend most of their time on the tour with the director who is typically professional, warm and friendly. While the director's background and experience is indeed an important part of your assessment, I believe that more focus should be placed on "who will be my child's teacher(s)"? Ask if and when you can have the opportunity to briefly meet and talk to your child's teacher?
- 6.) Ask if the center will allow you to bring your child in and place them in the classroom for a 1-2 hour observation. This will give you lots of information. How do the children interact with their teacher? Are they timid like robots or happy, care free and respectful? Is the teacher warm and friendly or rigid and impersonal? How does the teacher correct poor behavior? Is she firm but loving? How does your child interact with the teacher? I also recommend that you step out of the classroom for 20-30 minutes so the teacher can see how your child interacts when you are not present.
- 7.) While you are out of the classroom, ask to read the center's "parent handbook" of the center's rules and regulations. Do they seem reasonable? Are they acceptable to you?
- 8.) What opportunities does the center have for parents who want to participate and be more involved?
- 9.) What are some of the common issues that former parents have experienced that caused them to remove their child from the center and how did the director respond to attempt to remedy those issues?
- 10.) Ask if the director minds if you approach parents during pick up between 4:30 and 5:30 pm and just chat up a few random existing parents to see how they like the program. Most parents are happy to share their experiences. Expect to get 90% positive reviews? Don't allow one or two negative parent reviews to sway you if the other 8 parents are pleased and happy with the program.

I pray that these suggestions will assist you in finding the very best center for you and your child.

Chad Shumate
KKCC Owner/Administrator