

# How Do I Choose the Best Child Care for My Child?

*By Beth Mork, Regional Director for Child Care & Nutrition, Inc.*

I provided licensed family child care for 28 years. I have had my own children and grandchildren in licensed child care homes. I served as a Community Services Coordinator for a Family Child Care Association and been a family child care trainer for 20 years. When I earned my degree in Early Childhood Education for the U of M, I thought I may be a Center Director or run an early childhood program. But, all of my experience and my education have only convinced me that the best place for young children to grow and learn is in an in-home environment.

I have had the occasion to counsel many parents over the years who were looking for child care, either in one of the jobs I have held or when they had called me for child care and I had no openings. "What do I do? How do I know the child care I choose will be right for my child?" I suggest four tests as a really good indicator that you have found a child care that meets your needs and those of your child.

**1. *Is the home licensed?***

Licensing does not guarantee quality, but it is an important first step. At least you can be assured that the home has met minimum standards for health and safety.

**2. *What is your first impression of the home?***

Does it represent your values for cleanliness, educational opportunities? When you look around, are there choices of activities for children to do? Do you see any children's art displayed? Are all of the samples the same - "art projects" with a predetermined end result or are children free to explore art mediums and be creative with their art experiences? Are there books for the children to handle, explore or read that are age appropriate for your child, regardless if your child is an infant/toddler or a school aged child?

**3. *How comfortable are you in talking to this provider?***

Are you comfortable asking her any questions you want to ask? Your child will have to go to this person to get his or her needs met, if you are not comfortable talking with her, will your child be? How do you feel about the rules of the family child care home? You know your child better than anyone else, you are the best judge of how your child will feel in this environment and with this provider. If there are things the provider needs to know about your child's personality, needs, habits, likes and dislikes, it is important you share them with her. Do you feel valued and respected as the child's parent and the most important first educator of your child? It is important that she respect your role and recognize that you need to work together to best meet the developmental, emotional and social needs of your child.

**4. *Can she provide as a reference at least one family who no longer uses her/his services?***

Previous clients are usually the most free and open to talk to you about anything they wish might have been different. A previous client who gives a glowing reference of a provider can make you feel so much more confident of your choice.

If your provider passes all of these tests, let her know how valued and appreciated she is. If you are looking for a provider, good luck with your search. I know how difficult it is to leave your most valued possession in someone else's care. As a provider I valued all of the parents who trusted their child to my care and all of the parents who let me know I was valued.