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## Choosing Safe Child Care

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There *is* someone who can give your children the care, understanding and nurturing that you require for your children and for your peace of mind. Learning how to recognize that 'someone' is the first step toward ensuring that your children receive the best possible care. This could be a long process so start early.

When looking for childcare there are three choices: licensed day care centres, agency home childcare, and unlicensed home childcare. Licensed day care centres must be inspected annually in order for the license to be renewed.



Agency home childcare providers are visited on a more regular basis and receive support from Home Child Care staff. However, it is estimated that 80% of Canada's childcare spaces are provided by unlicensed caregivers. By law, the only requirements in these home daycares are that there can be no more than 5 children in care (excluding the caregiver's own children).

There is no inspection, no screening process and no requirement for formal training. This leaves it up to the parents to ensure that they are leaving their children in a safe environment.

Here are some factors which should affect your child care decision:

## General Area



- Are there 5 children or less?
- Child-to-staff ratio of 3:1 in a daycare centre for infants, 4:1 for 2-year-olds, and 7:1 for 3-year-olds.
- Children should be supervised at all times.
- Check references from parents of children currently in care.
- Do unannounced spot checks.
- What is the 'ill child' policy?
- Agree upon discipline methods.
- Does the caregiver have full liability insurance?

## Setting - Indoor

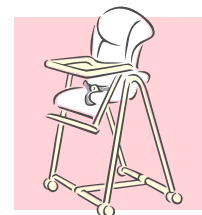


- Is the home clean, bright, and well maintained?
- Is there space for safe, active play above ground?
- Is furniture free of sharp edges, splinters, or pinch points?

## Kitchen and Meals



- Are menus, special diets, and allergies posted?
- Do they serve low mercury fish?
- Is perishable food refrigerated?
- Do they serve fresh and frozen foods rather than canned foods whenever possible?
- Do they purchase locally grown and organic food whenever possible and in season?
- Are the water pipes flushed each morning to reduce lead levels in the drinking water?
- Is only the cold water tap used for drinking water and for the preparation of food?
- Do they heat food or drinks in plastic containers?
- Do they avoid cooking food at very high temperatures when using non-stick cookware that is coated with perfluorinated chemicals (PFC's)?
- Are hard or round foods grated or cut into thin strips?
- Does the highchair have a safety strap and a wide stable base?
- Is the highchair positioned away from appliances, windows, walls and other furniture?



- Is baby equipment in good repair and does it meet current standards?
- Are there safety gates at the top and bottom of all stairs?
- Are stairs well lit and do they have handrails?
- Are windows shatter resistant and inaccessible to climbing toddlers?
- Are there window guards on all windows except designated fire exits?
- Are all poisonous and hazardous materials locked away?
- Are plants nontoxic?
- Are all electrical, drapery, appliance cords fastened out of reach?
- Are electrical outlets covered with protective caps?
- Are there working smoke detectors on each level?
- Are fire extinguishers available and serviced?
- Are balcony doors secured and locked?
- Are workshop and laundry areas inaccessible to young children?



### Setting - Outdoor

- Is the outdoor area completely fenced in?

- Are pot handles turned towards the back of the stove?
- Do they use the dishwasher only when children are not in the kitchen?
- Do they avoid opening the dishwasher until the dishes have cooled?
- Is there good ventilation in the kitchen?
- Are plastic bags, alcohol, etc. stored out of reach?
- Are children involved in composting, recycling, gardening, conservation and other activities?

### Bathroom

- Is the hot water temperature set below 54°C?
- Are all medicines, cosmetics, cleaning products and appliances locked away?
- Are platforms or stools stable?
- Are fire extinguishers easily accessible to adults?



### Toys & Craft Materials

- Are all toys and play equipment age-appropriate?
- Are toys clean and in good repair?
- Do they regularly check for product recalls on



Is the area free of hazardous materials and plants?



Are gardening tools and chemicals locked away?

Is play equipment safe and in good repair?

Are wagons and buggies in good repair?

Is the sandbox covered when it is not in use?

Is the sand changed every year?

Are there soft surfaces under all equipment?

Make sure there are no loose steps or railings.

Do children play in areas that are not treated with pesticides?

Does the daycare centre minimize the need for insect repellent and remove stagnant or standing water to discourage insects from biting at peak periods?

If an insect repellent is used, do they insist that children wash their hands before eating?

If any play equipment that was built before 2004 and made with pressure treated wood (Chromated Copper Arsenate CCA) do they apply a penetrating sealant every 1 – 2 years?

all toys, play equipment, furniture, and accessories?

Do they avoid old donated toys that may contain lead?

Is there a toy safety policy in place that considers the environmental health and toxic chemical hazards?

Are PVC plastic toys replaced with safer options?

Is toy box lid spring-loaded?

Are toys stored on sturdy shelves?

Are liquid, gel and paste art materials being used instead of powders and sprays?

Are craft supplies safe and nontoxic?



## Safety Behaviours

Are safety straps on highchairs, change tables, etc. used every time?

Walkers are dangerous and should not be used.

Are children directly supervised, especially when playing with toys with small parts, eating, in the bathroom or outdoors?

Is a properly installed, approved car seat used for outings?

Are matches and lighters stored out of a child's reach?



## Cleaning and Disinfecting

Do they use bleach in the concentrations recommended by the local Public Health Authority?



Are staff aware that mixing bleach with other cleaning products is very dangerous and highly caustic?

Are all cleaning products inaccessible to children?

Do the staff avoid using disinfectants, sanitizers and other cleaning products in close proximity to children?

Does staff observe and practice proper hand hygiene at all times?

When cleaning carpets and rugs do they use the least toxic cleaners available?

Do they use biodegradable laundry soap?

Do they use dryer sheets and scented fabric softeners?

## Sleeping

Do young children sleep only in a crib that meets standards as of October 1/86 or later?



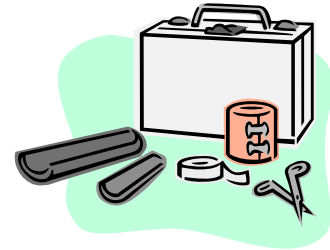
Are crib components in good condition?

Is there a separate diapering area, away from food and children's play area?

Is a regular maintenance check done on all child-related equipment and toys?

## Emergency Procedures

Does the caregiver have a current First Aid Certificate?



Is the caregiver trained in infant CPR (updated yearly)?

Is there a well-stocked, First Aid Kit accessible to adults but not children?

Are emergency numbers posted by each telephone?

Are parent contact numbers posted?

Is there Syrup of Ipecac at hand (used only on direction of Poison Control)?

Is a fire drill practised monthly?

Do they have an emergency evacuation plan?

## Air Quality

Is the Air Quality Health Index for smog, fire, and extreme heat and cold checked daily?



Is the crib or bed placed away from other furniture, windows, doors, and blind cords?

Is there a nursery monitor?

## Sun Safety

Does the day care centre ensure that children are not exposed to direct sunlight during peak hours – 10 am to 2 pm?

Is the UV index checked daily and all year long?

Are the parents encouraged to provide children with light, loose clothing that covers their body and limbs, and a sun hat with a wide brim that covers their eyes and ears? A Legionnaire-like hat would be best because it has a layer of cloth that extends from the top back of the hat to the top of the shoulders.

Are there natural shade areas in the playground area?

Is sunscreen applied on children 30 minutes before going outdoors?

If both insect repellent and sunscreen are required, is the sunscreen applied first?



Are children's activities located away from parking areas during drop-off and pick-up times?

Does the daycare centre have a 'vehicle idling' policy?

What measure has the day centre taken to reduce the amount of vehicle exhaust that enters through air intake vents, doors and windows?

Are staff members, parents, and children required to remove their outdoor shoes at the front door area?

Do all rooms have adequate ventilation?

If mold or mildew is present, is it dealt with immediately?

Are all rugs and carpeting vacuumed daily and wood or linoleum flooring mopped daily?

Does the day care centre have a fragrance-free policy?

Does the day care centre have a policy against using deodorizers or air fresheners including the plug-in type?

Has the day care centre tested their environment for radon and if found, have they taken appropriate measures to reduce the levels of radon below the Government of Canada guideline?

