DAY CARE CHECKLIST

SETTING

- ■ Is the atmosphere bright and pleasant?
- ■ Is there a fenced-in outdoor play area with a variety of safe equipment?
- ■ Can the staff see the entire playground at all times?
- ■ Are there different areas for resting, quiet play and active play?
- ■ Are there fire extinguishers visible? Are there enough smoke and carbon monoxide detectors?

ACTIVITIES

- ■ Is there a daily balance of play time, story time, activity time and nap time?
- ■ Are the activities appropriate for each age group?
- ■ Are there enough toys and learning materials?
- ■ Are toys clean, safe and within reach of children?

IN GENERAL

- ■ Do you agree with the discipline practices?
- ■ Do you hear the sounds of happy children?
- ■ Are children comforted when needed?
- ■ Are surprise visits by parents encouraged?
- ■ Will your child be happy there?
- ■ Is the facility licensed/registered?

Dear Friend,

Child care has become an essential aspect of life for many New Yorkers. We know that quality child care can make a significant difference in a child's development. That's why choosing a facility or person to care for your child can be one of the most important decisions a parent or guardian faces these days.

There are many questions to consider when choosing a daycare setting: Do they offer structured activity that is challenging? How will they interact with my child? And perhaps most importantly, do they provide a safe and nurturing environment?

I developed this brochure to assist you in finding a child care provider that best meets the needs of you and your child. You will find facts on financial options that can help make a day care more affordable, a checklist that provides practical advice on what to look for when choosing a child care provider, and other useful information.

I hope you find this material helpful. Please don't hesitate to contact my office if my staff and I can be of assistance in any way.

Sincerely,

John J. Flanagan

Senator John J. Flanagan
2nd Senate District

#561 Revised 2/2012

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Office of Children and Family Services
1-800-345-KIDS

Child Abuse Reporting Service
1-800-342-3720

Hearing Impaired TTY/TDD Device Only
1-800-638-5163

Child Care Aware
1-800-424-2246

UNDERSTANDING CHILD CARE

or contact me:

DISTRICT OFFICE:
260 Middle Country Road
Smithtown, New York 11787
(631) 361-2154

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TYPES OF CHILD CARE

There are many types of day care available to working parents today. All of these providers, except for informal care providers, are regulated by the State Department of Family Assistance or the NYC Department of Health.

- **Day Care Centers** provide care for more than six children at a time in a designated facility, not in a provider's home.
- **Family Day Care Homes** provide care for up to six children at a time in a residence. Depending on the children's ages, one or two school-age children may also be included.
- **Group Family Day Homes** provide care in a family home for seven to ten children of all ages, or up to twelve children where they are all over two years of age. A provider must use an assistant for every two children under two years of age.
- **School-Age Child Care Programs** provide care for more than six children during non-school hours. This type of program is sometimes operated in the school building. Generally these are school-age children from kindergarten through age 12. These programs may also provide care for children during school vacation periods and holidays.
- **Informal Care** is care for one or two children at a time, in addition to the provider's children, usually in the provider's home.

ONCE YOU'VE SELECTED A PROVIDER

It is important that you become involved in the program to not only stay informed, but also to ensure that your child consistently receives quality care.

- Visit and observe as much as you can. As a parent, you have the right to drop in at any time to observe the program or to see your child. You will become more acquainted with the provider and get a good idea of how things are going in the program.
- Listen to your child. Does he or she like to go to the program? If your child is unhappy, find out why. Talk to the caregivers about your child.
- Keep in touch with parents of other children in the program. Find out how their children are doing and how they feel about the program.
- Get feedback from the caregivers. Do they offer regular updates about how your child is doing? Do the caregivers encourage your questions and visits?

DAY CARE SAFETY

The "Jeremy Fiedelhotz and Julia Haas Safe Day Care Act" is a law which makes it a crime for child day care providers to make certain misrepresentations covering areas such as: the number of children in a facility when the number is in violation of applicable provisions of law; the area of the facility, home or center used for child care; and the credentials or qualifications of any child day care provider, assistant, employee or volunteer. This law also established the crime of reckless assault of a child. Additional state laws:

- require all group family day care homes, school age programs, day care centers and Head Start day care center programs to screen employees and volunteers against the State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment;
- establish minimum experience and education requirements for employees;
- provide adequate supervision of employees and volunteers;
- require parents or guardians to have unlimited access to their children while they are attending day care—this means you can make unannounced visits or pick up your child at any time of the day; and
- requires that a four foot high locked barrier be placed around swimming pools and bodies of water on the grounds of family and group family day care homes with the locked portion being inaccessible to children.

By choosing a program that is registered or licensed by the state, you can help to ensure your child is receiving quality care. **With only a few exceptions, every program that cares for more than two children for more than three hours a day must have a license or registration certificate.**

When you visit a regulated child care facility, ask to see its license or registration certificate. **Accredited** child care providers ensure their homes and centers voluntarily measure up to national standards of quality that have been established by national child care organizations. Caregivers in programs accredited by the **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)** take part in on-going child development training. Trained caregivers are more likely to understand children's needs at different ages, plan appropriate activities, interact with children in warm and stimulating ways and provide positive guidance for children, rather than harsh discipline. Accredited programs undergo in depth self-assessments, independent observation, approval by professional experts and endorsement by a national committee. Areas that are regulated include child supervision, training, and inspections.

IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE

It is important to listen carefully to your children about their experiences at a day care center, and to establish an atmosphere of trust and interest with them at home. You should also be alert to any changes in your child that could be signs of abuse. Be aware of any physical changes, including nightmares, bedwetting or other sleep problems. Have your child examined by a doctor if you notice anything unusual, including unexplained rashes, bruises or other injuries.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT

If you find there are any changes in your child's behavior, including reluctance to go to the day care center, modifications in toilet training habits, or unusual questions about sexuality:

- stop bringing your child to the center immediately;
- seek medical attention for your child;
- notify Child Protective Services and your local police immediately; and
- alert other parents to the problem.

If you have a complaint about a day care center or provider, call the Child Day Care Complaint Line at **1-800-732-5207**. Anyone can file a complaint of a possible regulatory violation in a day care program by calling this number or the nearest regional Office of Children and Family Services. In New York City, complaints also can be made to the Department of Health at **212-676-2444**.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Child care financial assistance – subsidies, government tax credits and employer-supported benefits – enables many parents to select a higher quality program than they could otherwise afford.

Government Tax Credits – The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit allows you to deduct part of what you pay for child care from your state and federal tax returns. Families of all income levels are eligible for this tax credit. The federal Earned Income Tax is available to low income, working individuals and families. Even if they do not owe taxes, applicants must file a tax return in order to receive this benefit. For more information, call the Internal Revenue Service at 1-800-829-1040 for more information.

Child Care Subsidies – Child care subsidies are funds that help pay part of the cost of child care. Eligibility is based on income, reasons for needing day care and your child's age and individual needs. For more information on child care subsidies, contact your county Department of Family Assistance. In NYC, contact the NYC Administration for Children's Services.

Employer-Supported Benefits – Many employers offer benefits and support to their employees that may help with child care needs. This assistance may include: on-site child care facilities, referral services, flexible work-schedules or vouchers or dependent care financial assistance plans. Ask your employer if any of these benefits are available.

CHECK IT OUT!

The following points are good ways to measure the quality of a child care home or center.

CAREGIVERS/TEACHERS

- ☐ Do the caregivers/teachers seem to really like children?
- ☐ Do the caregivers/teachers get down on each child's level to speak to the child?
- ☐ Are children greeted when they arrive?
- ☐ Are children's needs quickly met even when things are busy?
- ☐ Are the caregivers/teachers trained in CPR, first aid and early childhood education?
- ☐ Are the caregivers/teachers involved in continuing education programs?
- ☐ Does the program keep up with children's changing interests?
- ☐ Will the caregivers/teachers be ready to answer your questions?
- ☐ Will the caregivers/teachers tell you what your child is doing every day?
- ☐ Are parents' ideas welcomed? Are there ways for you to get involved?
- ☐ Do the caregivers/teachers and the children enjoy being together?
- ☐ Is there enough staff to serve the children?
- ☐ Have caregivers/teachers participated in early childhood development classes?
- ☐ Are caregivers/teachers trained and experienced?