

Tip Sheets

Questions to Ask When Seeking Child Care for Children with Special Needs



All parents seeking child care want to know that their child will be safe, make friends and be happy while away from

them. But parents of children with special needs may have additional considerations regarding their child's unique developmental needs.

Parents should meet face-to-face with program professionals to conduct the intake, ask questions, and tour the program. The following are some questions to use as guidelines when choosing an early care and education placement based on their child's specific needs.

Parent and Caregiver Communication

1. What is the process for communication with parents?
2. When are the best times to communicate with you?
3. How often do you meet with parents for conferences? What kind of information do you share at that time?
4. How do you track development?

Physical Accommodations

1. Is the program accessible/barrier-free for easy access to entrances, bathrooms, and outside play equipment as well as indoor centers?
2. Is there enough space for children to move around indoors and outdoors?
3. Are pathways wide and clear?
4. What kind of adaptations can be made for toileting/diapering if needed?

Eating and Mealtimes

1. What style do you use for mealtime?
2. How will my child be included at mealtime and snacks if he/she is in a wheelchair or has other physical needs?
3. In what ways can the tables and chairs be made to accommodate to my child?
4. What procedures are in place for food allergy protection?
5. Are there opportunities for alternate foods to meet my child's dietary needs?
6. Am I able to bring their foods, and if so, what are storage and prep options?

Previous Experience and Training

1. What experience do you and staff have working with children with special needs? Have you had challenges in the past which you overcame and how?
2. Tell me about the benefits you have seen when caring for children with special needs.
3. What training have you and your staff taken specific to children with special needs? Are you open to training or on-site consultation that would be specific to my child's needs?
4. What type of behavior guidance approaches does your program use? How do you communicate with parents challenging behavior has occurred?

Handling Emergencies and Medical Care

1. What is the program's emergency protocol?
2. Have you or staff ever dealt with a health emergency? How?

3. What is the medication administration policy?
4. Is there a process for training on a certain medication or procedure?
5. What are the procedures on handwashing, cleaning, and exclusion of children who are ill?
6. Are Health Services staff on site or are they utilized for consultation purposes?

Social Interactions

1. How do you promote peer interactions and manage conflict between children?
2. What strategies and specific activities do you use to promote social skills and teach developmentally appropriate social and behavioral skills?

Attitude and Relationships

1. What is your program's written policy on inclusion? What do you believe inclusion means to your programming?
2. How does the environment reflect diversity and celebration of differences? What materials, dolls, books, etc., do you have that reflect all types of cultures, families, and abilities?
3. How do you discover the individual gifts that each child brings to the program?
4. Are you and staff willing to integrate other service providers (therapy staff, early intervention staff, etc.) into my child's daily routine? If you have done this in the past, how did you build a partnership with these other providers?
5. How does the program ensure confidentiality when it comes to my child's special needs and any paperwork that might follow him/her?

Other Questions

1. If my child needs to be transported are staff available to take them to the bus?
2. What is the program policy for placement in a classroom? (The ADA encourages placement of children with disabilities with their same-aged peers rather than with peers of the same developmental age/level.)
3. What is the policy on toilet training? Is it flexible given my child's disability? (The ADA may also offer protection against discrimination if the program does toileting services for other children).

In addition to these questions, talk about what your child's needs are as well as their likes/dislikes. Share your child's strengths and special interests and abilities. Express your desire to have open communication and how that process might look.

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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