

early Intervention



Finding Child Care for Children with Special Needs

Just because your child has special needs doesn't mean that he/she wouldn't benefit from being in child care. The time away from the home environment can be a real learning experience. Not only can your child benefit, but you can too. You will get a much needed break, as caring for a child with special needs can be a tremendous drain, both mentally and physically.

However, finding suitable child care for a child with special needs is not easy. The center needs to provide not only excellent normal activities for your child but they will also have to meet the specific needs of a child with a disability.

We can never emphasize enough that there is no such thing as a "typical" child with special needs. Every child is different. The same thing may be applied to child care centers. Here are some things you should consider when seeking child care:

- The center should include children with and without learning difficulties to give children a chance to intermingle with each other. This encourages children to develop skills such as helping each other. It can also help inspire respect for others and helps your child to look past another child's disability.
- Staff should be trained to provide your child with special requirements he/she needs for their particular disability. If your child has special needs due to an illness then staff should be fully aware and able to cope with any situation which may arise.
- Your child should be able to be independent as much as his/her disability will allow them to be. Restriction should only be made for any activities which could harm them or are prohibited by your doctor. Be sure that the center is made fully aware of any such restrictions.
- The center should allow for flexibility in activities. For example, alterations to toys and equipment for children who are visually impaired or in a wheelchair.
- The center should have equipment that will meet the needs of the children. For example, breathing aids for children suffering from chronic asthma should be available with staff able to recognize the onset of an attack and how to deal with it quickly.
- Staff should be able to administer any medication a child may need and know how to reach the child's physician and parent in case of an emergency.
- The center should be fully accessible for wheelchairs or other assistive devices, particularly in areas such as playgrounds.

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Benefits of Inclusive Child Care

For Your Children

When children are cared for together (whether or not they have special needs) they:

- Experience a sense of belonging and feel part of their community
- Have better self-esteem
- Develop a wider variety of friendships with other children
- Have positive expectations about things they can do
- Learn from other children
- Share daily experiences
- Learn that people have different kinds of abilities
- Develop sensitivity and understanding towards others
- Learn to value differences in themselves and in others
- Are encouraged to be resourceful, creative, and cooperative

For Your Family

- Having a choice of high quality child care
- Feeling connected to the community
- Seeing your children form friendships with a variety of children
- Observing your child learn new skills
- Having an opportunity to develop friendships with other parents
- Developing an awareness and understanding of people with disabilities
- Having opportunities to teach your own child about diversity and individual differences

Finding Child Care *continued from page 1*

Another recommendation is to take a six step approach to selecting child care for children with special needs. By including questions based on the information above, consider the following:

1. Get a recommendation from your child's doctor, therapist, or other parents for an appropriate child care center. Recommendations remain one of the best ways to find reputable, safe child care centers you can trust.
2. Select a child care center that allows children with and without disabilities. You do not want to limit your children to only being able to interact with children who have disabilities.
3. Schedule an appointment to visit a child care center without your child and interview the director and staff. Seeing the center with your own eyes can help you form a more solid opinion.
4. Check the center for accessibility issues. You want your child to be able to experience and enjoy the entire range of center activities, including the playground even if he/she has mobility limitations.
5. Ask the staff about their training and experience with children with your child's condition. They need to be prepared to handle and assist your child with his/her limitations and recognize any early signs of physical or emotional difficulty.
6. Quiz the staff on potential physical emergencies and how they would be handled. The center you select should have the necessary equipment and expertise to keep your child safe in any situation that may arise.

It is also important that you are honest and upfront about what your child can and cannot do. If you minimize your child's limitations, it helps no one because the staff will not be able to appropriately prepare to accommodate your child's needs.

You should also be prepared to pay costs for the staff of the child care center to undergo special training to handle your child's condition. Many child care centers may agree to the training, but most will not pay any associated costs.

Editor's note: This article is adapted from information found at Childcarefinders.org and www.ehow.com.

DHS Child Care Assistance Program

DHS' Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides low-income, working families with access to quality, affordable child care that allows them to continue working and contributes to the healthy, emotional, and social development of the child. Families are required to cost-share on a sliding scale based on family size, income and number of children in care.

CCAP works through the 16 Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies that DHS contracts with. Families may apply for licensed care from a statewide network of contracted providers. Eligibility is determined on-site by the provider allowing families the freedom to choose from a variety of care settings to best meet the needs of both parents and children. You can contact your local CCR&R if you would like to find quality care, determine your eligibility for assistance, or receive an application to apply for the Child Care Assistance Program.

You can also learn more at the newly revamped DHS website at <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/> and click on the tab "For Customers" for more information.

Books and Videos on Child Care

Books

Behavior Matters: Making Child Care Work for You. Deborah Hewitt with Yvonne Pearson. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2005. Call # HQ 778.63 .H611 2005 – Looks at ways you can work with your child care provider to address in consistent and appropriate ways the most common and perplexing behavioral challenges.

Not Just a Babysitter: Making Child Care Work for You. Julie Powers with Yvonne Pearson. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2005. Call # HQ 778.5 .P888 2005 – Gives parents new ways to think about their relationship with their child care provider and offers strategies for partnering with them to create a satisfying experience for their child.

Parent Savvy: Straight Answers to Your Family's Financial, Legal & Practical Questions. Nihara K. Choudhri. Berkeley, CA: Nolo, 2005. Call # HQ 778.63 .C552 2005 – Answers, tips, checklist and resources make this a useful parenting reference on a wide range of practical concerns that come with parenthood, including child care, financial planning, and balancing work with family.

Videos

Buddy Bear in My First Day at Preschool. Hollywood: My First Day Productions, 2004. 27 minute DVD videodisc. Call # HQ 774.5 .B927 2004 – Buddy Bear is cuddly, friendly, and a little anxious about his first day at preschool. This video features imaginative exercises and songs that encourage working together, peer respect, and the fun and learning a day in preschool can inspire.

Quality Child Care: Making the Right Choice for You & Your Child. (I Am Your Child series). Reiner Foundation, 1997. 29 minute VHS Videocassette. Call # HQ 778.5 .Q1ma 1997 – This video includes information on why child care is important for your child's healthy development, what you should look for when choosing child care, questions to ask a potential caregiver, and important information to communicate to your caregiver.

Finding Childcare in Illinois: Utilizing INCCRRA

The Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) is a statewide organization which, in partnership with its 16 member Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agencies, is devoted to making high quality, affordable early care and education options available to children and families in Illinois.

INCCRRA provides statewide professional development support for individuals and programs who serve young children and their families, provides training and technical assistance to the 900 CCR&R staff across the state and collects and reports statistical information related to child care supply, demand and quality across the state. Parents can find locate their local CCR&R through the INCCRRA website and their CCR&R can provide information on the availability of local child care options. As part of their Quality Counts program, INCCRRA supports a toll-free number that parents can call for more information on finding legal and quality child care and assistance (877-202-4453). For more information on how to locate your local CCR&R and the services available from INCCRRA, visit their website at <http://www.inccrra.org>.

Sharing Information with a Caregiver "Cheat Sheet"

Whether you've hired a babysitter to watch your child one evening or have a child in regular child care, this list will help you provide useful information to anyone who will be in charge of meeting your child's needs. You can use these categories and list items as a template for putting together your own collection of information.

Discipline

- Our current disciplinary strategy:
- Response to bad behavior:
- Time-out spot:
- Time-out duration:
- Absolute no-no's:
- Things to let slide:
- Phrase we use:

Medication

- What to give:
- When to give it:
- What it does:
- Problems to watch out for:
- What to do if you forget to give it:
- Other medical procedures needed:
- Emergency contact:

Diet

- Food allergies:
- Food preferences:
- Foods child is not allowed to eat:
- Foods child is allowed to avoid:
- Acceptable treats:
- Eating assistance required:
- Food log entries required:

Routine

- Wake-up time:
- Morning routines:
- Typical meal times:
- School drop-off:
- School pick-up:
- Appointments:
- Afternoon routines:
- Leisure time:
- Bedtime routines:
- Bedtime:

Comfort Items

- Toys:
- Books:
- Games:
- TV shows:
- Videos:
- Music:
- Activities:
- Places:

One Sure Thing

If my child is upset, or sad, or hyper, or otherwise needs something more than you can figure out, here's one thing that usually works to turn things around:

Editor's Note: This is adapted from "Put Together a Caregiver 'Cheat Sheet'", found at About.com: Parenting Special Needs at <http://specialchildren.about.com/>

Illinois Public Health Association

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Calendar Ahead

April 12, 2008

2nd Annual New Dreams Conference • Springfield, Illinois
CONTACT: Family Matters, 1-866-436-7842 or www.fmptic.org

April 30-May 1, 2008

The Arc of Illinois 58th Annual Conference • Lisle, Illinois
CONTACT: Janet Donahue, 708-206-1930

May 6, 2008

Early Intervention Regional Conference • Effingham, Illinois
CONTACT: Illinois EI Training Program, 1-866-509-3867 x 250 or
www.illinoiseitraining.org

May 18, 2008

Walk Now for Autism • Chicago, Illinois
CONTACT: www.walkforautismnow.org

June 4-6, 2008

25th Annual Parent-Infant Institute • Jacksonville, Illinois
CONTACT: Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, 1-800-919-5617 or
email: Janet.L.McGovern@illinois.gov

USEFUL WEB SITES ON CHILD CARE

Center for Inclusive Child Care • <http://www.inclusivechildcare.org/>

Child Care and Child Carer's Guide • <http://www.childcarefinders.org/>

ChildCareAware • <http://www.childcareaware.or/en/>

Child Care Bureau. Administration for Children & Families. United States Department of Health and Human Services – Resources for Parents
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/parents/index.htm>

Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies
<http://www.inccrra.org/>

National Child Care Information Center • <http://www.nccic.org/index.html>



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Editorial Policy

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