All parents seeking child care want to know that their child will be safe, make friends and be happy while away from them. For parents of children with special needs, other considerations may also be present that involve their child’s unique developmental needs.

# Tip Sheets

## A Guide for Parents’ Questions When Seeking Child Care for Children with Special Needs

Children with disabilities are protected against discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act so parents can assume that all early care and education programs are seeking to be inclusive programs. It is recommended that parents meet face to face with program professionals to conduct the intake, have the opportunity to ask questions and tour the program.

The following are some questions for parents to use as guidelines when they are choosing an early care and education placement based on their child’s specific needs.

## Parent and Caregiver Communication

* What is the process for communication with parents?
* When are the best times to communicate with you? What is the best options?
* How often do you meet with parents for conferences? What kind of information do you share at that time? How do you track each child’s development?

## Physical Accommodations

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

## Eating and Mealtimes

* What style does your program use for mealtime? How will my child be included at mealtime and snacks if he/she is in a wheelchair or has another physical need?
* In what ways can the tables and chairs be made to accommodate to my child’s needs?
* What procedures in place for food allergy protection?
* What opportunity is there for alternate foods to meet my child’s dietary needs? If not, am I able to bring his/her foods and what are the storage and preparation options?

## Social Interactions

* How do you promote peer interactions and manage conflict between children?
* What specific activities do you incorporate that promote friendship skills such as sharing, communicating and problem-solving?

## Previous Experience and Training

* What experience do you and staff have working with children with special needs? Have you had challenges in the past which you overcame with teamwork (You might ask for a specific example)?
* Tell me about some of the benefits you have seen when caring for children with special needs.
* 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?
* What type of behavior guidance approaches does your program use? How do you communicate with parents when a challenging behavior has occurred? What strategies do you use to teach developmentally appropriate social and behavioral skills?

## Handling Emergencies and Medical Care Needs

* What is the program’s emergency protocol?
* What is the medication administration policy? What is the process if there is a need for training on a certain medication or procedure?
* Have you or staff ever dealt with a health emergency? How was it handled?
* What are the procedures on handwashing, cleaning and exclusion of children who are ill?
* Are there Health Services staff on site or that are utilized for consultation purposes?

## Attitude and Relationships

* What is your program’s written policy on inclusion? What do you believe inclusion means to your programming?
* 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, abilities, etc.?
* How do you discover the individual gifts that each child will bring to the program?
* Are you and staff willing to integrate other service providers (early intervention staff, therapy staff, etc.) into my child’s daily routine? Have you ever done this in the past? How did you build a partnership with the child’s other external services?
* 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

* If my child needs to be transported are there staff available to take him/her to the bus?
* What is the program policy for placement in a classroom? For example, if a toddler is not walking? (The ADA encourages placement of children with disabilities with their same-aged peers rather than with peers of the same developmental-age/level.)
* What is the policy on toilet training? is there flexibility 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, be sure to talk about what your child’s needs are as well as his/her likes and dislikes. Make sure to share your child’s strengths and special interests/abilities. Emphasize the positives about your child while still being open about the details of his/her special needs. Express your desire to have open communication and how that process might look. Follow up with references regarding the early care and education program.



For more information on including children with special needs, visit [www.inclusivechildcare.org/c\_learning.cfm](http://www.inclusivechildcare.org/c_learning.cfm)

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