



## Tip Sheets

### A Guide for Parents' Questions 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. For parents of children with special needs, other considerations may also be present that involve their child's unique developmental needs. Children with disabilities are protected against discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act so parents can assume that all child care programs are seeking to be inclusive programs. It is recommended that parents meet face-to-face with the program to conduct the intake and 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 a child care 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 option?
- How often do you meet with parents for conferences? What kind of information do you share at that time? Do you track my 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, including outdoor and indoor play space?
- Are pathways wide and clear?

- What kind of adaptations can be made for toileting or 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?
- Are the tables and chairs easy to accommodate to my child's needs?
- Are there procedures in place for food allergy protection?
- Is there an opportunity 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 conflicts between children?
- What specific activities do you incorporate that promote friendship skills like sharing, communicating, problem-solving?
- My child uses a special communication process (picture board, sign language, etc.). Have you ever used this before? Do you have questions?

#### **Previous Experience and Training:**

- Do you and your staff have experience working with children with special needs? Have you had challenges in the past which you overcame through teamwork? (You might ask for an example). Can you talk to me about some of the benefits you have seen or

when caring for children with special needs?

- What training have you and your staff taken specific to children with special needs or my child's needs in particular? 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 policy?
- What is the medication administration policy and if there is a need for training on a certain medication or procedure, what is the process?
- Have you or your staff ever dealt with a health emergency? How was it handled?
- What are procedures on handwashing, cleaning, and also exclusion policies for ill children?
- Are there Health Services staff on site or that are utilized for consultation purposes?

### **Attitude and Relationships:**

- Does your program have a written policy on inclusion? What do you believe inclusion means to your programming?
- Do you believe you have an overall environment that reflects diversity and celebration of differences? Do you have materials, dolls, books, etc. that reflect all types of cultures, families, abilities, etc.?
- Are you and your staff eager to discover the individual gifts that each child will bring to the program?

- Are you and your staff willing to integrate other service providers (like speech therapists) into my child's daily routine? Have you done this in the past? How did you build a relationship 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:**

- If my child needs to be transported are there staff available to take him/her to the bus?
- What is the program policy for classroom placement? For example, if a toddler is not walking? (The Americans with Disabilities Act encourages placement of children with disabilities with their same-aged peers, not with peers of developmental-age or developmental-level).
- What is the policy on toilet training? Is there flexibility given my child's disability? (The Americans with Disabilities Act may also offer protection here 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 their likes and dislikes. Make sure you also share your child's strengths and special interests or abilities. Emphasize the positives about your child while still being open about details of his or her special needs. Express your desire to have open communication and how that process might look. Follow up with references from the child care program.

**For more information on including children with special needs, visit [www.inclusivechildcare.org](http://www.inclusivechildcare.org)**

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