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Matching Your Infant's or Toddler's Style to the Right Child Care Setting

Child Care Aware is a national initiative, conducted by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), committed to helping parents find the best information on locating quality child care and child care resources in their community. Child Care Aware, in partnership with local child care resource and referral agencies, builds consumer awareness and supports families in making choices for the care and education of their children.

ChildCareAware™
America's most trusted child care resource.

For more information about Child Care Aware or for help in locating your local child care resource and referral agency, call:

1-800-424-2246
www.ChildCareAware.org

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This brochure offers some guidelines on how to use what you know about your infant or toddler—like personal style and activity level—to select a child care setting that's just right.

The questions below can help you develop a profile of your child, and learn more about the type of care that might best meet your child's needs.

What is your child's personal style?

Pick the one that describes your child most of the time.

Adaptable

- * Flexible
- * Approaches new people/situations with ease
- * Good with transitions

Look for:

Large group setting providing social interaction and new experiences.

Cautious

- * Thoughtful
- * Approaches new people/situations cautiously
- * Has difficulty with transitions

Look for:

Small group settings that are less overwhelming.

Feisty

- * Passionate, feels things intensely
- * Has difficulty controlling her strong feelings, wants, and needs

Look for:

Programs where each child has a primary caregiver, someone who knows and understands your child. (Note: All children would benefit from this.)



Adapted from the following ZERO TO THREE publications:

- *Learning and Growing Together: Understanding and Supporting Your Child's Development* by Claire Lerner and Amy Laura Dombro (2000)
- *Caring for Infants & Toddlers in Groups: Developmentally Appropriate Practice* by J. Ronald Lally et al. (1995).



How does your child react to the world?

Big Reactors communicate their feelings, and don't hold back!

Look for:

Caregivers who respect your child's emotions, but help him to express them in a more controlled way.

Low Reactors fuss very little, play quietly, and sleep a lot.

Look for:

Caregivers who gently introduce new activities.

How active is your child?

High Activity children are always on the go.

Look for:

Individual schedules, safe exploration and physical play.

Low Activity children sit quietly, exploring through their eyes and ears.

Look for:

Caregivers who engage children in sensory-rich activities.

How social is your child?

Super-Social children:

- * Enjoy approaching new people
- * Are happiest interacting with others

Look for:

Opportunities for group play.

Take-It-Slow children:

- * Are shy around strangers
- * Need time to warm up

Look for:

Programs that allow children to choose when they'd like to play with others.

Is your child tolerant of changes and challenges?

High Tolerance children:

- * Aren't bothered by changes
- * Are adaptable
- * Cope well with frustration

Look for:

Mixed-age settings that offer enjoyable challenges and stimulation.

Low Tolerance children:

- * Are sensitive to change
- * Get upset when daily routine is altered
- * Are easily frustrated, impatient

Look for:

Same-age settings with developmentally appropriate toys and activities.

Health and Safety Issues to Consider

Quality child care providers are ones that also make health and safety issues a top priority. Use the questions below as general guidelines, and contact Child Care Aware for more information (1-800-424-2246).

- Are diapering, sleeping, food preparation and play areas separate?
- Are there clearly written sanitation procedures specific to each area? Are there instructions posted on proper diapering and food storage/preparation procedures?
- Do staff receive training on health and safety issues?
- Are infants' and toddlers' toys washed and disinfected regularly?
- Is there a sick-child policy?
- Do adults regularly conduct safety checks of all areas inside and out for potential safety hazards?
- Do staff maintain children's personal grooming standards (for example, hand-washing)?
- Are all infants put to sleep on their backs?
- Is the staff equipped with appropriate first aid materials? Do staff members know basic first aid techniques (for example, CPR)?
- Do staff practice fire drills and evacuation procedures? Is there a written policy in place for evacuation procedures?

What are your child's unique needs?

Sleep

Look for child-friendly settings offering:

- * individual schedules;
- * separate sleeping areas; and
- * appropriate lighting (dim), temperature (comfortable) and noise level (low).

Cultural Identity

- * Are staff interested in your family's culture?
- * Do staff speak your home language or find effective ways to communicate with you about your child?
- * Are staff open to including books and other aspects of your child's culture?
- * Are staff's values and practices consistent with your family's?

Special Needs

- * Are staff enthusiastic about accommodating your child?
- * Do staff understand the medical and therapeutic procedures and assistive technology necessary to support your child?
- * Are staff trained and supported to accommodate children with special needs?
- * Is the setting accessible to your child?
- * Do any books/toys feature children with special needs?
- * Are staff willing to help your child develop the skills that match what your family believes are important?



Responsive Care

Among the items we've discussed, there is one common thread: the need for caregiving staff to adapt *their* approach to meet your child's needs. This is called *responsive care*. To do so, caregivers need to be excellent observers of the children in their care, and search for the meaning behind children's gestures, gurgles, cries, and glances. Responsive caregivers wonder *why* a particular behavior is occurring, come up with an educated guess, and interact with the child to see if they're correct. Is a crying baby tired? Hungry? Wet? Lonely? Frustrated?

Responsive caregivers adapt their responses based on the reason behind the behavior as well as *the style of the individual child*. This ensures that all children are treated as unique, with their own thoughts, feelings, preferences, and needs.

Responsive Child Care Issues to Consider

- Are children allowed to function on individual schedules?
- Do parents receive daily written reports about their children's day (and formal progress reports twice per year)?
- Are parents free to visit at any time during the day?
- Does the caregiver adhere to state-regulated caregiver/child ratios?
- Is the caregiver's turnover rate for families under 20%? Why do families leave?
- When caregivers leave, how do staff help children understand the transition?
- Do staff receive medical benefits, vacation leave, and continuing education support?
- How do caregivers respond to child-initiated interests?
- How can parents get involved in the program?
- If you are nursing, is the caregiver responsive and accommodating?