

Interviewing Providers: What to Ask Before You Choose

A YoungStar Guide for Families

Finding someone to care for your child can be both emotional and stressful, but with YoungStar, families can gather information about child care programs with the click of a button. This information can help families make informed decisions about potential programs in their community.

Once a family has narrowed down their choices, the next step is to plan a visit to the programs they are considering. Visiting the program gives parents the opportunity to ask important questions and see firsthand if the program has the qualities they value most.

The following are a few tips to help you on your way to finding quality care for your child.

Beginning Steps

Check childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov

YoungStar's 5 Star rating system is a quick and easy way to compare child care programs in your community. Using YoungStar's child care finder, families can look through detailed information for the programs they are considering, including hours of operation, contact information, star rating history, and any licensing or monitoring violations. This valuable resource will help you to make informed decisions.

Review the Program's Policies

Every child care program should have a set of policies for how they will handle everything from daily schedules and child illnesses, to discipline and food plans. These policies, or program rules, help families and staff work together to provide a consistent quality of care, as well as a safe place for children to play and learn. When you visit a program, ask for a copy of their written policies. Take the time to look them over and don't be afraid to ask questions if you need further explanation.

Ask for References

Talking to other families is a great way to find out if a child care program is right for your family. When you are visiting a program, ask about contacting a few of the currently enrolled families. Being able to listen to and ask questions of someone who is already attending the program can give you some important insight into the program as a whole.

Ask About the Program's Teacher-to-Child Ratios

It is important to know the kind of personal attention your child will receive, as well as how many peers they will have in their group or class. A teacher-to-child ratio tells you the maximum number of children who can be cared for by a single teacher or adult. Typically, as children get older, the teacher-to-child ratio increases. For example, according to Wisconsin licensing rules, a classroom of infants needs at least one teacher for every four children, whereas a classroom of 5-year olds may have one teacher caring for 17 children. Asking the provider about the teacher-to-child ratio that your child's classroom or group would have is important information when considering a child care program. For more information on Wisconsin's licensing rules, please visit: dcf.wisconsin.gov/cclicensing.

Using YoungStar Is Easy

Visit youngstar.wi.gov to compare child care providers and find helpful parenting advice.

Call **1-888-713-KIDS (5437)** to get personalized help from a local child care resource and referral specialist.

Want to Learn More?

At youngstar.wi.gov, parents can watch videos, download articles and find useful information on early childhood education, nutrition, and more. You can even discover activities that encourage healthy brain development.

What Questions to Ask

Finding the right child care program for your family isn't easy. But asking the right questions can help. The following are some simple questions that you can use to get the conversation started:

Ask About the Program's Star Rating

YoungStar's 5 Star rating system gives parents a snapshot a program's quality. It is an objective system that values the education and training of staff, developmentally appropriate learning experiences for children, professional business practices, and safe, healthy and nurturing environments. To find out how the programs you are interested in stack up, consider asking the following questions:

- When were you last evaluated by YoungStar and what is your star rating?
- What were your program's strengths?
- Were there parts of your program that needed improvement? What are some of the ways you are looking to improve your program and practices?
- What should I know about your program that I wouldn't find in your YoungStar rating?

Get the Full Picture

A YoungStar rating is a great way to find out about a program's quality, but the rating can only tell you so much. It is important that families ask questions that look beyond the stars. Here are some questions that will help you to gain information that is not included in the program's YoungStar rating.

- How long have most of the teachers worked at your program?
- What is the education level of your staff related to early care and education? Do you and your staff attend ongoing early childhood training opportunities?
- How do you keep parents informed and up-to-date on the things happening in your program?
- Are there opportunities for me and my family to get involved with your program?
- What does your daily schedule look like? Do you offer a good mix of active and quiet times, indoor and outdoor play?
- What happens if a child gets sick?
- Do you have a menu for what is being served each day? Who prepares the food? What if my child has a food allergy?
- How can I help make my child's experience the best it can be?

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Early Care and Education at 608-422-6002. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.