

Understanding your child care center's policies and procedures important

A strong and reliable relationship between parents and their child care provider is important in order for children to receive quality care outside the home. Becoming familiar with the policies and procedures of your child's center is an important first step to building a good relationship with your child's provider and showing your support of all the children served by your child care program.

Start with the Parent Handbook

Read it and ask questions if there is something you don't understand. If your provider does not have a handbook, request that you be given something in writing. It is important that you are clear of your care provider's policies in the following areas:

Illness: How ill does a child have to be to be kept home? How severe a runny nose, cough, temperature have to be? If a child is kept home, when may the child return? Many centers request that a child be kept home for at least 24 hours after a child has been sick, run a temperature or started antibiotics. Some centers and providers are equipped for sick care, but most are not.

It is important that you have a back-up care plan in place if your child is too ill to attend school and you can't take the time off from work. If you send a sick child to school, expect a phone call asking you to pick up your child. Sending a sick child to child care is unfair to the other children, the providers and mostly to the sick child. Would you want your child to be playing, eating and resting with a child who is sick?

Drop-Off and Pick-Up: Where do you sign in and out? How does the provider know who is picking up the child each day? How does the provider know who is approved to pick up a child? What is their policy when a stranger shows up? Do you need to call if you are going to be late? Is there a fee if you are late? It is important to remember that teachers and providers have lives outside of work and a late parent can inter-

fere with a provider's family commitments, classes, second job and appointments. Being late not only affects the teacher and his or her family - it can be very upsetting to your child. They may worry that you have forgotten them or that something has happened to you. If you are going to be late CALL your provider and let them know. This is a basic human courtesy and will be greatly appreciated by provider and child.

Payment Policy: Has the center made it clear as to when payment for services is expected? Have you signed a contract? What are the consequences if you are late? Is there a late fee; will you be asked to remove your child? Will you be charged for holidays and other times when the center is closed? Will you have to pay when your child is out due to illness or vacation? If you are having trouble paying for the services, talk to the director or owner. Some centers have financial aid available and many centers are more than willing to work out a payment plan to get caught up. The worst thing you can do is to ignore the problem.

Starting off with a clear understanding of your provider's procedures and policies is the first step in creating a loving and nurturing relationship between your child, your provider and you.

Information for this article was provided by Early Learning New Hampshire. The organization is committed to ensure that all New Hampshire children have the opportunity to reach their full potential by expanding access to affordable quality child care and early education, supporting the child care industry; building public-private partnerships; and helping families balance work and family. www.earlylearningnh.org