

Keep lines of communication open between parent, provider

Last month, we discussed how important it is for parents and caregivers to understand their child care provider's policies and procedures.

Once you've read and understand your provider's policies, it's time to bring your questions and concerns back to them. Hopefully, some of your questions were discussed before your child was enrolled. This helps to avoid surprises and misunderstandings.

It is important that both you and your provider understand each other's needs and expectations from the beginning thereby avoiding conflict. That is why communication is key to the success of your relationship with your childcare provider.

It is important to understand that most providers don't have the ability to meet all of your expectations - not because they don't want to, but because there are limits related to the number of children they legally care for based on the facility's license and the provider's education and training. Licensing rules are different for center and family child care homes and are often the reason behind procedural differences from one facility to another.

A family childcare provider may be far more flexible than a large childcare center because of the difference in number of children in each facility. Any caring provider will listen to your expectations and offer a compromise if it is at all possible. Try to put yourself in the position of the provider and think about how your request affects the facility's schedule. For example, if a provider is putting three children down for rest after lunch and you show up late with your child who hasn't eaten lunch but has already napped, your provider may understand this happening once. They might not, however, be able to accommodate this schedule on a regular basis. It is very difficult, if not impossible to supervise, feed and entertain one young child while creating an environment for the other children in their care.

Daily communication is essential to build good provider-client relationships but probably the most important age group for this "every day" communication is with children under one year. Every infant is different and as the parent, you know your baby better than anyone. Providers rely on parents for input every day with children of this age.

The following is a checklist of things that your childcare provider needs to know to help them care for your infant:

- When your baby last ate as well as what was served and if the baby ate well.
- When your baby last napped and for how long.
- When she/he was last changed.
- How to help the baby sleep and whether your baby likes to be cuddled (some babies do not!).
- What a certain cry means, what kind of a bottle and pacifier the baby likes; if you're breast feeding they will need to know if they can they feed your baby formula and what type?

- When when you start feeding your baby food, especially if your provider will be serving your baby food during the day.
- What you would like to do when your baby is teething.
- If your child has just received immunizations so that they can be aware of any reactions.

■ Where you can be reached at all times in case a problem arises or your baby becomes ill and needs to go home.

■ What your concerns are so that they can help you feel more confident and less worried about the care your baby is receiving.

Sharing this information provides an opportunity for both parents and providers to be clear about their roles. Your provider is a resource that can be tapped any time you feel you have questions or concerns and challenges of being a new parent. Keeping an open mind when your caregiver makes a suggestion will help build your relationship and encourage your provider to listen to you. You don't have to agree all of the time, but at least listen to their suggestions.

Expect your provider to give you a detailed report of your baby's day - preferably in writing. It may become imperative for you and your baby's doctor to have information on your child's sleeping, eating and diapering schedule, as well as information regarding your baby's mood and temperament during the day, should problems develop. Find out what your provider's procedure is for communicating this information to you on a daily basis, and communicate to her/him what information you would like at the end of the day and how you would like it shared.

The key here is to keep it simple for your provider. She/he is not going to have lots of spare time to write a long report everyday, but make sure that all of the vital information is shared. If your provider doesn't have a written report they normally use - create one of your own. A checklist is the simplest type of form for a provider to use. If you need to spend more time talking to your provider about your concerns or your baby, request a meeting or phone call at a time that is convenient for both of you, since the provider's attention should be on the other children in her/his care not on you.

Finally - providers do not read minds! Please don't assume your provider knows what you are thinking or expecting. Babies are different and what may work with one infant may not work with yours. Your baby is unique and special. Your input and guidance are needed and appreciated to keep your baby happy, comfortable and safe.

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