

## Making the most of family, neighbors and friends

**N**ationally, most child care is provided in family child care homes. This is also the case here in New Hampshire. Over 5,000 New Hampshire children receive early care and education through a state licensed or licensed exempt family child care home each day. In addition, it is quite possible that at least as many New Hampshire children rely on immediate family, neighbors, and friends to fulfill their daily child care needs. National statistics also demonstrate that many of these children are cared for by their grandparents, the balance are cared for by other family members, neighbors or friends of the family.

Family, neighbors and friends child care settings are chosen by parents for various reasons including; trust, safety, providing a happy, loving and emotionally nurturing environment where children can learn and have fun. Family, neighbors and friends child care settings can also serve a working families need for child care during odd work hours and can be an affordable alternative to financially stressed families.

Finding a child care arrangement that has the quality and convenience you need -at a reasonable cost-can be a real challenge. It is rare to find the perfect situation, but it is possible to find a very good situation that will meet the needs of your family. There are several key quality indicators to keep in mind when looking for a good early care and education experience for your child. These quality indicators are; education, experience, and environment. In this article we will review some tips on how to make the most of this type of child care arrangement that include these quality indicators.

The following checklist will help you, as a parent, understand exactly what you can expect of your caregiver and what they will expect from you.

**1. Convenience** - What days and times is your caregiver available?

**2. Schedule** - What are the drop off and pick up times and can you meet them?

**3. Payment for Services** - How does your caregiver expect to be paid and when?

**4. Vacation and Holidays** - Communicate with your caregiver ahead of time to coordinate vacation and holiday schedules and payment expectations.

**5. Sick Days** - Discuss a plan for notification if your child is sick or your caregiver is unable to provide the care that is scheduled. In addition discuss the parameters of illness that would constitute your child needing to stay at home.

**6. Safety** - You should have your caregiver complete an infant/child CPR and first aid training at least every other year. You will need to conduct a safety check of the child care environment, inside and out including all equipment and other furnishings.

**7. Feeding and Diapering** - From bottles to the introduction of new foods, communicate your expectations and recommendations from your pediatrician or other nutrition expert in the field. Do not expect that your caregiver will have all the latest information or know exactly what you want.

**8. Educational Supplies** - Will you or your caregiver provide educational supplies including toys, games and crafts? What are your expectations regarding early care and education experiences for your child?

**9. Training** - Inquire about your caregiver's level of early care and education training and their plan for training in the year ahead. New Hampshire offers a great variety of free and low cost trainings to early care and education providers from CPR/First Aid to water safety trainings and everything in between.

**10. Trips Away from the Child Care Setting** - From errands to personal appointments, how often will you accept your caregiver leaving the child care setting to fulfill their own personal needs or the needs of their family members during care giving hours? Does this provider utilize a cell phone during these times?

The importance of these communication tools cannot be overstated. Whether these issues are addressed in some type of a written agreement or maintained as a verbal agreement, raising these issues will help you make the most of your child care arrangement. This process will also help you maintain a healthy personal relationship with your family member, neighbor or friend. These relationships are long-term relationships and are as key to you and your family as they are to your child's caregiver. Remembering that you are relying on this person to keep your child safe, healthy, happy and hopefully on track to quality early educational experience is imperative. Communication is the key to keeping this relationship healthy and happy for everyone involved.

*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](http://www.earlylearningnh.org)*