

CHOOSING CHILD CARE

A PARENT'S GUIDE

For Children with Special Needs



Dear Parent,

Children are more alike than different, yet each child has unique needs that must be considered when arranging child care. This booklet will give you the information you need to make a confident choice. Here are some steps that will ease the way to a successful relationship with your child care provider:

- Ask about the types of care that are available in your area to select the setting that is most suited to your child's needs.
- Visit several child care providers' homes and child care centers to evaluate the services they offer.
- When you find a child care program that meets your needs and has current openings, talk with the potential provider about your child's special needs.
- Bring your child to meet the child care provider so they can get to know each other. After meeting your child, the provider will be able to work with you to plan activities that will be appropriate and fun for your child.

Encourage your child care provider to talk with other people who are already involved in your child's care. Your child's pediatrician, therapist or teacher can be very helpful. They can provide information regarding your child's abilities and needs and they can suggest activities that will help your child grow and develop. Keep the lines of communication open. You and your child care provider can work together to ensure that your child is receiving the best possible care.

Remember that you are the expert when it comes to your child. Making an informed child care choice is an important step in meeting your child's needs. With teamwork and good communication you, your child, and your provider can all benefit from a positive experience.

Sincerely,

MAP to Inclusive Child Care Team
Office of Early Care and Education,
New Jersey Department of Human Services

Children with special needs have a physical, social or mental condition or special health care need that affects their typical process of growth and development. Special needs may fall under the headings of physical disabilities, developmental delays, learning disabilities, challenging behaviors, extreme shyness, specific developmental delays in speech or language, hearing or vision impairments, illnesses, or adjustment difficulties. In each of these categories, the child's needs may vary from moderate to significant. Some children have special needs in more than one area. All children have the need to be safe, to be accepted, to have friends, to learn, to participate in the community, and to be the best he or she can be.

Choosing Child Care

Q. What are some factors to consider when deciding on the best child care setting for your child?

A. Think about how your child spends his or her day, and the circumstances that make him or her most comfortable.

- How does your child handle being in a large group?
- Does your child require a great deal of one-on-one attention?
- Does your child enjoy activities such as crafts, sports or trips?
- Does your child tend to thrive in a quieter, less active environment?

Q. Should you be looking for a specialized setting or an inclusive setting for your child care solution?

A. This is a personal decision that each family must make depending on their particular needs and requirements for care. If you visit several child care settings, you will be able to decide whether a center or family child care provider has the services your child needs. Other options include therapeutic care and in-home care. There are important benefits to placing a child with special needs in a typical child care program:

- An inclusive group brings together children with varying abilities who all learn to respect each other and to get along. This helps all children develop an accepting attitude about people who may be different from themselves.
- Each child in an inclusive group can learn to use his or her own strengths to help others. They can also learn to improve their abilities by watching and learning from other children.
- Research has shown that pre-schoolers who are segregated tend to remain so into adulthood and that inclusion is beneficial for all children.

Q. Should you expect your child care provider to be an expert in caring for children with special needs?

- A. Most of the time parents who have a child with special needs do not start out as experts - and often feel unprepared for the challenges of parenting. They certainly become “experts” as they learn along with their growing child. You can help your child care provider learn by sharing as much information and as many resources as possible. Many child care providers have learned to do therapeutic exercises with children and to develop special activities that help children develop the skills they need. The staff of your county Unified Child Care Agency can assist you and your provider with resources and information (see page 10).

Q. What will the child care provider need to know about your child?

- A. It is important that the child care provider become knowledgeable about your child’s talents, skills, and interests as well as any disability your child may have. You can help the provider to feel confident about caring for your child by sharing the ways you have met any challenges along the way. You will need to be very specific in describing your child’s needs and your expectations. By working together to develop a plan for your child’s care, you and the child care provider can form a very successful team.

Q. How should you interview a potential child care provider?

- A. The best way to match your child and a provider is to bring your child to the child care setting for a visit. This should happen after you have decided that the program meets your needs and an opening is available for your child. At this point, you will find that a meeting between your child and the new provider will bring many benefits:
- Your child can begin to feel comfortable in the new setting with you along for support.
 - The provider will have a chance to see your child’s abilities and personality in order to begin planning the best ways to include your child in the program.
 - You will have the opportunity to decide if the child care provider is comfortable and accepting of your child with special needs.
 - You and your provider can prevent any unexpected problems by establishing those all-important lines of communication from the start and by sharing any concerns you both may have.

Q. What else can you do to facilitate the placement of your child in the care setting of your choice?

- A. You will want the provider to talk directly with other people who are already involved in your child’s care, such as early intervention staff, pediatricians, physical, occupational or speech therapists, child study team staff or teachers. The child care provider will need your permission to make these contacts. Some families even arrange a meeting so the child care provider can get to know all the professionals involved. Making these contacts, arranging meetings and providing appropriate training for staff may slow the entrance of your child into a program. However, planning ample time for these preparations and your patience will result in a better situation for your child in the future.

Child Care Options

Q. What types of care are available in New Jersey?

- A. **Child care centers** provide care for six or more children and must meet basic state licensing requirements. **Family child care** is provided for five or fewer children in the home of the child care provider. Although there are no licensing requirements for these providers, New Jersey has a voluntary registration program that provides support and monitoring if the provider chooses to participate. **In-home care** is provided by a caregiver who is employed by the family and comes to the child’s home. In-home care and the agencies which place in-home caregivers or nannies are not regulated by the Department of Human Services. Child care programs operated by **public schools** and held in public schools are exempt from licensing. Child care programs that are operated by a **private school** that extends to grades 6 may be also exempt.

Q. What types of centers must be licensed in New Jersey?

- A. The New Jersey Department of Human Services, Office of Licensing is responsible for inspecting and issuing licenses to the following types of centers:
- child care centers or programs with six or more children up to age 13
 - government-sponsored recreational centers serving children up to age 13
 - drop-in care where parents sign children in and out on an intermittent basis
 - nursery schools
 - kindergartens that are not part of a private or public school system
 - night-time care centers
 - cooperative schools
 - child care centers for children with special needs
 - child care centers serving children who are sick
 - summer camps that are not licensed by the Board of Health

Inspectors periodically make unannounced visits to these programs to ensure that they meet minimum requirements for health, safety, group sizes, and appropriate activities. Centers are also monitored in response to complaints, when necessary.

To determine if a program is licensed, or to ask questions about child care licensing, contact the Office of Licensing at 877-667-9845.

Q. How do you find child care in New Jersey?

- A. There are Unified Child Care Agencies (UCCAs) located in each county in New Jersey. These agencies have listings of all registered providers in your area. You can call the local UCCA for child care referrals. The phone numbers are listed by county in the back of this booklet. Your local school district may also provide preschool and/or child care services.

Interviewing a Potential Caregiver

Q. Should you ask the provider for references?

- A. Yes, it is a good idea to ask to speak to a parent who is using or who has recently used this provider about their experiences and impressions.

Q. Would a trial period be advisable?

- A. This can be a good way for both the parent and the provider to determine if their relationship is satisfactory before a long term commitment is made. You might even agree to start your child on a part-time basis for a while.

Q. Is the environment safe for your child?

- A. You will want to be sure that there is enough supervision and that the furnishings and equipment do not pose any hazards for your child. This may mean that some rearrangement is necessary - for example, widening aisles for a child in a wheelchair or moving toys out of the middle of the room for a child who is visually impaired. You will want to see that the entrances, exits, play areas and bathrooms are accessible for your child.

Q. Is the child care provider prepared to handle medical needs?

- A. You can ask the provider to describe how she or he would handle medical needs. Providers can contact the Health Consultant Coordinators (nurses) in their local Unified Child Care Agency to assist with developing appropriate medication policies and for local resources on health related issues. As long as reasonable care is used in following the doctors' and parents/guardians' written instructions about administering medication, centers should not be held liable for any resulting problems.

Q. Will the child care workers be able to give your child the attention he or she requires?

- A. By describing your child's daily activities and needs, you will help your child care provider understand how much staff time will be needed. Does your child require one-on-one supervision most of the time? Will he or she need assistance with toileting, dressing or eating? Will the staff be able to meet the needs of all children equally? Both the parents and the child care provider will need to be realistic in assessing whether the setting and the staff are right for that particular child.

Q. What if you find a child care program you like, but you feel that additional help is needed to make the situation a success?

- A. Your child may be entitled to services from the New Jersey Early Intervention System (see the listing on page 10 of this book for the Special Child Health Services Case Management Unit in your county) or from the public district. For further information on how to navigate the system of services available, call the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network at 1-800-654-SPAN. The NJ Division on Developmental Disabilities might provide someone to help with respite care. Having the child's own therapist visit the program to give activity suggestions and help with problem-solving can also make things easier.

Sometimes a grandparent is enlisted to volunteer in the program. You might also see if local high schools and colleges have programs that would allow a student to volunteer in the program. Senior citizen groups often sponsor "foster grandparent" programs for this type of situation.

The **New Jersey Inclusive Child Care Project** can assist you and your provider in developing an accommodation plan. Free telephone assistance, workshops and on-site consultation is available for licensed providers. 800-654-7726 ext. 108.

Starting Child Care

Q. Will the provider “spoil” your child?

- A. It is important that you give your child care provider a very clear picture of what your child can and cannot do. Let the provider know that you want your child to do as much as he or she is capable of doing. Most child care providers understand that it may be quicker to do things for children, but it is best to let children do as much for themselves as possible. Whether in a center or a home, all child care providers should encourage children to try new things and to master new skills.

Q. How will the other children react to my child?

- A. Young children are often quite accepting of differences. They may be eager to help and eager to understand. The way a teacher or child care provider introduces a child to the group can make a big difference in how that child is accepted. A provider with an accepting and respectful attitude about introducing any new child, will set the tone for the way the other children behave.

All children in child care are learning social skills. It is natural that some children will get along better than others. Some difficulties arise in any group of children and it is the caregiver’s responsibility to deal with issues on an individual basis.

Q. How will the other parents react to my child?

- A. Parent reactions are a little harder to predict than the reactions of children. This is because adults bring many preconceived notions to their understanding of a new situation. The center director, teacher, or child care provider should be prepared to answer any concerns with a positive attitude. Parents may be concerned that your child may take the provider’s attention away from their children, or that your child’s needs will hold back the progress of the entire group. A child care provider with a well prepared and positive plan for handling the inclusion of your child in the group, can answer any questions the other parents may have. The most important message is that children are more alike than different, and they all have a right to have friends and learn and enjoy life. The younger children are when they get to know people who are different from themselves, the more tolerant they will be as adults. This is a benefit to all of us.

Child Care and the Law

Q. How does the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) apply to our child care arrangements?

- A. A child care provider must accept your child if the adaptations required for your child’s inclusion are “readily achievable,” meaning that changes can be made without undue expense or difficulty. This question is addressed by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act which was signed into law in 1990. Child care centers and family child care providers must follow the ADA along with state laws against discrimination, unless they are owned and operated by a religious institution that is not receiving any federal or state funds.

As with any other service, child care must be provided without discrimination based on real or perceived disability. Your child with special needs must be provided with care in an inclusive setting unless separate or different measures are necessary to ensure equal opportunity. Child care centers and family child care providers must not maintain unnecessary eligibility standards that might deny equal access to care for children with special needs.

According to the ADA, child care providers must make *individualized assessments* about whether they can meet the particular needs of each child with a disability who seeks services from their program. Centers and providers must make reasonable modifications to their policies and practices to include children, parents and guardians with disabilities in their programs. They are not, however, required to make changes that would alter the fundamental nature of their program or cause undue burden. Child care directors, teachers and providers must demonstrate reasonable efforts to obtain additional services that would help your child benefit from their programs.

Many child care programs provide care for young children who are already toilet-trained and can feed themselves. Even in these settings, teachers and providers will occasionally need to help a child who doesn’t make it to the bathroom, or who has trouble eating correctly. Caring for a child with special needs may mean that the provider has to do these things more often. These activities are not, however, completely outside the typical boundaries of caring for preschool children, and child care providers should not exclude a child because they need this type of help. Wherever possible, it is best to place a child who has special needs into a class that is right for his or her actual age.

Q. What are some of the areas covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

- ❑ Increased insurance rates should not be used as a reason to exclude a child.
- ❑ A child who needs to use a service animal, such as a seeing-eye dog, may not be rejected from a child care program.
- ❑ Under the law, it would be considered discriminatory to reject a child who needs medication or simple health procedures in order to attend the program. If it is the type of medicine that parents can learn to administer, the child care provider would be expected to learn to do this also as a reasonable accommodation under the law.
- ❑ Children with mobility impairments may require some help with braces, crutches, etc., and their participation in the program may make it necessary to remove some physical barriers. These adjustments are considered to be reasonable accommodations.

According to the ADA, the cost of making reasonable accommodations for a child with special needs may not be charged directly to the parent. These costs must be treated as overhead and be spread across the tuition and fees paid by all who use the program. In some circumstances, the parents and the provider may agree that a medical specialist is needed to administer a medication or therapy that will enable the child to remain in the program. In this case, the parents of the child with special needs may be asked to pay for that special service.

Providers are not required to provide care to children who pose a *direct threat* to health and safety of others. A center does not have to take any action that it can *demonstrate* would result in a *fundamental alteration* in the nature of its program or activity or in *undue* financial and administrative *burdens* to the agency.

For more information about the ADA and child care centers, visit the U.S. Department of Justice website at www.usdoj.gov or call 800-514-0301.

Q. How does the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD) apply to our child care arrangements?

- A.** The Law Against Discrimination is New Jersey's version of the ADA. The Division of Civil Rights enforces the LAD. If you feel that a provider has discriminated against your child based on disability, you can call the New Jersey Division of Civil Rights. Staff will ask questions about your situation to determine if a complaint should be filed against the provider. The phone numbers for regional offices of the Division of Civil Rights are in the back of this booklet.

**Resources for including children with special needs in child care settings
MAP TO INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE**

VISION: All children in New Jersey will have equal access to affordable, high quality, developmentally appropriate and culturally competent child care.

MAP Team

Interagency group that meets bi-monthly to address issues of inclusion of children with special needs in child care.
609-292-8444

NJ Inclusive Childcare Project

Provides free regional trainings, telephone and on site consultation to licensed child care centers and family day care homes.
1-800-654-7726 ext. 108
www.spannj.org

NJ School-Age Care Coalition (NJ SACC)

Provides an annual conference, training, telephone and on-site consultation to school age child care providers.
908-789-0259
www.njsacc.org

Unified Child Care Agencies (UCCA)

A centralized location in each county that provides child care resource and referral, training and technical assistance.
Phone # by county on next page
1-800-332-9CARE

Child Care Health Consultant Coordinators

Provide consultation, education and training about health and safety needs of children in child care.
Phone # by county on back

Warmline

Uses automated messages and pediatric nurses to answer routine health

and behavior questions.

1-800-713-9006

Project Child Find

A free referral service to identify children with a delay or disability birth to 21. Distributes info about early intervention and special education programs.
1-800-322-8174
www.state.nj.us/education/

Child Study Team

Identify and evaluate students ages 3-21 for special education program and services. School staff and parents develop an Individualized Education Program for eligible students.
Call school district where child lives

Learning Resource Centers (LRC)

Current special education info, workshops, consultation and assistance to parents and professionals for \$2 annual fee.
South 856-582-7000
Central 732-274-5570
North 973-414-4491
N. Satellite 973-631-6345

Early Intervention

Statewide system of services for infants and toddlers, birth to age 3, with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.
County Case Mgt. Phone # on back
www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/eiphome.htm

Special Child Health Services

Provides county-based case management services to special needs children, birth to 21.

COUNTY	UNIFIED CHILD CARE AGENCY	HEALTH CONSULTANT COORDINATOR	CASE MANAG. UNIT
Atlantic	(609) 646-1180	(609) 646-1180 x602	(609) 645-7700 x4335
Bergen	(201) 336-7150	(201) 336-7168	(201) 634-2620
Burlington	(609) 261-9222	(609) 261-8009	(609) 267-1950 x42830
Camden	(856) 374-6376	(856) 374-5147	(856) 374-6021
Cape May	(856) 886-5164	(609) 886-5164	(609) 465-1200
Cumberland	(856) 451-6330	(856) 451-6330	(856) 453-2154
Essex	(973) 297-1114	(973) 744-4050 x1017	(973) 857-4663
Gloucester	(856) 582-8282	(856) 582-8282	(856) 262-4100
Hudson	(201) 451-8888	(201) 451-8888	(201) 915-2514
Hunterdon	(908) 782-8183	(908) 782-8183	(908) 788-6398
Mercer	(609) 989-7770	(609) 989-7770 x149	(609) 730-4152
Middlesex	(732) 324-4357	(732) 324-4357	(732) 745-3100
Monmouth	(732) 294-1894	(732) 294-1894 x302	(732) 224-6950
Morris	(973) 398-1730	(973) 598-2106	(973) 971-4155
Ocean	(732) 905-6363	(732) 905-6363 x132	(732) 341-9700 x7602
Passaic	(973) 684-1904	(973)684-1904 x270	(973) 523-6778
Salem	(856) 935-7139	(856) 935-7123	(856) 935-7510 x8479
Somerset	(908) 927-0869	(908) 927-0869 x113	(908) 725-2366
Sussex	(973) 383-3461	(973) 383-3461	(973)948-5400 x62
Union	(973) 923-1433	(973) 923-1433 x141	(908) 301-2544x2544
Warren	(908) 454-1078	(908) 454-1078	(908) 689-6000x258

County Case Mgt. Phone # on back
www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/schome.htm

NJ Self-help Clearinghouse

Statewide listings for support groups
 1-800-FOR-MASH
www.selfhelps.org
www.njgroups.org

Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)

800-654-7726
www.spannj.org

Offers information on all types of disabilities, as well as support programs and services

Regional Early Intervention Collaboratives

part of the early intervention system for children from birth to age 3

Southern Region : Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Salem 856-768-6747

Central Region: Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Somerset 732-699-0944

Northeast Region: Bergen, Hudson, Passaic 973-256-8484

Family Link: Essex, Morris, Union, Warren, Sussex 908-964-5303

Provides information, support and advocacy to families on educational, health and human services issues for children.

Parents Anonymous Helpline

Confidential hotline for support groups
 1-800-843-5437
www.pa-of-nj.org

Family Support Center

732-262-8020
 800-372-6510
www.familysupportnj.com

State of New Jersey Offices

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

www.state.nj.us/humanservices/index.html

Office of Licensing.....	877-667-9845
Developmental Disabilities Council.....	609-292-3745
Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.....	973-648-2324
Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (tty).....	800-792-8339
Division of Developmental Disabilities.....	609-292-7260
Division of Disability Services.....	888-285-3036
Division of Family Development.....	609-588-2400
Division of Youth and Family Services.....	609-292-6920
Office of Early Care and Education.....	609-984-5321
Head Start State Collaboration Director.....	609-633-2546

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES

www.state.nj.us/health.html

Early Intervention System.....	609-777-7734
Special Child and Adult Health Services.....	609-777-7778

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

www.state.nj.us/education/index.html

Office of Early Childhood Education.....	609-777-2074
Office of Special Education Programs.....	609-292-0147

DIVISION OF CIVIL RIGHTS

www.njcivilrights.com

Atlantic City Satellite Office.....	609-441-3100
Camden Regional Office.....	856-614-2550
Newark Regional Office.....	973-648-2700
Paterson Regional Office.....	973-977-4500
Trenton Regional Office.....	609-292-4605

Literature in Print

Exceptional Children
Journal of the Council for
Exceptional Children
920 Association Dr
Reston, VA 22091

Young Children
Journal of the National Association for
the Education of Young Children
1834 Connecticut Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20009

Exceptional Parent Magazine
296 Boylston St, 3rd Flr
Boston, MA 02116

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State of New Jersey
Richard J. Codey, Acting Governor

Department of Human Services
James M. Davy, Commissioner