

## Initial Contacts and Enrollment

When a family first contacts you about child care, they often have number of concerns. These are the kinds of questions about which they are thinking:

Will my child...

- be safe and free from harm?
- receive a lot of attention?
- feel comfortable and happy in this child care home?
- receive warm, loving, and responsive care?
- still love me best?
- have interesting things to see and to do?
- learn to get along with other children?
- hear lots of language?
- be ready for school?

These questions reflect the uncertainties and fears that many families experience when they seek care for their children. Everything you do to assure families that your program will respond constructively to their concerns will encourage the trust and confidence essential to partnerships.

## Determining Whether Your Program Is the Right Fit

Your program may or may not be the right one for a child and family. This is a decision that both you and the family will have to make. Families will have questions for you, and you will need information from each family. Together, you will determine whether your program is the right fit for everyone.

A family may call at any time to inquire about your program, but you do not want to take time away from the children to talk on the phone. Use an answering machine so you do not miss an important call if you are busy when it comes. Include a message about when you are available to talk and ask the caller to leave a phone number so that you can contact the family at another time.

When you speak with a family, take notes about important information such as the following:

- parent's(s') name(s), address, and phone numbers
- child's name and age
- hours of care required
- when care would begin

Families will need information from you as well. Be prepared to share the following information:

- your hours of operation
- the location of your family child care home
- your experience and qualifications
- the number and ages of the children in your program
- your fees
- names and phone numbers of references

If you and the family determine that enrollment is a good idea, set up a time for the family to visit when you will have time to talk. It is important for you to get to know one another and for you to meet the child. Some topics you might cover in this initial meeting with the family include the following:

- your philosophy and your use of a comprehensive curriculum to guide your planning for children of different ages
- your daily schedule and the kinds of experiences you offer children
- your approach to guiding children's behavior
- how you handle mealtimes, toilet training, and naps
- suggestions for easing hellos and good-byes

Use this initial contact with a family to determine whether your program is a good fit for the child. This may be the beginning of a long relationship. You need to feel comfortable with the family, and the family needs to feel comfortable with you. Pay attention to your own feelings and intuition before accepting a family.

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