

Choosing Child Care for your Child with Special Needs



All children have special needs. However, some children because of physical, emotional, or learning needs, may require extra support in a child care setting. It is important to choose child care that meets your basic requirements first, then address your child's unique needs with the provider.

Things to Consider

- A child care provider, that has never cared for a child with special needs, may be fearful or uncomfortable until he or she gets to know your child. You are the most knowledgeable person about your child's needs, so it is important for you to share with the provider information and ideas that you have found work best.
- Children often act differently in a child care setting than at home, so don't be surprised if your suggestions don't always work out.
- Caring for a child with special needs is a partnership among the family, child care providers, and many specialists involved.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires child care programs to make reasonable efforts to accommodate a child with a disability.
- Family resource centers provide parent-to-parent support and training. Regional centers link families of children ages birth to three years who have or are at risk of developmental disabilities to early intervention programs.
- Children ages birth to three who qualify for early intervention services receive an individualized family service plan (IFSP). The IFSP identifies the special services and who will provide them. At three years of age, special services, such as speech therapy, are provided by the school district through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). IEP describes the goals for your child and the services to help meet them.

Finding Child Care

YMCA Childcare Resource Service (YMCA CRS) provides free enhanced referral service for families that need child care for children with special needs. The Inclusion Specialists search our referral database for several licensed child care programs with staff who have training or education in working with children who have disabilities

and other special needs. Potential programs are contacted to ensure care is available and meets the child's special care needs. When care is selected, the parent and provider receive individualized resource packets and are linked with community resources and support.

To request an enhanced referral call the Inclusion Specialist at 619.521.3055 ext. 2325. As with all referrals, YMCA CRS believes that the parents/guardians are the best people to determine if the setting is a good match for their child.

If you feel a child care program is discriminating against your child because of a disability, you can get legal advice from the Child Care Law Center at 415.495.5498.

Choosing Special Needs Care

When choosing child care for a child with special needs:

1. Interview caregivers as you would for any child.
2. Ask for the references and check them out.
3. Visit without your child first. Make sure you are comfortable with the type and quality of care provided.
4. Bring your child to the child care setting and observe how he/she reacts or adjusts to the staff, the materials and the other children.
5. When you are ready, start your child's care for an hour or so, gradually increasing the time until he/she gets used to the provider and the provider is secure in meeting his/her needs.

Children with special needs require different levels of support and care. The willingness and openness of the provider to work with specialists in coordination and partnership with the family is crucial in providing high quality child care for your child.

Caregiver considerations

In your search for quality child care, the following checklist may be helpful:

- Caregiver has special training, skill, or experience with children with special needs.
- Communicates regularly about the child's development and any concerns as they arise.
- Maintains confidentiality and with parents permission answers questions regarding the child's special needs.
- Has a system to record medication, special feedings, or other procedures.

Environment considerations

- Facility is accessible and safe for the child, and accommodates adaptive equipment.
- Toy and play materials are developmentally appropriate and within child's reach.
- There are enough adults present to meet children's individual needs.
- The overall group size is not too large to be overwhelming for the child.
- Children with special needs are included and activities are adapted to their needs and abilities.

Parent responsibilities

- Provide caregiver adequate training for special procedures (e.g., nebulizer, g-tube feeding, finger prick testing).
- Invite the child care provider to the IEP or IFSP meetings.
- Request that consultation with the child care program is written into the IEP or IFSP.
- Plan a method of regular communication among the family, the provider, and the child's specialists.

Resources

- **YMCA CRS Inclusion Specialist:**
619.521.3055 x 2325 www.ymcacrs.org
- **Exceptional Family Resource Center:**
1.800.281.8252 www.efrconline.org
- **YMCA CRS HealthLine:**
1.800.908.8883 www.ymcacrs.org
- **United Cerebral Palsy of SD County**
858.571.7803 www.ucpsd.org
- **San Diego Autism Society:**
619.595.3691 www.sandiegoautismsociety.org
- **Down Syndrome Association Of San Diego:**
619.276.4494 www.dsasonline.org
- **Child Care Law Center:**
415.495.5498 www.childcarelaw.org
- **National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY):**
1.800.695.0285 www.nichcy.org
- **Regional Center:**
858.576.2996 www.sdrc.org
- **Center for Families of Children with Special Needs:**
619.260.7856 www.sandiego.edu/cfcsn

The information for Choosing Child Care for your child with special needs was derived from Care About Quality, developed by the California Dept of Education, Child Development Division. Resource numbers were correct at the time of printing. Contact YMCA CRS at 1.800.481.2151 to report any changes and to receive updated information.