

20 Questions to Ask Child-Care Providers

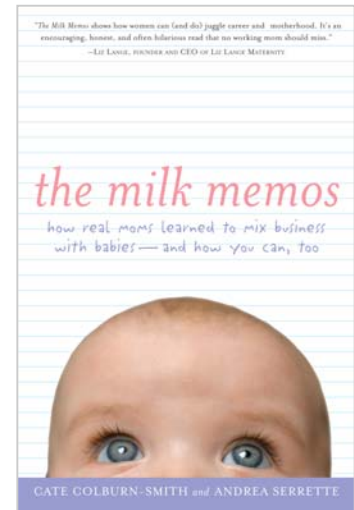
Adapted from:

The Milk Memos:

How Real Moms Learned to Mix Business with Babies – and How You Can, Too

By Cate Colburn-Smith & Andrea Serrette

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Leaving your child in the care of another is never an easy thing. You *will* find a good child-care solution! In the end, it comes down to trusting your intuition, but you'll also want a complete list of questions to ask potential child-care providers. We hope this helps.

1. *Are you certified/ licensed/ accredited?* Providers caring for more than six or seven children are required to be licensed. Specific criteria differ by state, but in general, a licensed or certified provider has had a background check and met certain standards for safety and adult-to-child ratios. Also, they must be recertified or renew their license every few years. Accredited providers have met voluntary standards for child care that are usually higher than state requirements.
2. *What education do you and your staff have?*
3. *What is the adult-to-child ratio?*
4. *Do you have first-aid training? Are you certified in infant and child CPR?*
5. *What is your policy regarding sick kids?* Do you send kids home at the first hint of a sniffle, or do you wait until a child has a fever? You'll need to know when to get backup care for your child, and you'll also want reassurance that all parents will be asked to keep their green-boogered kids at home.
6. *Do I have to pay for days when my child is absent due to sickness or vacation?* Usually, the answer is yes, but some care facilities allow for a week or two of vacation time per year. Some will give you a break if your child has an extended illness.
7. *How do you discipline children when you see tantrums, pushing, fighting, and arguments?* It's important to find out which discipline methods are used as well as which ones are prohibited. As your provider to put their discipline practices into writing.
8. *What would you do if my baby cried inconsolably?*

9. *How much do you charge if I'm late to pick up my child?* It's common for child-care providers to charge one dollar for every minute you're late. However, some have a "three-strike" policy – only after the third time you're late will you have to get out your wallet.
10. *Can I make unannounced visits to see/ observe my child?* Stay away from any provider who doesn't allow you to come and go or that has a strict visiting schedule. You should always feel welcome to observe your child during the day.
11. *What are your security and emergency policies?* How will my child be checked in and out each day? What would you do if my child fell? Do you practice fire drills? How would you handle an emergency situation (earthquake, tornado, national security threat)?
12. *What is your staff turnover rate?* Turnover at day-care centers averages 30 to 40 percent per year, but you can find a center that has a lower rate.
13. *What is a typical day like?* Make sure the answer you get matches what you're looking for in an in-home or day-care center, whether that is a structured daily routine or a free-flowing atmosphere.
14. *What do you like most about caring for infants/children? What do you like least? Why did you decide to become a child-care provider?*
15. *On which holidays do you close? Is there a backup provider?* If you are interviewing an in-home provider, it's also a good idea to find out what happens when she is sick or on vacation. Many providers make arrangements with another in-home provider in the neighborhood who can care for your child. If this is the case, make sure you meet the backup provider as well.
16. *Do you drive the children anywhere?* If yes, ask to see the vehicle and car seats.
17. *Do you smoke? Do you have pets?*
18. *How much notice is needed if I decide to switch day cares?*
19. *What is your billing policy?* Do you provide receipts for income tax credits?
20. *May I please have a list of references?*

For laughter, encouragement and many more Milk Mama tips, check out [*The Milk Memos*](#), a one-of-a-kind guide to balancing motherhood and work, based on actual journals kept by a group of IBM women during their visits to the company's employee lactation room.