



P.R.O.T.E.C.T.

Choosing a safe caregiver, in any setting

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES

HIRED: Caregiver hired to work in your home. **GROUP:** Daycare or other program you take your child to **FAMILY:** A relative or friend caring for your child.

P Prevention & body safety

Talk openly with caregivers about abuse prevention and build the foundation at home by teaching kids the correct anatomical names for their body parts, the difference between a secret and a surprise, and that their body is their own. Talk with your children about how safety feels and sounds. For children 4 months and under, remember: *If they can't cruise, they can't bruise.*

HIRED Ask how they handle privacy, bathroom, and bathing. Comfort with the topic is a green flag. Discomfort or dismissiveness is worth noting.

GROUP Ask for the written child-protection policy, and how staff are trained to handle diapering, toileting, and private care.

FAMILY Normalize saying your rules out loud. "In our house we use the real names for body parts, and we don't do secrets."

R Red flags & Resentment

Red flags in any setting: discourages your drop-ins, wants alone time with your child, pushes past boundaries you set, singles one child out, introduces secrecy, lying, and resentment. For children who are not yet mobile, remember: *If they can't cruise, they can't bruise.* Resentment is the quiet sense that a child is a burden and stacked on stress it is the mix that most often precedes harm.

HIRED Resentment sounds like irritation that feels personal, sighing or eye-rolling at ordinary needs, or complaints about your child that carry an edge. Notice anyone who treats your requests as an inconvenience, or who talks about your child as "too much."

GROUP Watch for a program that resists unannounced visits, is vague about policies, or discourages your questions. High staff turnover is its own red flag. Resentment shows up as staff who seem burned out or short with children, adults who talk about the kids with irritation in front of them, or a room where children seem ignored rather than engaged.

FAMILY Watch for a relative who dismisses your rules as unnecessary, keeps secrets with your child, or singles one child out. Resentment can sound like jealousy over the time, money, or attention your child requires, comments that your child is spoiled or too much, or frustration that caring for them is an imposition.

O Open & Observable

Safe adults welcome your eyes. People who intend harm need access, secrecy, and isolation.

HIRED Interview in person, bring your child into the meeting, and watch them together before you decide. Before they start consider using nanny-cam devices. Once they start, drop in unannounced. How does your child feel or act after they've been with the caregiver?

GROUP Insist on an open-door policy: you can walk in any time. Tour in person, and watch how staff are with the children while you are there. What adults will be interacting with your child?

FAMILY Watch how your child actually responds to them while in their care and afterward. Before they start consider using nanny-cam devices.



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T Temperament

Ask the caregiver how they handle stress, what they do when a baby will not stop crying, and how they remain calm when a child is at their hardest.

- HIRED** Ask directly: "What do you do when a baby won't stop crying?" Listen for calm, and a willingness to put the baby down safely and step away. Ensure the caregiver clearly understands and employs your approach to discipline with toddlers and older kids.
- GROUP** Ask about staff-to-child ratios and how they support staff through hard moments. Overwhelmed, understaffed, and/or under-supported adults are a safety concern. Ensure the caregiver clearly understands their approach to discipline.
- FAMILY** A loving family member or friend may not know what to do when a baby won't settle or a child won't listen. Ask directly: "What do you do when a baby won't stop crying?" Listen for calm, and a willingness to put the baby down safely and step away. Ensure the caregiver clearly understands and employs your approach to discipline with toddlers and older kids.

E Environment & Everyday Safety

Step back and read the whole picture: the safety of the space, the quality of supervision, other adults who may interact with your child, and whether the setup keeps your child visible and protected rather than isolated.

- HIRED** Verify their driver's license, insurance, and a clean driving record. Demonstrate correct car seat use and remind that the car seat is to be used every time they are in the vehicle.
- GROUP** Look at the sightlines. Is there anywhere a child could be alone with one adult, unseen? Ask how field-trip transport is handled. Is the center baby-proof and clean? Are children engaged? Are medications and stairs properly guarded?
- FAMILY** Verify their driver's license, insurance, and a clean driving record. Demonstrate correct car seat use and remind that the car seat is to be used every time they are in the vehicle. Is their home baby-proof? Clean? Are pools, medications, firearms, and stairs properly guarded? Who else will be in the house?

C Credentials & References

Verify that they actually have the training and experience the role needs. Check references by asking open-ended questions. You are looking for stories about how they handled various situations, not adjectives ("they're great!").

- HIRED** Verify CPR, first aid, safe sleep, and real childcare experience. Ask to see certificates.
- GROUP** Are the teachers and facility properly licensed, accredited, and qualified? Read reviews, and talk to current parents. Ask about staff turnover. High turnover is its own red flag.
- FAMILY** Do they know infant CPR, safe sleep, proper feeding, and how to walk away when they need a minute?

T Trust your gut

Red flags are what you can see. Your gut is what you feel. If something feels off, that feeling is information. You never need proof, and you never need to justify choosing someone else.

- HIRED** A candidate can look perfect on paper and still feel wrong. You can pass without explanation.
- GROUP** A place can be licensed and well-reviewed and still feel off to you. Keep looking.
- FAMILY** The hardest place to honor your gut, because saying no costs you something. Your child's safety outranks hurt feelings. "We're not comfortable with that yet, it's nothing about you" is a complete answer.