



CONDUCTING A PARENT INTERVIEW

By Holly McDonough

Excerpted from *Making Home-Based Child Care Work For You*

People often ask me how to prevent high turnover in child enrollment. I think the key is to avoid enrolling children just for the sake of filling all openings. You should take care to enroll only children you can work with on a long-term basis and whose parents you can communicate with openly. Make it clear to parents inquiring about care that you, too, have an interview process and want to be sure your child care philosophy is similar to (or at least not in direct conflict with) their own. Parents may be surprised, but most will appreciate your honesty—even the ones who are sent back to the referral center!

Just as the parent's screening process has several steps, so does the provider's.

Step One: Telephone Screening

During the telephone screening process, narrow down the field of potential clients with a few general questions and comments:

1. How old is the child?
2. What type of care are you seeking: full or part-time, temporary or long-term?
3. Give location, hours and fees.
4. Briefly describe your services. Keep description brief, as you want parents to come and see your child care operation first hand. You have worked hard to set up your facility. Take pride in what you have to offer.

If you don't have an opening for the caller's child, do everything you can to refer him/her to another facility or an appropriate referral agency. The parents will remember your helpfulness and may call on you later for care.

If, on the other hand, you do have an opening that might fit their needs, invite them out for an on-site visit. At some point you will want them to come with their child during child care hours. For now, encourage them to make this first visit during off hours and without their child. It will be much easier for you to talk without having six or seven other children demanding your attention. While you want to be as flexible as possible, you also need a certain amount of down time. Keep set hours for interviews, so that you can get the necessary rest and relaxation you need. An hour after closing during the week or two hours on a Saturday morning will give you a chance to collect yourself after a hectic day or week.

Step Two: Initial Home Visit

When the parents arrive for the initial interview, present yourself in a professional manner. Dress professionally and greet the parents with a smile. Always introduce yourself and extend a warm welcome. Give all of your attention to the interview. Take messages if the telephone rings. Don't run back and forth cooking dinner, doing laundry, etc. If you have small children of your own, try to get them to play in the room with you so that you don't have to continually leave the interview.

Give the parents a tour of all areas of the house used for day care, including outside playground, sleeping, eating and play areas. Tell them about the services you provide and all day care policies. Invite them to look around all day care areas and to ask any questions.

During the interview process, look at the parents while they are speaking. This makes for more personal contact and shows a sincere interest in what they have to say. Make sure all of their questions have been answered fully. Once all of their questions have been answered, be prepared with a list of your own questions (see sidebar). Make notes if necessary, but don't spend too much time writing during the interview. You want to give all of your attention to the conversation. Spend ten minutes immediately following the interview to make notes while impressions are still fresh in your mind. At the end of this visit, send the parents away with a handbook of your policies, a copy of your contract, sample copies of activity and meal schedules, a list of references to call and a registration form.

If all agree, invite the parents to stop by during day care hours with their child. Remind them that you will be happy to answer questions during this visit, but to please understand that you will also be caring for children during this time.

Step Three: Return Home Visit

When the prospective clients arrive for the follow-up visit, finish up whatever activity you are engaged in and encourage some free play time. This will give you the chance to watch how the children interact with each other, and you will be free to interact with the visiting child. This will also make it a little easier to answer additional parent questions.

At the end of the visit, encourage parents to call with any further questions. Try to avoid signing them up on the spot. You want them to give this a lot of thought and you should review your own notes. Everyone wants this to work long-term.

If you don't feel you can accommodate the needs and expectations of the parents and the child, don't be afraid to refer them for other care.

If all parties feel it is a fit, welcome your new clients. Be sure to have them complete all necessary contracts, health forms and other required paperwork before the first day of care.

See below for handy interview forms.

For Providers: Parent Interview Questions

From *Making Home-Based Child Care Work For You*

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1. Has your child been in day care before? If so, for how long? If not, who has provided child care?
2. Why are you seeking new child care? (If applicable.)
3. Is someone available to pick up your child by closing time?
4. Do you have emergency backup care?
5. What is your method of discipline?
6. How do you approach potty training?
7. Will you be giving two weeks' notice to your former child care provider? If not, why?
8. Does your child have any special needs based on religious or health issues? Are there any activity or food restrictions?
9. Are you available to participate in occasional day care activities and special events?
10. Are you willing to sign a contract?
11. Are you available to chaperone an occasional field trip?
12. What is your child's favorite activity?
13. What general observations can you give me about your child's development, activities, etc.?
14. What are your expectations of a child care provider?
15. May I have the names of references? (If possible, ask for name of a former caregiver. Be sure all contract obligations (final payments) were met.)

Use this space to add your own questions.

For Providers: Parent Interview Work Sheet
From *Making Home-Based Child Care Work For You*
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Parent/Legal Guardian Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Name of child:

Referred by:

First contacted:

Days and hours care is needed:

Initial home visit scheduled for:

Notes, comments, observations from home visit:

Follow-up questions or concerns:

Return home visit scheduled for:

Notes, comments and observations from return home visit:

Follow-up questions or concerns:

Child enrolled into care to begin on:

Forms and contract given on:

Follow up action:

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