Tips for Parents: Assessing early childhood care and education options

K-State specialist shares tips on how to find the right provider for children’s needs

By Lisa Moser, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — When anticipating a new baby, oftentimes pregnant families face a challenge in trying to arrange infant care for their little one while they go to work.

But in Kansas and other places, meeting the demand for early childhood care and education is a challenge, said Bradford Wiles, a K-State Research and Extension specialist in applied human sciences.

The demand for early childhood care and education

“We would need to add 84,000 slots to meet the current demand for early childhood care and education in Kansas,” Wiles said.

Not only is the need great, but the affordability for young families can also be a challenge, he added.

“Early care and education facilities are essentially private schools, and you are asking people at the start of their lifetime of earnings to pay for a private school at a time when they can least afford it,” Wiles said.

He said it is also hard for providers to make a living wage in many communities.

“By helping our communities solve early childhood care and education needs there is a collective benefit for the children, families, and businesses in those communities,” Wiles said.

Selecting an early childhood care and education provider

“In most counties in Kansas, home care providers provide 50% of the overall care in any community, and they go through the same licensing and professional development as those who serve in an early childhood care and education center,” Wiles said. “It is best to secure licensed care whenever possible.”
With that in mind, what do parents need to look for when evaluating a potential early childhood care and education provider?

“Look at how the providers talk to the children. Do they get down to talk with them at their level? What is their tone of voice? High-quality professionals use a tone of voice that is supportive of everyone,” Wiles said.

Other things to observe are the cleanliness of the facility and if there are any obvious safety issues. He also said to see if the children are ever out of the view of the provider.

When speaking to the provider, he encourages parents to ask about discipline protocols and learn about what type of early education curriculum they follow. Wiles also recommends asking for referrals.

For those who are interested in learning more about this topic, Wiles recommends two publications:

- Choosing Care for Your Children: Child Care Centers and Preschools.
- Choosing Care for Your Children: Child Care Homes.

“If the provider is concerned by the questions that you are asking, that is a sign; good providers are proud of how they care for children and welcome questions,” Wiles said.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
K-State College of Health and Human Sciences, https://www.hhs.k-state.edu

Choosing Care for Your Children: Child Care Centers and Preschools: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3176.pdf

Choosing Care for Your Children: Child Care Homes: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3175.pdf

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Story by:
Lisa Moser
785-532-2010
lmoser@ksu.edu

More information:
Bradford Wiles
785-532-1939
bwiles@k-state.edu