

# If Your Child Has Special Needs

Child Care **CCRS**  
Resource Service

Choosing care for a child with special needs is essentially the same as choosing care for any child. In addition, you can do some things to make a better choice and to assure that the situation you choose will be supportive for you and your child. Many parents of children with special needs feel they have to settle for lower-quality care because fewer options are available to them. Now that the Americans with Disabilities Act applies, many more quality child care programs are becoming experienced in caring for children with special needs. We hope that the information here helps you find the **best** care for your child.

## Determining Your Needs

Besides the questions and issues included in the enclosed booklet on child care options, you may want to consider these points:

- Will your child need to receive any special services by therapists or others while in the child care setting?
- Should your child care provider be close to special service providers so you can transport your child easily for therapies or medical appointments?
- Must you find care in an area that your child's program bus will transport to?
- Does your child have any special health needs that would make a large group setting such as a center or large school-age program less desirable?

## Screening Child Care Providers

Many providers who are not used to caring for children with special needs may seem somewhat fearful about caring for your child. This is normal. Remember how you felt at first? A positive attitude, and interest in learning more, and a belief that all children deserve quality care with other children are the most important considerations. Here are some other questions to think about as you screen providers:

- What is the provider's attitude toward disabilities in general and your child in particular? Is it frightened, overprotective, pitying? Or is there appropriate expression of interest and curiosity?
- How does the program handle things like eating, sleeping, and toileting? Would it be a problem to fit your child into these routines?

- Does the program have other children with disabilities? Have they cared for similar children in the past? (You may want to call the parents of these children to see how it worked for them.)
- Is there anything about the physical environment that would be hard for your child?

## Talking to Potential Providers

It is more important to tell the provider about your child rather than about his or her diagnosis. Disability labels such as cerebral palsy can be very scary for a child care provider who does not know what this means. Tell the provider about what your child can and cannot do. Describe any special adaptations or routines that your child needs. For example, "Mac is four and has Down's Syndrome. He can run, draw with crayons (nothing recognizable!), and sit still for a very short story. His speech is about two years behind other kids his age. He is very shy and needs extra encouragement to play with other kids. He is also just learning to go potty on his own." Tell the provider about how your child acts around other kids and when you're gone.

## Making it Work

After you decide, be available and encourage questions. Make sure you share specific information about your child to help the provider(s) understand and provide good child care. Tell them:

- How your child lets you know what he or she wants or needs.
- How your child gets around.
- What special equipment, if any, your child uses.
- What kind of help is needed, if any, to feed your child or with any other daily routines.
- What medicines your child takes, how much, and when.
- If a special diet is needed.
- What your child really likes to do.
- What activities are really hard for your child.
- What other agencies or programs provide special services to your child. (It's a good idea to give your child care provider written permission to talk with or share written information with special service providers.)

Your child care resource and referral agency may be available to provide technical assistance, training, and/or consultation to providers serving children with special needs. Encourage your provider to call with any questions or concerns.