

HOW TO EVALUATE YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Choosing the right childcare provider is important for your child's health, happiness, and safety. So how can parents choose among the countless options for daycare centers, summer camps, or after-school programs? Just as you ensure that the institutions where you take your children adhere to building codes, have smoke detectors and fire extinguishers, and practice fire drills, these institutions should also have protocols to prevent and detect child sexual abuse. Asking the questions below will help you make choices that keep your child safe and healthy.

1.



DOES THE ORGANIZATION HAVE A LICENSE TO PROVIDE CHILD CARE IN YOUR LOCAL JURISDICTION?

Most cities, counties, and states have regulations regarding qualifications for service providers that care for children. Check with your local government office to find a list of all certified care providers. Then make sure the service provider is on that list.

2.



DOES THE ORGANIZATION HAVE CLEAR, WRITTEN POLICIES ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Every childcare provider should have a written policy with clear guidelines for preventing, detecting, and responding to child abuse. This should include rules that clarify acceptable and unacceptable behaviors for individuals who interact with children. For example, do they prohibit staff from being alone with a child unless visible to others? These policies should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

3.



DO STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS UNDERGO A VETTING PROCESS?

Anyone interacting with children in an official capacity—whether paid or unpaid—should have completed a thorough screening process. Depending on the organization and type of service offered, employees may have to hold a specific degree, earn certain certifications, or complete a training course. All prospective staff and volunteers should undergo a criminal background and reference check. Ask about these requirements and compare them across different organizations. You should also reference any county or state regulations that may apply (information can generally be found on government websites).

6.



DO THE FACILITIES PROMOTE A SAFE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT?

Are the facilities well-kept and clean? Are proper visibility and security measures in place throughout the building? Some things to look for include: windows on all doors, safety cameras or mirrors in hard-to-see areas, and check-in procedures at entrances. Ask how the organization ensures only approved staff have contact with children and all children are accounted for at all times.

4.



DO STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS RECEIVE TRAINING IN ABUSE PREVENTION, DETECTION, AND RESPONSE?

All adults responsible for minors should be able to recognize the indicators of abuse in children. They should also be trained to detect predatory behavior. Ask about ongoing training and awareness-building for staff. What training is involved for understanding how to identify and respond to signs of abuse? How often is this information tested or reviewed?

5.



HOW DOES MANAGEMENT PUT CHILD SAFETY POLICIES INTO PRACTICE

Ask how caregivers are monitored or evaluated. Is there a system for ensuring that staff and children understand interaction policies? What are the protocols for identifying and responding to policy and rule violations? Ask about turnover rates for caregivers (a high rate of turnover is a warning sign). You should also ask the organization how many people each caregiver is responsible for supervising.