

BANANAS CHOOSING CHILD CARE HANDOUT

A Closer Look at Large Family Child Care Homes Licensed for 12 or 14 Children

In some ways, small family child care providers (those licensed to care for six or eight children) and large family child care providers (those licensed for 12 or 14 children) are very similar. Both are licensed by the State Dept. of Social Services and have to meet essentially the same health and safety standards. Both types of family child care providers work in their own homes, as opposed to a child care center. Our Handout, "*Choosing Family Child Care*," should help you choose a small or large family child care program. But there are some important differences between the two programs which you should consider when looking at a home licensed for 12 or 14 children. This Handout is designed to highlight those differences.

The most crucial difference between small and large family child care homes is that, in most instances, the large family child care provider is required to hire a full-time assistant once she enrolls more than six children. This means a provider is not only running her own business, but she is also an employer with all the joys and woes associated with being a "boss." Many providers make this transition with ease. For others, the change is more difficult. Here are some questions to ask when interviewing providers who operate large family child care homes:

How Many Children Are In Care?

Large family child care providers are licensed for 12 children and, under certain circumstances, they can care for up to 14 children. Therefore, a parent should ask a potential provider: "*How many children do you care for at any one time – 12 or 14?*" Providers who care for 12 children and decide to care for **two more** children must meet the following conditions:

- one of the 14 children must be at least six years old and another must be in Kindergarten or older;
- only **three** of the 14 children can be infants under the age of two years;
- the provider must notify **all parents** – including parents whose children are about to join the program – that she will be caring for the two additional children. This notice must be in writing and signed by each parent acknowledging receipt of the notice;
- if the provider rents or leases her home, she must obtain the written consent of the property owner or landlord.

How Long Has The Provider Been Licensed As A Large Family Child Care Home?

Providers who have large family child care licenses must have first been either a licensed provider caring for six or eight children for a full year or had comparable child care experience in a center or related setting. Find out from a prospective provider what she did before she got licensed to run a large family child care home. Was she a family child care provider for six or eight children? Was she the director or a teacher in a child care center? Does she have any experience as an employer? (Because most providers licensed for 12 or 14 have the same responsibilities as any other employer, experience as an employer counts.) How long the provider has held her large family child care license may also affect how smoothly the program runs.

How Do Provider And Assistant/s Work Together?

A large family child care provider can care for eight children without an assistant only if two of the children are schoolage (one has to be at least six years old and another must be in Kindergarten or older) and no more than two of the children are infants. In all other cases, an assistant is required if more than six children are in care. While you may like the licensed provider, you should also meet the assistant/s and see how everyone works together. Your child may well spend as much or more time with the assistant as s/he does with the provider. Find out if the two work with all the children in one large group, or if they divide the children into two smaller groups (or some combination of the two). If two groups are used for many activities, then find out which group your child would be in and which caregiver has primary responsibility for that group.

Other Considerations: Does the assistant have child care experience? How long has he or she worked for the provider? Who substitutes for the provider or assistant if either one is ill or on vacation? It is crucial to verify by site visits and by talking to other parents whose children are in the program that the assistant is really there when s/he is required to be. Aside from the exception mentioned above, an assistant is absolutely required by the licensing regulations. If you learn that the provider or her assistant are frequently alone with all the children, you can assume



that the regulations are not being followed. A ratio of nine or ten children to one adult (much less 14!) cannot result in quality care for your child.

How Big Is The Provider's Home?

The building code determines, and the fire marshal monitors, the size of a home licensed as a large family child care home. In addition, every home licensed for 12 or 14 children needs to pass a fire inspection. However, you should also use your own judgment. Even the largest home is too small if only a few rooms are actually used for child care. Is the home set up so children engaged in quiet activities have space away from children involved in noisier ones? (Many times this is as much a factor of layout or space usage as it is of the number of rooms used for care.) Where do the children play outside? Is the yard large enough for all the children or do children go outside in shifts? (Shifts might be preferable to an overcrowded yard.) Is the yard fenced? (It doesn't have to be, but if it isn't, an adult must supervise the children at all times – two adults if more than eight children are outside at one time.)

How Does The Provider Plan For So Many Children?

How a provider uses the available space is as important as the size of the space itself. How are the everyday activities accomplished with 12 or 14 children in a home setting? Where and how do all the children eat lunches or snacks? Where do the children nap? Does each child have his/her own cot or mat? Is there enough space to accommodate children who need privacy to go to sleep? Does the provider have an isolation room where a sick child can wait to be picked up? A dozen or more children is a handful and, even in a very large house, wise use of space is an important consideration.

What Techniques Does The Provider Use To Assure One-To-One Contact?

How does the provider see to it that a child who needs individual attention at a particular time will actually get that attention? Some children thrive on being with many other children, but for others, it's too much of a crowd. Everyone needs time alone sometime, or to be comforted. You will need to determine whether your child would fit in based on what the provider tells you about the program and what you see when you visit.

What About Safety, Hygiene And Emergencies?

Any child care setting should be safety-proofed, but larger settings require extra precautions. In addition to safety-proofing, vigilance is crucial when dealing with large numbers of children. When caring for 12 or 14 children, it's easier to overlook that one of the children has gone "exploring." Hygiene also requires extra work with more children. If some of the children in care are still in diapers, does the provider have adequate covered trash baskets, diaper pails, changing tables near a source of running water, etc.? Ask the provider how she handles fire and earthquake safety drills. (Detailed plans for both

are required for the provider to get licensed.) Does she have a first aid kit? Ask the provider if her first aid and CPR certificates are current (every licensed provider is required to have completed 15 hours of first aid, CPR and health training). Has her assistant also had CPR or first aid training?

What Is The Age Range Of The Children In Care?

If all the children are near the same age, the provider will probably run a different program than if the children's age range varies widely. Do all the children usually engage in the same or similar activities at the same time or is there a wide variety of activities going on at any one time? Dealing with 12 children of about the same age may sound like too much to handle, but, in fact, some very successful child care programs are set up to serve a specific age group – all schoolage children, for example. The key to a successful program is the provider's attitude and approach. There is no one "right" way to do child care. You must decide if the age range of the children and the approach to the care would be best for your child.

Summing Up

Large family child care programs can benefit both the provider and the children in care. Having a full-time assistant helps avoid "child care burnout" due to isolation – a factor which sometimes causes providers licensed for six or eight to leave child care for other work. Two adults planning activities, sharing in the caring, and supporting each other can result in an outstanding and stimulating atmosphere – one that is very positive for the children in care. You need to look at large child care homes with that in mind and decide if the numbers and the program will work for you and your child.

Important Regulations:

- A large family child care provider can care for eight children without an assistant **only** if at least one of the older children in care is six years and another is in Kindergarten or older **and** no more than two children are infants.
- A large family child care provider who cares for 12 children can care for no more than **four** children under the age of two.
- A large family child care provider who cares for 14 children can care for no more than **three** children under two provided one of the older children in care is at least six and another is in Kindergarten or older.
- No corporal punishment is allowed in any child care setting (home or center-based).
- Parents have the right to ask licensed providers for information on complaints and licensing visits. Parents can also contact Community Care Licensing at (510) 622-2614 for a complaint history of a licensed provider.

BANANAS has many other Handouts to help parents choose quality child care. Handouts are available at our office, by mail or from our website, www.bananasinc.org.