

## Town Square Tip Sheet: Things to Include in Your Contract

- ★ **Paid days off...** Such as holidays, professional development days, vacation days... Ideally, included in your contract would be a calendar that includes the schedule for the year with designated days that the program will be closed, and including days that are reserved for professional development activities and provider vacation days.
- ★ **Program closure...** Clearly written statement on the protocol of your program closure, for sickness where no substitute is available, inclement weather, government order, any other unexpected closure.
- ★ **Clear hours of operations...** Many providers struggle with ending the workday, given that your workplace is in the home. It can feel like you are working all day and can't take a break. It is important to create time boundaries. Indicate hours your business is open. Within that time, set time restrictions for how long a child/family can be in your care. For example, if you open for 10 hours a day, 8am- 6pm, restricting families to 9 hours a day can help protect your time. The same applies to hours of communication. While families can message/call you during opening hours, you can also set limits on after-hours message replies. Communicating clear boundaries about responding to messages can help end the workday.
- ★ **An airtight illness policy...** Ideally, this would be a statement that if children are sick they cannot attend the program, with "sick" being defined as "no incidence of vomiting, fever, or diarrhea in the last 24 hours". The policy should adhere to any local or state guidelines, which might include 3-5 examples and how the illness policy applies. For example: "My child was vomiting all evening but woke up perfectly normal and is ready to be there this morning" or "I gave them some Tylenol this morning, so they are fever-free and feeling much better" with indications that under the illness policy for the program the child cannot attend. Include an explanation that the policy is for the health and safety of **ALL** of the children in the program and the adults who care for them, so just as you would like to protect your child and family from illness, so do other parents.
- ★ **How dirty diapers and soiled clothing will be handled...** For example, if a child has a soiled diaper either at drop off or after a parent arrives to pick up, the parent would change their child's diaper. If a child has soiled clothing because of an accident or messy play during the day, the clothes will be put into a plastic bag for the parent to launder or dispose of at home as they decide. These policies allow the adults in the program to focus more time and energy interacting with and caring for the children during program hours.

- ★ **Late pick up policy...** Ideally, if a parent is late, a fee will be charged. Some policies state \$1 per minute past the program end time up to 10 minutes, and then at 10 minutes past it is a \$20 late fee with additional \$10 for every 5 minutes beyond that. Your policy needs to be something that you are comfortable with enforcing, but if it is very clearly stated and followed through upon, late pick-ups will occur less frequently. This is a policy that is about respecting the provider's personal time and family time.
- ★ **Release of children...** Include clear procedures around communication required for alternative pick up person(s). This policy should indicate how to notify you of a change of pick-up person and that you cannot release a child to any individual who is unable to care for the child or without car/booster seat if driving the child.
- ★ **Willingness to adapt...** Often it is necessary to be open to adapting to change, be it a pandemic or something happening for a particular family. You might change the policy for a period of time and then go back, or perhaps find the change is better aligned with your goals. Including a statement in your contract that indicates that policies are subject to change as necessary can help families be prepared for this possibility.
- ★ **Payment schedule...** Include clear policies around when payment is due and how it will be collected. This will help keep clear expectations of your business and you can schedule payments to best fit your program. Perhaps you only accept checks, or only cash and it works best if families pay you Friday during pickup.
- ★ **Family involvement...** Communicate expectations for family participation. Do you have an open-door policy, or set times when families can stop by? Do you plan on conducting family visits or conferences? Are there planned events for families to come together, will families volunteer, can they help in planning? Think about other opportunities to engage families such as field trips or fun events.
- ★ **Use your state licensing standards to back you up...** When you have a policy that is important in your contract, add the state licensing standard next to it in parentheses... "I feel like it makes me look more professional, it gives backbone to what I'm trying to say, and it's easier to enforce" says family child care professional Diann Gano from Rock Island, Illinois.