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PARENTING

Tips on Choosing a Pediatrician for Your Child

NewsUSA

(NU) - Finding the right pediatrician is not always an easy task.

Many managed-care plans limit your choices. Furthermore, many families will live in several different towns before their children are grown up, making it necessary to choose a new pediatrician more than once.

But once you locate a pediatrician that makes both you and your children feel at ease, you'll know the effort was worth it.

Start by asking friends for names, checking with local hospitals or going to the American Academy of Pediatrics Web site, www.aap.org. If you are moving, ask your current pediatrician for a referral. Look for the letters "FAAP" after the pediatrician's name. This indicates that the pediatrician has passed the American Board of Pediatrics Exam and is now a Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The next step is to conduct interviews with several pediatricians. Most pediatricians do not consider it an imposition on their time and do not charge for the visit.

"Interviewing potential pediatricians is absolutely essential to making sure you choose the right one for you and your children," says Dr. Carol Berkowitz, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "Interviewing allows parents to get a sense of a pediatrician's accessibility, personality and philosophy of practice."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents ask the following questions.

- Is the pediatrician accepting new patients? Is he or she covered by your insurance or managed-care plan?
- What are the office hours?



The pediatrician you choose should be the right fit for your family's needs.

- Is emergency coverage available 24 hours a day, seven days a week?
 - Is the pediatrician available by phone or e-mail? If so, when?
 - Does the practice have an after-hours answering service? Is that service linked to a university or children's hospital?
 - Where are patients referred after hours?
 - Is there access to pediatric specialists, if needed?
 - What hospital does the pediatrician prefer to use?
 - How does the office handle billing and insurance claims? Is payment due at the time of the visit?
 - If your child has special medical needs, ask about the practice's overall orientation and philosophy about caring for special-needs children. Can it provide the support you need to coordinate medical care for your child?
- A family's relationship with its pediatrician can be a lasting and rewarding one. That's why it's worth taking the extra time to find a pediatrician that is a good fit for you and your children.