

Choosing a Pediatrician

Once you have a few recommendations from friends, family, acquaintances, and your Obstetrician, you'll need to list your own priorities. It may help you to divide your wants and needs into the categories of tangible aspects and philosophy. The tangible aspects are those practical things that will make visits and interactions with the doctor and office more enjoyable. Philosophy is more intangible. There are many aspects about the health and rearing of children which have no right or wrong way of doing things. Therefore, it is important that you feel your philosophy and way of doing things is compatible with your pediatrician's.

TANGIBLE ASPECTS

- ▶ Is the doctor's office conveniently located? Hopefully, your child will not get too many illnesses, but when he does, sometimes a doctor's office close-by can be one of the most important aspects of the practice.
- ▶ How early does the office open, how late does it close, and do they have weekend/holiday hours? Evening hours may be absolutely necessary for you especially if you are a single parent.
- ▶ How are phone questions handled? Some doctors answer their calls immediately, some have a "call hour" in which they answer all their calls. Some have their nurses answer the calls in consultation with the doctor. There are probably as many ways phone calls are handled as there are doctors, so be sure you are comfortable with it.
- ▶ How long do you have to wait in the office? This can be one of the most frustrating aspects of going to the doctor. And the waiting time may vary widely depending upon whether it is the cold and flu season, therefore, keep this in mind when you are asking. Ask this directly from the doctor or nurse. I would also ask that of the parents who go to that office.
- ▶ Does the waiting room look nice and have enough toys to make the wait less painful?
- ▶ How are bills handled? Some offices require some payment with each visit. Others will bill you. Much of the cost is dependent upon the type of insurance you have, but you should inquire about how this is handled.
- ▶ Is the doctor board certified in pediatrics? To become board certified, a doctor must have completed 4 years of medical school, three years of pediatric specialty training, and passed the boards exam given by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The exam is taken every seven years for recertification.
- ▶ Where does the doctor have hospital privileges? It would be optimal for the physician to have privileges where you will be delivering so she or he can see your infant from the very beginning. In addition, should your child need to be hospitalized, you would want to be comfortable with the hospital where your doctor attends.

TANGIBLE ASPECTS (CONTINUED)

- ▶ If laboratory tests are needed, can they be done right in the office or will you have to go elsewhere to have them done?
- ▶ How are urgent/emergency matters handled? Some doctor's offices can handle most urgent matters in the office. Others will refer you to the emergency room. If you are referred to the ER, will your doctor meet you there or have the ER staff take care of it?
- ▶ When your child is ill, do you call to make an appointment or just come to the office and be seen first-come-first-serve? There are pros and cons to both systems. Appointment making ensures your child will be seen shortly after you arrive, however, that appointment time may be later than you might like. Those who have first-come-first-serve ill visits usually do this in the morning, so your child will probably be seen earlier in the day, however, in the winter months when many are sick, you may arrive in the office at 8:00 a.m. only to be seen at 10:30.
- ▶ Who covers for the physician when she or he is sick or on vacation? In small practices and practices which have several offices, the covering physician may be someone in a totally separate office who has never seen your child before, whereas, moderate sized offices share call between the physicians within that office.

PHILOSOPHY

- ▶ **Breastfeeding:** If you are very eager to breastfeed or have strong feelings about how long you want to breastfeed, you will want a physician who knows a lot about the subject and is supportive.
- ▶ **Circumcision:** It is your choice, so you want a doctor who will support your decision.
- ▶ **Special circumstances:** Being a vegetarian, specific religious beliefs, etc. will require both knowledge and understanding from the pediatrician.
- ▶ **Immunizations:** Most pediatricians are very aware of the need for immunizations, but asking about their immunization rates would not be improper.
- ▶ **Antibiotics:** When your child gets a cold which does not require antibiotics, you do not want a physician who is all too ready to give them to you for no good reason.