I am the parent of two children. I work half-time. I choose family day care for my children while I work. I expect a lot from my family day care provider and I receive even more. My life and the lives of my children are richer for our experiences with family day care homes over the past six years.

I look for a provider who knows she is important, who knows she is a business woman; then we can have a clear contract about money and hours and all of the nitty-gritty that, if not settled clearly, can be friction points between us.

Goodness knows I don't want her to feel imposed upon, overworked or underpaid because she might then seek other work and I would lose my valuable day care service. I, too, don't want to be second-guessing whether I have offended her or wonder if she is upset about something. I expect her to peak up when my check doesn't clear the bank or I am late and she has company coming.

Because my child care partner knows she counts and does set a clear contract, I am comfortable in calling and saying I would like to work an extra two hours, is she willing to care for the children? And I know that if she has other plans she will tell me and our relationship won't be damaged.

But beyond a clear business relationship, I want another good parent for my children. My children need many good parents – beyond their mom and dad. Their blood relatives live a thousand miles away so we build our own extended family through day care and friends. The family day care home allows my children to see how another family lives.

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The family day care mom shows my children how an adult acts – how she handles anger or frustration, how she expressed love and concern, how she resolves conflict. Some days when I don’t feel I’m setting the best example for the children, I have the good feeling that I’m not the only adult model for them – that’s a relief!

Because my mom and aunts and sister are so far away, I need an experienced mother to check out my own parenting skills with. My family day care providers have served this function well. When my two year old doesn’t eat and complains her mouth hurts, when my first grader is tired and moody after school – I check this out with my family day care provider.

She knows how kids that age act; she tells me about two year molars and assures me that first grade is hard work and frustrating for many children. With this information about what is normal, I can be more help to the kids. And sometimes I just need to hear that I’m an OK mom and even good moms have two years olds who express lots of anger!

Because my day care mom cares deeply about my children, I have peace of mind so that I can use my work time productively. When I return at the end of my work-day, I don’t feel guilty because I know they have had a good day, too. And because we have had fun apart from each other, we are now going to have good times together.

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