

## **Choosing A Doctor**

*The University of Pittsburgh  
Office of Child Development*

Three months before Lorraine's due date, she had a bassinet, tub, mobile, and toys ready and waiting. The baby's room was painted, furnished, and decorated. And she had crammed for the parenting experience by reading a half-dozen books on the topic.

Only one essential was left undone – choosing her baby's doctor.

It wasn't that Lorraine had forgotten. But unlike painting, decorating, and shopping, selecting a doctor was unfamiliar, confusing territory.

She is not alone. Many parents find choosing a doctor confusing, even daunting. It need not be.

First, decide what kind of doctor you want. Do you want a pediatrician who is specially trained in infant, child, and adolescent medicine and development? Or do you prefer a family or general practitioner, perhaps one that all family members use?

Gather recommendations. Ask other doctors, such as your obstetrician, and ask about specific training and certification. Consult other parents who share your values and ask why they recommend the doctor, because what is important to them may not be as important to you.

What to look for in a doctor depends largely on your preferences.

Having a doctor whose office is nearby is important to many new parents. It is convenient and you'll be able to get to the quickly in times of crisis. It is also helpful if a doctor can be reached 24 hours a day and has a phone hour on weekdays to answer your questions.

Approach to treatment varies, so choose a doctor whose style you are comfortable with. Do you prefer a doctor who is quick to order diagnostic laboratory work, to treat an illness, and to put a child in the hospital? Or do you prefer a more cautious, wait-and-see attitude?

It is also important that your doctor discusses your concerns with you. Some talk, some listen, some ask questions, some give alternatives, some recommend treatment. Choose a doctor who matches your preferences.

You expect doctors to be concerned with your child's physical development and preventing and treating illness. But you will probably also want a doctor who is concerned with your child's mental development, behavioral problems, and other issues.

Schedule a preliminary visit or interview to determine the doctor's manner and to see if you are comfortable with the doctor's style.

Regardless of your preferences, be a serious shopper. You probably wouldn't buy a car without checking it out first. Be just as thorough when choosing your child's doctor.

*This column is written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and Professor of Psychology, and is provided as a public service by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.*