



SELECTING CHILD CARE

When you're new to a community, locating a person or program to provide child care for you is not the easiest of tasks. Due to expanding demand, just finding an opening can be difficult. Pinpointing a place that is not too far or too expensive and, most importantly, a provider whom you trust, may take days or weeks of persistent phoning and visits.

When considering child care, there are three main types of care arrangements: a center-based child care program, a home-based child care program, and care in the child's own home. Each of the different arrangements has unique advantages and disadvantages.

Family Child Care Family child care offers a blending of ages. Children particularly infants and toddlers who have little experience relating to other people, are well served by a family child care home. There are only a few other children and adults with whom to relate. Family child care is designed to be a less structured program where children have the flexibility to play, rest and even eat on different schedules. School-aged children often can stay in their own neighborhoods and still participate in after-school activities. Each child has the opportunity to relate to a few other children of different ages—some younger and some older. A family child care home is required to be licensed if the person provides care for more than three children, including her own children under age 12.

Child Care Centers In a child-care center, children are grouped by age with activities planned especially for that age level. Each classroom has diverse equipment, materials and activities which support a planned curriculum. Group size and child-to-adult ratios are regulated by the licensing standards issued by the Department of Children and Family Services. A variety of staff is employed to supervise the children during the day. Child care centers may serve children from six weeks to 12 years of age and include part-day pre-school programs, such as Montessori and Head Start.

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In-Home Care In-home care is care for children in their own homes by someone the parent has employed—perhaps a nanny, housekeeper, live-in student or baby-sitter. Your child is cared for in familiar and comfortable surroundings: home with familiar toys and playthings. Also, time is saved by not having to take your child anywhere. In-home care is often perceived as the most convenient for working parents but is generally the least available and most expensive form of child care. When you have full-time, in-home care, you pay at least minimum wage and all necessary state and federal withholding and taxes. Salaries start at around \$250 per week. Always check the references and work histories of candidates for any child care position.

In addition to the forms of child care, you want to take into account the following factors:

- Age and personality of your child.
- Child care needs of all the children in your family.
- Location of your workplace, home and child care families.
- Hours you need child care.
- What you can afford.

When you begin your search, start with the telephone. Plan to spend a few minutes with each call. Describe your needs and ask about the program, staff, location, other children in care, and what is included in the cost. Make appointment and visit the center, school or home, and plan on spending at least an hour at each place. Visit once to observe the children in care and at another time outside of regular provider or director.

In the final analysis, locating a child care provider with whom you are confident is well worth the searching. Why? Your child benefits greatly from such an arrangement, meeting and interacting with other children and adults. The child learns and grows from experience, often times a major step in establishing independence and becoming his or her "own person." And you feel more at ease knowing your child is safe and happy.

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