

HOW TO SELECT DAY CARE FOR CHILDREN



Deciding whether to send children to day care or to have one parent stay home with the children is an individual matter. What is best for one family may not be the best for another family. However, parents are depending more and more on full-time day care for their children. Choosing the care that's right for both parents and their children is not an easy task. Many things must be considered before a particular type of day care is chosen. Parents must consider cost, location, services provided and the specific needs of their children before a particular type of day care is chosen.

There have been many studies looking at how day care affects

young children. In recent years, some professionals thought that children placed in day care didn't develop as well physically, emotionally, or intellectually as children who remained at home with one parent.

There is no conclusive evidence that day care, in and of itself, has a negative effect on children's social, personality, or intellectual growth. In fact, recent studies have found that good, high-quality day care can have some positive effects on children and their working mothers.

***Working mothers vs. stay at home mothers.** There is no difference between the school achievement, IQ test scores, and social, emotional, and language development of children with working mothers and children whose mothers do not work outside of the home.

***Stay-at-home mothers report having just as many problems with their children as working mothers.**

***Quality time.** A recent research study suggests that many working parents often spend just as much time directly interacting with their children as parents in families in which only one parent works.

***High-quality, well-organized day care can promote the well-being of both children and their working mothers.**

The controversy continues. However, most professionals now believe that high-quality day care in and of itself does not negatively affect children's intellectual, social, or emotional development. Rather, factors such as the family environment and the quality of day care have a much greater effect on children's well-being.

Types Of Day Care

There are many different types of day care. The cost and services provided differ from one to another. Here is an overview of some of the most frequently used types of full-time day care.

In-Home Care

This type of child care is considered to be one of the best types of care for children under three years old. A caregiver is hired to take care of children in the children's homes. Some caregivers work during the day only, and some live in. Some do light housekeeping and some don't. Situations vary, depending on the

needs of the parents and their children.

Advantages of In-Home Care

*Children remain in familiar surroundings.

*Parents personally choose their children's caregiver.

*Children are not exposed to the illnesses of other children.

*If sick, children can be cared for at home.

*Care is often available on evenings and weekends. Hours are flexible.

*Many caregivers will do light housework in addition to child care duties.

*No transportation is necessary.

*Children have the complete attention of the caregiver.

*There is an opportunity for children to develop close relationships with their caregiver.

Disadvantages of In-Home Care

*It is one of the most expensive types of child care.

*If the caregiver is unable to come to work or quits suddenly, there is no backup caregiver.

*It may be very upsetting to children if their caregiver quits suddenly.

*There is a loss of privacy if the caregiver lives in.

*It is sometimes difficult to find a competent caregiver. It may also be difficult to judge if children are receiving adequate care.

*As children get older, they may not receive the interaction with other children that they need for adequate social development.

Family Day Care

This type of day care is the most widely used type of day care. Family day care is best described as care given by a parent (usually a mother) who stays home with her own children and takes care of other children to supplement her income. This type of care is usually provided in the caregiver's home. Often the provider is a relative, friend, or neighbor.

Advantages of Family Day Care

*It's affordable. It's one of the least expensive types of day care.

*Sick children are usually cared for.

*There is a lower adult/child ratio. Therefore, children receive more attention than with other types of day care. This may also allow parents to have a closer relationship with the caregiver.

*Children are exposed to other children of different ages.

*There is less exposure to illness.

*Children are cared for in a warm, home-like environment.

*The hours are usually flexible.

Disadvantages of Family Day Care

*Often this type of care is unlicensed. This means it is not supervised by a government agency. If the center is unlicensed, parents may not be able to claim daycare costs on income tax.

*It may be difficult to determine the quality of care children are receiving.

*Transportation is required.

*It can be unstable. If the provider becomes ill or takes time off, there is no immediate backup provider. Also, the provider may discontinue the arrangement without notice. This could leave parents without a day care arrangement for their children.

*The provider usually has little training in child care and/or child development. His or her child rearing philosophy may differ from the parents of the children being cared for.

Group Day Care

This type of day care is usually organized to care for large numbers of children. Children are grouped according to age and cared for together. This type of day care usually provides specially planned programs. It is usually staffed by people trained to work with young children. There are many different types of group day care:

***Private Day Care.** These centers are privately owned and operated. Since they operate as a business, they have to provide the services that parents want. If they don't, they probably won't stay in business. They often provide interesting,

stimulating activities, and they hire staff trained to care for children.

***Workplace Day Care.** These centers are provided by employers. They are usually at least partially funded by the employer. The cost for parents is usually lower than other types of group day care. This arrangement allows parents to visit their children during the day. Parents are also able to commute with their children. However, space is often limited. Parents usually have to wait for space to become available.

***Cooperative Day Care.** This type of day care usually involves a group of parents who hire staff to care for their children. Parents determine what services are to be provided, and who to hire. This type of child care allows parents to be involved in the administration of their children's care.

***Non-Profit Day Care.** This type of day care is available for many low income families. These centers are usually funded by governmental agencies and private donations. Many non-profit child care organizations also offer programs for adults and parents.

***Chain Centers.** This type of day care is rapidly growing in this country. Chain centers usually offer standardized programs and curriculum for children. They are often criticized for being profit-oriented and more concerned with growth and expansion than providing quality care.

Advantages of Group Day Care

*It's dependable. The hours of operation are regular. There are usually evening and weekend hours, too.

*Staff is usually trained in child care and/or child development.

*Many different toys and activities are usually provided.

*Children spend time with children of the same age.

*Programs are usually well organized and structured.

*Group day care must be licensed and, therefore, must meet certain government requirements. Licensed day care providers are monitored by government agencies.

Disadvantages of Group Day Care

*Care is less individualized.

*Staff turnover may be high.

*There is a higher staff/child ratio.

*The hours are less flexible than other types of child care.

*The cost can be fairly high.

*Children are exposed to more illness and are at greater risk for development of infections.

*Sick children are usually not allowed to attend.

*Transportation is required.

Things to Consider When Looking for Day Care

***Cost.** Parents should shop around to determine the range of costs for the type of care they're looking for. Prices vary from provider to provider. Parents shouldn't always assume that more expensive care is better. Cost is not the way to determine quality of services.

***The Children.** Parents should consider what type of day care their children will prefer. Do they work well in large groups, or do they need individualized attention? Are they in

need of social interaction? If there is more than one child in the family, will they both be able to attend the same day care?

***Location.** If parents are considering care outside of the home, they should take its location into account. Is it close to home or to the office? How long will the commute take?

***The Caregiver(s).** What are the individual characteristics of the caregivers being considered? Are they warm and affectionate? Do they like children? How do they get along with children? Do they seem overworked or frustrated?

***The Parents.** Parents must consider what type of child care will work the best for them. It is important that the arrangements parents make are satisfactory to both themselves and their children. Parents should never settle for child care they're not happy with.

What Children Should Receive From Day Care

***Good Physical Care.** Children's physical and custodial needs should be met through day care. The day care center or home should be clean and safe. Steps taken to ensure the

safety of children should be obvious. For example, there should be safety plugs in all electrical outlets, and all cabinets and drawers should have child-proof latches. Children should receive adequate meals and should be allowed adequate time to rest.

***One to one contact with adult(s).** Even if there are other children in the day care situation, all children should receive frequent individual attention (and affection!) from their caregiver(s).

***An interesting and stimulating environment.** There should be activities geared to different children's levels of development. There should be plenty of things to do. There should also be plenty of room, indoors and out, for children to play.

***A Predictable Environment.** Children need to know what to expect from a daycare situation. Regular schedules and consistency are very important.

How to Start the Search

***Allow enough time.** Finding the right daycare can take time. Parents should allow at least two months for the search.

***Network.** Parents should talk to as many people and organizations as they can. Some examples are pediatricians, friends, relatives, churches, nursery schools, baby sitting services, hospitals, newspapers, nanny organizations, employers, etc. It is also a good idea for parents to contact the agency that regulates daycare in their state.

***Visit.** Parents should visit as many day cares as they possibly can. They should drop in unannounced and check out the facilities for size, teacher to child ratio, atmosphere, parent involvement, types of activities, age separation, rest time, and sanitation. Parents should try to get a general feel for the facility. They should ask questions, and shouldn't leave until they get the answers they need.

***Interview.** Parents should talk to the personnel at the day care facilities they're considering. Are they friendly? How do they get along with children? What's their general mood and attitude? If parents are considering in-home care, they should conduct formal interviews with each applicant they're considering.

***DON'T SETTLE.** If parents are unhappy with the day care they're considering, they shouldn't settle for it. Rather, they should keep looking until they find the arrangement that's right for them. Children are precious, and, of course, parents want to find them the best care possible.



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