



University of Michigan Health System

Your Child

Child Care

What do parents need to know about childcare?

During the past two decades, there has been a big increase in the number of families with two parents working outside the home. Currently, about 80% of kids entering school have had regular care in either child care centers, preschool, their own homes, relative's homes, or family day care homes. The quality of care in these crucial early years varies, and parents need to make informed choices regarding child care.

The American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement on childcare states that quality care should have:

- Adult caregivers who have experience or training in child development.
- A warm, nurturing, attentive, developmentally appropriate and intellectually stimulating home environment.
- Small child to adult ratio, with consistent long-term adult caregivers.
- Good parent/staff communication.



What are the different kinds of care to consider?

Choosing the right type of care is a personal choice. When deciding, you will need to consider your hours, finances, values, need for flexibility versus routine, and most importantly, your child! In order to find care that fits your child, choose childcare that is in line with your child's personality.

- **Center-Based Daycare:** Centers can vary widely, and you may need to make several visits before finding a center you are comfortable with. Centers should be licensed by the state. They can also apply for accreditation, which is optional. Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is an indicator of an excellent program. The criteria that must be met to earn accreditation are the kinds of things that research shows are important for quality care.
 - What is NAEYC accreditation? –information is available in English and Spanish.

- Find a NAEYC accredited program near you.
- Family Home Daycare: Home daycare must also be state licensed (but state requirements may be less stringent than for centers), and can earn accreditation through the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). There will likely be a single care provider and a small group of children, which fosters good emotional development, and the feeling of a family environment. The quality of care can vary widely though, and the caregiver may have no background in child development.
 - Questions to ask about infant/toddler family day care
 - Questions to ask about preschool family day care
- Nanny: A nanny is a caregiver employed by the family to provide in-home childcare, on either a live-in or live-out basis. Among nannies, there is a diversity of childcare experience, educational background, and willingness to do non-child related work. Some nannies may be accredited by a nanny school and have taken college level courses in child development. Deciding on the right person can be difficult and time-consuming. Here is what you need to know if you are considering a nanny.
 - Questions to ask about in-home infant/toddler care
 - Questions to ask about in-home preschool care
- Au Pair: An *au pair* is a childcare provider, often a young person from outside the United States, who provides childcare for a family in return for room and board, exposure to family life and a new culture, and sometimes a small salary. The *au pair* is to be treated as a member of the family during the stay, which is often limited to one year.
- Relative or friend: Some parents feel that family members or friends are the best caregivers for their child. They are personally involved with the child, and are likely to be reliable and loving caregivers. They may also be more flexible when parents work odd hours. Costs may be lower, or there may be no cost. However, good communication with the family member or friend is key, and everyone involved must be clear about their expectations. Read this brochure called *All in the Family* (also available in Spanish) to find out more about the in's and out's of using family caregivers. Some states have programs to help families with relatives (or "kith and kin") providing childcare. Check out these frequently asked questions about kith and kin child care. Find out more from: *Family, Friend, and Neighbor Child Care: Resources and Organizations*.

What about childcare for school-age kids (ages 6-12)?

Here are some resources:

- Selecting a Quality After-school Program for Your Child (also in Spanish)
- A Parent's Guide to Childcare for School-age Children
- Five Steps to Choosing Summer Childcare (also in Spanish)
- Questions to ask about school-age before and after school center-based child care
- Questions to ask about school-age before and after school family child care
- Questions to ask about school-age before and after school in-home child care
- The Afterschool Alliance is dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of after-school programs and advocating for quality, affordable programs for all children

When is my child old enough not to need care anymore?

There is no set age at which all kids are ready to stay home alone. You know your child best. Consider factors like:

- Can your child make good decisions?
- Do they know how to handle an emergency?



- Will they make good use of their time?
- How mature are they?
- Does your child know and follow house rules?
- Are they familiar with safety guidelines, such as what to do in case of fire?
- Are they comfortable using the phone and cell phone?



Moving your child to this level of independence is a process. Start by reading this: [Is your child ready to stay home alone?](#) If you think your child is ready, you can make sure they know all the important safety and house rules. You can use *YourChild's* babysitter resources as a starting point. Talk to your child about their feelings about being home alone. Start small, with short periods away, and gradually increase the time you are away if everyone is comfortable with it.

For more information on Children Home Alone and Babysitter Age Guidelines, this page from the National Child Care Information Center is useful. It lists some local community guidelines as examples of appropriate ages for being home alone. Basically, if your child is age seven or younger, they should never be left alone. Kids ages 8-10 can be alone briefly, and ages 10-13 for longer periods, provided there is back-up supervision. Babysitters should be at least 12-13 years old, and can babysit for longer periods as they grow older. Again, this is a very individual decision, and these ages are only general guidelines. *You* need to decide if *your* child is mature enough.

What do I need to know about having an older sibling sit for my younger kids?

If you plan to have your older child babysit for your younger children, it would be a good idea for them to take the American Red Cross babysitter class and become familiar with sitter safety information.

- Please note: Giving your older child too much responsibility for their siblings can lead to problems with rivalry and sibling abuse.

How do I decide between all the different types of care?

Here's a chart to help you weigh some of the advantages and disadvantages:

Type of care:	Pros:	Cons:
Center-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centers are licensed • Care is usually structured and predictable • Staff will be stable in a well-run center • Usually open year-round 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be less oriented to individual child if group is large • Usually expensive • May have high staff turnover
Family day care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually reasonable in cost • Family day care is licensed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of care and skills of caregiver vary greatly • May have to find substitute care when caregiver is ill or on

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent caregiver and small groups allow close relationships to form 	vacation
In-home (nanny or au pair)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually very flexible • Child may get more individual attention than in group care • Usually caregiver will care for sick child, so parent does not have to miss work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually most expensive type of care • Parents need to take on responsibilities of an employer, supervise daily activities, keep records, and pay taxes
Relative or friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually most affordable • Often flexible hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be conflicts over how to care for the child
School-aged care (at or near an elementary school site before and after school and during vacation time)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides safety, adult supervision, and peer companionship • Children supervised after school may be less at risk for social problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost is higher than leaving child alone, to care for self • Some older kids may not like being in an organized program

How do I go about finding childcare, and making sure it's a quality program?

Here are some tools to help in the search for quality care:

- Childcare Aware is committed to helping parents find the best information on locating quality childcare in their community. You can find your local *Child Care Resource and Referral Agency* (CCRRA) on their website, or call 1-800-424-2246. They offer a checklist of 38 research-based indicators of high-quality care.
- Michigan's CCRRA is the Michigan 4C Association (Community Coordinated Child Care). You can contact them directly through their website or by calling 1-866-4-CHILDCARE. 4C can connect you toll-free to your regional office. 4C regional offices provide referrals for child care and family services, using a computerized childcare database. The data includes information on the type of care, type of program, the hours of operation, the location, the ages of children served and the cost. The 4C childcare referral counselors provide information to parents on how to select a childcare program and information on childcare funds, scholarships and emergency loans funded by city and local governments. 4C offices also provide information on financial assistance, health care agencies, counseling services, and educational and recreational services for children.
- The University of Michigan Work/Life Resource Center (WLRC) can assist with:
 - Child care-including care for babies, school-aged kids and kids with special needs
 - Emergency, back-up child care
 - Creating flexible work schedules, and much more!
- Find a NAEYC accredited program near you
- Selecting a Child Care Site
- Childcare Checklist for Parents

- Childcare safety checklist

Where can I get information about childcare for babies?

If you are planning to work after your baby is born, you should shop around for childcare while you are pregnant. Choose several quality programs (see below) and get on their waiting lists, even if you have arranged for Grandma or a friend to care for the baby. Waits can be as long as a year and a half for daycare for babies!

- Accreditation is the key to quality when babies and toddlers are in care.
- How Does Infant and Toddler Care Measure Up?—from the NAEYC.
- The Hunt for Infant-Toddler Child Care—includes issues such as attachment and bonding, what is “high quality care,” what does a good place look like, and developing your own checklist.
- Infant Day Care: The Critical Issues is a digest from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC).
- Questions to ask about infant/toddler center-based child care.
- Questions to ask about infant/toddler family child care.
- Questions to ask about infant/toddler in-home child care.

What if I want to breastfeed my baby and work?

Breastfeeding while working is a challenging balancing act, but well worth it for you and your baby. The level of support for breastfeeding varies greatly from one workplace to the next and it can be a difficult issue to discuss with your employer.

- Pumping at work and using expressed milk can be made easier with some simple guidelines.
- Make sure you and your childcare provider are familiar with safe handling and heating of breast milk.
- La Leche League has answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about breastfeeding your baby and working, including the FAQ’s How can I make my return to work easier? and How often will I have to pump?
- Check out La Leche League’s Working and Breastfeeding main page, which has lots of articles and resources.
- Working It Out: Breastfeeding at Work—encouraging nursing is good business. Here’s how to convince your boss.
- *Your Child* has more information on breastfeeding at Feeding Your Baby and Toddler (Birth to Age Two).

What is preschool?

Another option for childcare is preschool. These are usually half-day programs. For some things to consider when looking for a quality preschool program, read *The Preschool Classroom—Room to Improve*. Check out these ten signs of a great preschool.

- Questions to ask about preschool center-based child care.
- Questions to ask about preschool family child care.
- Check out this preschool resource list for books for you and your child.



What is Head Start?

Some families may qualify for Head Start Programs, which are enrichment programs for low-income children in the pre-kindergarten age groups. Find out more about giving your child a Head Start (also in Spanish: *Dele A Su Hijo La Ventaja Educativa Inicial De Head Start*).



How can you get your child into Head Start? Get the answer, and find a Head Start program near you. The Children's Defense Fund offers more Head Start resources.

What should I do to get my child ready to start in a new childcare setting?

You definitely need to begin to prepare your child before their first day. Make sure they have time to visit the center and play a little, so it's familiar. It can really help to read children's books about daycare together. Make sure your child gets to meet the new care provider before the first day. When that first day finally arrives, here are some tips to help it go smoothly. Your child may have some trouble adjusting, but there are many things you can do to help.

What about toilet training while my child is going to day care?

Parents often wonder about how toilet training at home translates to the childcare center. In order to help children learn to toilet most effectively, the care provider and parent should act as a team. You should share with your caregiver what you are doing at home and how your child is responding. Keep the program as consistent as possible between home and day care. Your care provider may also have a great deal of experience and be a helpful resource for you as your child learns to use the potty.

What about finding childcare for kids with special needs?

Choosing quality childcare for a child with special needs—this pamphlet, also available in Spanish, will help answer your questions. Read more in this article about the benefits of inclusive programs. If your child needs medication while in day care or preschool, here is a medication information form that is helpful.

What if my kids are already in daycare, and I just want to know more, or I'm having problems with child care?

- You have rights and responsibilities when your child is in childcare.
- Do you know what to expect from your childcare provider?
- Do you know what to do if you have a problem with your child's care?
- What happens when your kid gets sick?
- While most caregivers do a good job and act appropriately, you should be familiar with the signs of child abuse.
- Find out what to do in case of several different child care dilemmas.

What are the drawbacks to having my child in day care?

Although it's unpopular to say it, there is mounting evidence that child care has disadvantages for children over being with a parent. Leading experts are beginning to draw attention to this fact. Even most good daycare programs do not do a good enough job of fostering kids' emotional development. There's just not enough time for caregivers to give kids individual attention. Also,

children usually have many different caregivers, and don't get to form strong attachments. Kids tend to enter school with good academic skills, but poor social skills. According to child psychiatrist Stanley Greenspan, kids are increasingly aggressive, antisocial, depressed, and lacking in empathy and the ability to handle conflict.

The Irreducible Needs of Children, a book by Stanley Greenspan and pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton encourages parents to limit the time spent in childcare in a child's early, crucial developmental years. The authors suggest alternatives to full-time work and call for a national policy more supportive to parents. Stanley Greenspan has written another book called *The Four-thirds Solution: Solving the Childcare Crisis in America Today*. He puts forth the idea that in two-parent families, if each parent could cut back from full-time work to two-thirds-time, the family's need for childcare would go down to only one-third of the time.

You may want to take this quiz to help you evaluate how much you are actually gaining financially from your second income. In many cases, it's less than you might think, once you factor in all the expenses of working.

What are some alternatives to traditional workdays that would reduce our family's need for childcare?

While many parents want or need to work outside the home full-time, there are alternatives to the traditional career path. How your family chooses to balance work and kids is an important decision, and will require much thought and discussion. How can you reduce the amount of time you spend at work and/or the amount of child care your children need? Here are some options to consider:

- **Flex-time.** Some jobs lend themselves to working odd hours, and some employers are open to letting you flex your hours. Two parent families may be able to arrange their work hours so that their kids spend less time in childcare.
- **Job sharing.** Job sharing is defined as two people employed to share the duties and responsibilities of one full-time position on an hourly, daily or weekly basis. The pay and vacation is divided up proportionally. The position is held jointly if both the job share partners accept the job offer. Finding the right job share partner may require some persistence and creativity.
- **Part-time work.** Another option is scaling back your hours and working part time.
- **Working at home.** This may involve starting your own home-based business (such as consulting or event planning), contract or freelance work, or telecommuting (the preferred term is now *telework*). Check out these basics for employees, to see if your job may lend itself to coming home with you. Then you just need to convince your boss that it will work. Although working at home allows you more time at home, there are many factors to consider before making this decision. *(Please, beware of work-at-home scams.)*
- **Full-time parenting.** If you choose for one parent to be a full-time parent and give up outside work altogether, it can be a difficult transition in many ways. If you know ahead of time that this will be your choice, it's a good idea to begin living on one salary, and saving the other. That way, you will not have such a financial shock when suddenly your income is reduced. The at-home parent should find support,



since going from full-time work to full-time parenting can be a difficult adjustment.

- Mothers and More is a group for moms who have altered their career paths to care for children at home.
- at home dad is an online resource and network for Stay At Home Dads (SAHDs). They have links to SAHD's blogs, a message board, and networking for playgroups.

Where can I get more information and support relating to childcare?

- *YourChild*: Balancing Work and Family Life
- *YourChild*: Babysitter Safety
- The University of Michigan Work/Life Resource Center (WLRC) helps University of Michigan families achieve a balance through connections with campus and community resources to help integrate personal and work life. The WLRC can assist with:
 - Child care
 - Emergency, back-up child care
 - Balancing work and personal responsibilities
 - Creating flexible work schedules
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Healthy Child Care America Project
- The AAP's Healthy Children: Work & Play, offers many article relating to child care
- Childcare seem expensive? Find out where your childcare dollars go.
- Childcare is Education...and More.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Study of Early Child Care.
- What the results of the above study mean for parents and childcare providers.
- The National Network for Child Care offers information, an e-mail listserve, support and assistance from experts, and a newsletter.
- Zero to Three offers several resources relating to child care.
- National Child Care Information Center is a national information resource.
- Many groups are working on changing social policy on childcare and parents' work. Here are a few:
 - Mothers and More: The Network for Sequencing Women is an international group that supports women who are "sequencing" (altering their career path in order to care for children at home). Mothers and More advocates for more choices for women in how they combine work and child rearing.
 - The National Partnership for Women and Families works to promote policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family.
 - Childcare and Early Childhood Education from the AFL-CIO.
 - The Early Childhood Development Division at the Children's Defense Fund, focuses on supporting and expanding Head Start, child care services, infant and toddler care, pre-kindergarten education, and after-school programs.
 - The Afterschool Alliance is dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of after-school programs and advocating for quality, affordable programs for all children.

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