

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Introduction to Child Care

One of the biggest decisions parents have to make after choosing to have a child involves deciding who will care for that child, especially during the early developmental years. Parents choose to resolve this difficult dilemma in many ways. Some families choose to use full-time childcare, while in other families one parent stays or works at home for all or part of the time. In other families, a parent chooses to leave the workforce completely in order to become the primary caregiver.

Finding appropriate and affordable child care is often a challenge. There are different options available in different places, and at many different price points (although all options are expensive). Each care option comes with its own advantages and disadvantages. It can be confusing for parents to sort though the different options, and to locate local caregiving resources that fit their individual needs while remaining appropriate and affordable.

This document has been designed as a guide to help parents and other interested parties sort through the various issues involved in selecting and locating child care options. It begins by describing the different factors that each family must consider in selecting care. Next, the various types of care available are described. A discussion of the factors that states typically consider in licensing care facilities follows, as does a list of conditions that families should consider while evaluating care facilities. The document ends with further discussion of the issues that can arise during the family's transition into childcare.

Factors in the Childcare Decision

As parents think about their motivations for providing care to their child, they must consider many factors. These include financial considerations, career issues, emotional considerations for both the parents and the child, and the development and socialization of the child. For example, the type of developmental and social opportunities that parents desire for their child must be considered. Some parents want their child to be part of a larger group and gain experiences from interacting with other children. Others desire a smaller setting where their child will receive more one-on-one attention and skill building. Parents must also consider what they desire for themselves. Some parents desire to continue their careers while others feel that the ability to be a full-time or part-time caregiver for their child must take priority over their career during their child’s early years. There is no one solution that fits all situations. Instead, each family must find a caregiving solution that fits their unique needs, desires and resources. The many variables that affect the childcare decision are described in some detail in the following discussion.

Financial Considerations

If the family chooses to use some form of day care, they will most likely be required to make a weekly payment to the provider. Rates vary depending on a number of factors, including the area of the country, whether the setting is metropolitan or rural, the type of care chosen, and the number of care hours needed.

Some families choose to use nannies or au pairs for child care duties, locating suitable persons for such positions through agencys, or in some parts of the country, by hiring an undocumented worker. Other families choose to have a friend, relative, or neighbor provide care. Rates in these types of settings will vary not only depending on the area of the country, but also on the individual agreement made with the caregiver in terms of salary, benefits, or housing. There is more flexibility in agreeing on a rate in such informal settings, but generally a live-in nanny will earn $250-400 per week if he/she is new to the field

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and anywhere from $350-1,000 per week if he/she is experienced. In addition, benefits can include paid health insurance, use of a family car, two weeks paid vacation per year, and all major holidays off and paid. A live-in nanny will also receive room and board.

A family's decision to have a parent stay at home or not determines in part how the child will be socialized. In a day care setting, the child is exposed daily to many other children and learns the important skills of sharing and playing together. Also, children in day care are likely to be exposed to and learn about people from different cultures, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. Children who remain at home with a parent end up having less interaction with others. In some cases, such relative isolation can push the child towards shyness or to have difficulty interacting with other children when the time comes to enter school. It is important for stay-at-home caregivers to seek out opportunities for children to be exposed to other children, whether through play groups, children in the neighborhood or extended family, or through short day care situations such as at a gym/health center so that some socialization occurs.