



Feeling Good About Child Care



Two-thirds of the children under 18 have working parents. These families face a special challenge. Putting children in the care of others can cause needless worry and feelings of guilt. You can reassure yourself by following simple guidelines to choose the right care.

Choose Your Option

Your first step is to identify what is needed. You can make a list of personal standards. These may be influenced by your feelings about your own childhood and about being a working parent. Your list for your child's needs may include things that are common for that age group, but you'll want to include any special, individual needs as well. Furthermore, it's a good idea to include future needs. You may want to establish backup care for the times when your child is sick or there's a change in your routine.

When your list is complete, you can choose from five types of services:

1. **BABYSITTERS.** They come into your home, maintaining a familiar environment for the child. The cost is usually expensive.
2. **SHARED CARE.** This saves money by using one caregiver for two or three families. You designate where the location will be.
3. **FAMILY DAY CARE.** They provide for a small group of children to be cared for

Guidelines for Choosing What's Best

daily in a private home. Play and social activity are featured.

4. **CHILD CARE CENTERS.** These centers, which are usually licensed by the state, provide a staff to care for larger groups of children.
5. **AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS.** These may be set up by your school district or other community facility. Older children benefit from a variety of supervised activities.

The federal government provides a tax credit for child care. Check your city, county and state governments. Check on allowances your employer may provide.

Make a Plan

There are many resources for your search. Friends, child care ads, your employer, referral services, government agencies and schools are among them. You can save time by using the telephone for your first interview. Discuss openings, service hours, location, rates,

the size of the staff and the number of children supervised. Note how you feel about the facility after the phone call.

When you visit, you'll want to see how much individual attention is given to each child, as well as evaluating safety precautions, food quality, how much space is given to activity and rest areas and general cleanliness. You should ask about the caregiver's ideas on discipline and educational activities.

Work Together

By sharing your goals and concerns, you can help make sure that your child gets the kind of attention you want. For example, the staff may be able to offer support when something is upsetting at home. Perhaps they can help with a shyness problem.

You may want to assign responsibilities in writing. You can indicate who is authorized to pick up your child, how you want emergencies handled, when payment is expected and how much notice will be given for changes or cancellation of service.

Reduce Stress

Use your intuition and then monitor your child's reactions. With a little homework, you can select just the right service. You'll feel confident about your choice and better about your work.