Child Care
PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP

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CHILD CARE: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP

This packet contains the following factsheets:

Is Child Care an Option for Our Family?

Selecting a Child Care Provider

Building the Parent-Provider Partnership

Child Care: Parent-Provider Partnership
Is Employment for Me?: A Look at the Economic Factors

Use worksheets 1 and 2 to think through the decisions you need to make concerning the costs of employment to both the earner and the family. You will calculate your take-home pay (A), followed by the work-related expenses (B) for the earner. Finally, you will calculate the family expenses (C) and total all expenses (D). Worksheet 3 will help you calculate the available dollars from your employment.

Worksheet 1 Monthly Costs of Employment Incurred to the Earner

Factors	***Job or Position***		
	Job 1	Part-time	In-home
Income			
Salary or wage			
Commissions			
Other (tips, etc.)			
Job-related expenses			
Fringe benefit costs			
Social Security			
Pension payments			
Other:			
Fringe benefit cost for the job or position you pay, if offered			
Life insurance			
Health insurance			
Dental insurance			
Disability insurance			
Profit-sharing plan			
Other:			
Total take-home pay **A**			
Work-related expenses			
Dues/fees/license*			
Special uniforms or work clothes			
Tools/supplies/equipment			
In-service conferences/business meetings			
Coffee breaks/gifts/social activities			
Other:			
Transportation expenses (estimate costs for job-related portion of use only)			
Vehicle			
Insurance			
Gas/oil/maintenance			
Parking			
License/tax/fees			
Other:			
Personal expenses			
Personal care (hair, etc.)			
Clothing (quantity *and* quality costs)			
Other:			
Total work-related expenses **B**			

*Some of these may be deducted from your gross pay—be sure not to count items twice.

Worksheet 2 Monthly Costs of Employment to Family* Due to Employment

Family Factors	*Job or Position* Job 1	Part-time	In-home
Child care during employment			
Additional babysitting costs			
Hired help for house or yard			
Home repairs or maintenance			
Dry cleaning or laundry			
Meals out (including job)			
Meals at home (some at increased cost)			
Other:			
Total family expenses C			

*These costs will vary depending on your answers to issues considered in the question section of the factsheet.

Worksheet 3 Available Dollars from Employment Per Month

		Job or Position Job 1	Part-time	In-home
Income*	A			
Total work-related expenses	B			
Total family expenses	C			
Total Expenses **(B + C)**	D			
Available income to use for family needs **(A - D)**				

* You can request a free statement of earnings credited to your Social Security record by sending your name, address, and Social Security number to: Social Security Administration, P.O. Box 57, Baltimore, MD 21203.

Worksheets prepared by Shirley L. Barber, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Ramsey County, and Jean W. Bauer, Extension Family Resource Management Specialist.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP

Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Is Employment for Me?: A Look at the Economic Factors

Shirley L. Barber, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Ramsey County
Jean W. Bauer, Extension Family Resource Management Specialist

When planning for child care, parents need to make both individual and family-based decisions about who will be employed and who will care for the children. The costs *versus* the benefits of employment for you as an individual and for your family need to be weighed. These costs and benefits will not be entirely monetary. Many non-economic factors will need to be considered as well.

The costs and benefits will differ for you depending on whether you choose to be employed outside the home, within the home, or not be employed at all. Many families choose to have a second earner because of the fringe benefits. However, the earner's income and/or hours must be sufficient enough to be eligible for certain employment benefits.

Choices made by both one- and two-parent families involve some of the same issues, but the choices will vary according to the age of the children and the family situation. The worksheets 1-3 that accompany this factsheet can help you with the decision process.

Key Factors Influencing Two-Parent Families

A two-parent family with a young child usually has two decisions that need to be made simultaneously: Who will work in the labor market and who will take care of its young children? Also, how much of the second income is used for expenses related to the job?

Other Factors to Consider

Economists say the primary caretaker who decides to stay home to take care of the children does not provide these services free to the family. *There is an economic contribution made by family members when they care for other members and themselves.* The time spent in preparing meals, doing housework and laundry, cleaning, purchasing food, removing snow, mowing the lawn, doing management tasks (i.e., bill paying, recordkeeping, deciding what items to buy, where to save or invest the family's money, etc.), and caring for

Income and Your Family's Views of Its Use

These are some questions to consider:

- ❑ Is income viewed as your own or the family's?
- ❑ Is your family's main income dependable and secure?
- ❑ Has your family discussed the pros and cons of a second earner?
- ❑ How is or would a second income be used? Should it be saved, used for essentials or extras?
- ❑ Are expenses viewed as your own or the family's responsibility?
- ❑ Are there large debts or bills to pay such as college loans, medical bills, or parent care?
- ❑ Who makes decisions about how the individual income is spent and how it relates to the total income for the family?
- ❑ What benefits are tied to employment income for each earner?
- ❑ What benefits should be considered long-term such as retirement or pension and Social Security? What does a reduction or an increase in hours worked do to the benefits you receive, both short- and long-term?
- ❑ Is loss of job advancement a factor in your long-term career plans?
- ❑ Would a delayed re-entry require new training or additional education for the job you would like to have?
- ❑ Are there alternatives of job-sharing, part-time, or earning income at home such as providing child care?
- ❑ If you plan to have less income, what expenses are you planning to reduce or delay? Do you have a plan for your family? Have you considered the increased costs as your children age?
- ❑ Can your time at home be used to develop new skills or interests? What will this do to the family income?

family members (bathing and physical care of children, directly watching over children, reading to them, listening to them read, supervising play, attending softball games, etc.) all have value to the family.

Key Factors Influencing One-Parent Families

A single parent has similar decisions to make. In addition, there may be strong forces for the single parent who is also the primary caretaker to work outside the home. These forces may also include welfare reform requirements. However, the wage a single parent earns needs to be high enough to cover child care costs with enough left over to pay other bills. If the wage isn't high enough, it may not be economically worth the parent being employed outside the home. Government child care subsidies may be available to help cover child care costs. This can make the critical difference between entering and staying in the paid labor force.

Opportunity Costs

Making decisions about decreasing, increasing, or changing employment involves trade-offs with each option or alternative. Ask yourself the question—what is the opportunity that I won't have because I choose another option? Working part-time may offer the flexibility you need. Non-economic factors include your social and psychological needs, and participation level in community activities. Other factors involve the group experience your child may develop if they are in a child care situation.

Research about mothers indicates that the higher the mother's earning capacity in the paid labor force is, the less likely she will be willing to stay home to raise the children.

Costs and Benefits of Employment Income: Economic and Non-economic Factors

Employment has related costs and benefits. There are many factors such as work-related expenses, transportation expenses, child care expenses, and personal expenses that reduce an earner's take-home pay. Even when the actual dollar amount after these expenses is known, the question to be or not to be employed is still not answered. In addition to benefits such as contributions to health and disability insurance, retirement and other fringes, many non-economic factors also need to be weighed. These can be difficult for the family to assess because they include social and emotional (and not actual dollar) values. Examples include: time with children; personal growth through community, church, or school involvement; and personal demands on parents' time for trying to work and care for the family. The employment benefits that are not in dollar amounts include keeping skills current, personal growth opportunities for the parent and child, and opportunities for decision-making that the child has when parent(s) are employed. It may be the non-economic factors that a family places a higher value on when they decide not to be employed.

Use worksheets 1 and 2 to think through the decisions you need to make concerning the costs of employment to both the earner and the family. The items that are included are typical ones for most people. You should choose the ones that best fit your situation and add any that aren't included. In some cases you will have exact dollar amounts. In others you will need to estimate. In all cases, be as precise as you can. This will result in a better decision for you and your family.

Consider All the Factors and Trade-offs

In making decisions to be employed full or part-time, away or in the home, you need to calculate the available dollars from the employment. Worksheet 3 will help you determine your available dollars from employment.

Evaluate the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of each option or opportunity in relation to the *opportunity costs* in both economic and non-economic terms. Consider short- and long-term costs and benefits. The options must include the income available to meet family needs.

Your answer to the question "Is employment for me?" will come from these worksheets and the subsequent discussions you will have with family members. Your personal situation will influence the decisions you make.

Answering the employment question will be difficult for many families to answer. Start your thinking today.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Planning for Child Care Costs

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Cost and quality are two major factors you need to consider when you begin your search for child care. No matter if you're looking for family child care, a child care center, or at-home nanny care, you need to plan for enough money in the family budget.

What Can You Expect to Pay?

A child in child care for one year may cost $3,500 or more. Not only will the type of care you select affect the cost, but also the location you are looking in.

According to the Commission on the Economic Status of Women, costs typically average $66 per week for infants, $63 per week for toddlers, and $61 for preschoolers in family child care. Infant care may cost $10 to $20 a week more than care for toddlers and preschool children. Part-time care might be $2.50 to $3.50 per hour. You may be paying more or less.

Day care in a family home generally has a wider range in costs than care at centers.

Center care costs average $100 for infants, $83 for toddlers, and $71 for preschoolers.

At-home child care usually costs more than family or center care. In addition, parents must act as employers and follow the laws regarding minimum wage, worker's compensation, withholding taxes, unemployment insurance, and FICA. This applies if they pay their employee $50 or more in one or more calendar quarters: January–March, April–June, July–September, or October–December.

Services that match families with in-home providers often require a finder's fee.

Questions To Ask Child Care Providers

The following are some of the questions you should ask:

- What are your basic costs and payment requirements (including amount of fee, due dates, overtime fees, paid and unpaid holidays and vacations)?
- What happens when I go on vacation?
- Will there be extra costs for diapers, food, and summer fees?
- How is food handled? Will you provide snacks and meals within your basic cost? Do I have a choice?
- Are there additional costs for a child with special needs, such as an allergy or handicap?
- What provisions are there for sick care of either my child or the provider?
- Do you have any discounts? If care is needed for more than one child, do you have a discount for the second child?
- What requirements do you have on my child's clothing? Some providers require certain types of clothing, such as elastic bands on pants.

It is a good idea to set up a written record of both your weekly household budget and child care costs. You can use the forms found at the end of this publication or make your own.

Child Care Tax Credits

The Child Care Tax Credit (1990) allows parents to receive federal and state tax credit for child care expenses.

These rules apply to the federal child care credit and exclusion for dependent assistance. Your dependents under age 13 qualify. You must report the name, address, and taxpayer identification number (often the social security number) of the child care provider.

The dollar limit on expenses eligible for the child and dependent care credit is $2,400 for one qualifying individual or $4,800 for two or more qualifying individuals. If you receive a reimbursement under your employer's dependent care assistance program, your dollar limit is reduced dollar for dollar by any reimbursement excluded from your income.

Therefore, if you have one qualifying individual and receive $1,400 under your employer's dependent care assistance program, your child care credit maximum dollar limit is $1,000.

Earned Income Credit

The Earned Income Credit is a federal income tax credit designed to assist low-income working families, who have at least one child living with them.

The 1990 earned income and adjusted gross income must each be less than $20,264.

Call the IRS at 1-800-424-3676 to request Publication 503 (Child and Dependent Care Expenses), Publication 926 (Employment Taxes for Household Employers), and Form W-5 (Earned Income Credit).

For Minnesota Child Care Tax Credit, refer to Schedule M-1CD available by calling (612) 297-1764.

Financial Aid

The State of Minnesota Child Care Fund, also known as the Sliding Fee Program, is designed to help low- and middle-income parents pay a portion of their child care costs. It is for those employed or in job training or school and in some cases is also available for special needs or family crises. For information, call your county's social services department. The level of funding for this program varies from county to county. You must apply and in some cases the number of persons applying is greater than the funds available. In this case you will be placed on a waiting list.

Form 1 Weekly Child Care Costs

Weekly Costs	*Child 1*	*Child 2*
What is the fee to the child care provider?	$	$
Extra Day Care Costs		
Overtime fees	$	$
Food		
Diapers		
Other:		
Extra Family Costs Related to Child Care		
Transportation to and from care		
Food		
Child's clothes		
Diapers		
Other:		
Total costs	$ *	$ *

*Enter total amount on weekly budget in Form 2

Form 2 Weekly Budget

Income:	$
Expenses:	
Food	
Housing	
Utilities	
***Child Care Costs**	
Medical	
Education	
Transportation	
Clothing, personal	
Contributions	
Set-aside for irregular expenses	
Entertainment	
Savings	
Other:	

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Employed Parenthood: Do I Have A Choice?

Joan Sprain, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Washington County
Reviewed by Ron Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist

To work or not to work is one of the biggest questions you and your family needs to answer when you start to have children. If you explore all the options and make sure your decisions match both your own and your family's values and goals, you will probably be happier with your choice. There may also be less stress on the family and your children will most likely receive stronger parenting.

Parental Satisfaction

Many parents worry about the effects day care has on their children. Research has shown that there is little difference in development, well-being, and the happiness of a child if the following conditions are present:

—the mother and/or father is satisfied with the situation;
—the mother receives both emotional and home management support from her partner and children;
—there is a good relationship between parents and child when they are together; and
—the child receives good quality care when parents are away.

Making a Decision

It is important to re-evaluate all employment decisions no matter what they are from time to time. Emotions change with the birth of a child and continue to change as the child grows. A decision made before birth may not fit after the child is six weeks old.

Personal Values and Goals

Take time alone to think carefully about your ideal situation. Identify how you could create this situation or how you might not be able to. It is important to be true to yourself because your happiness will influence the happiness of your child and others around you.

Ask yourself why you wish to stay home or to work. What barriers are standing in the way of either decision? Examples of these could include one or more of the following:

—your financial situation,
—you or your partner's beliefs about parenting, or
—other people's expectations.

Identifying the above considerations will force you and your partner to think about your attitudes and values toward parenthood and home management. The following questions will be important to consider:

- Do you believe mothers should be the primary caretaker?
- How involved do you believe fathers should be?
- What are your standards regarding housekeeping tasks?
- Can you let go when you don't have time and let others become involved? And then can you accept their standards?
- Can you live with the stress of making daily decisions such as those needed to get ready every morning to leave the house and then those needed once you return at night?
- Can you handle the stress of isolation if you are considering being at home full-time?
- How do you feel about sharing parenting with a non-family member?
- Is your personal self-esteem strong enough so you can live with your decision and the societal influences around you?
- Is your partner also in agreement with your decision?
- Will you have support from family and friends when things get tough?
- If you are currently employed, how do you feel about your job?

- Is it the best possible match for your skills and talents at this time?
- Would you be happier with a different job or fewer hours?

Allow yourself time to daydream and picture the ideal situation. If you have a partner, ask him or her to do this on his or her own too. Each of you should be able to identify what you want and what is currently keeping you from achieving it. Doing this will help you take charge of your lives and work toward what you really want and need.

Shared Decision-making

The next step is to discuss the situation with those most involved. Make a commitment to work on the decision. Plan time away from your children and other responsibilities to focus on this communication. (If your children are old enough, you can involve them in the decision.) Discussing the decision may take a few sessions.

Each person involved needs an opportunity to share his or her needs with everyone else. After this sharing, you should allow some time before the next step. This extra time may produce more alternatives.

Try not to rule out any suggestions when thinking of alternatives. Sometimes the most outrageous idea can be made into a workable solution. Again, plan a time delay to think things over.

After you follow this process of thinking and communicating, of waiting and then talking things over again, it is then time to select a tentative solution. Select the solution that best meets everyone's needs and set a trial period to determine how the decision feels. You can always change the decision and try something else if it is not working.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Child Care: Is It Good or Bad for Children?

Rose Allen, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Ramsey County
Reviewed by Ron Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist

Today, preschool children often spend much of their time in the care of someone other than their mother or father. In fact, many children are in child care from 9 to 10 hours a day, 5 days a week before they are a year old. For many this continues until they enter kindergarten.

The question for many parents and researchers is whether child care will make today's children different in some way. Is child care good or bad for children?

Although child development experts do not agree on the answer to this question, they do know something about the effects of child care on the development of our children.

Is There a Best Age to Put Your Child in Child Care?

Research on children entering child care tells us that the older the child, the easier it is for them to adjust to out-of-home care. Children between 2-1/2 and 3 years can benefit from being around the other children in a child care setting. Learning how to get along with others is an important task for children at this age.

Researchers and parents are most concerned about infants and young toddlers. If the infant has already entered the attachment stage (see box) when they are placed in a child care setting, they may be unhappy when they are left with a new caregiver. This can be stressful for both the infant, their parents, and the child care provider.

Remember that children are constantly going through new stages and leaving old ones behind. The person you choose to care for your child will play a big role in your child's growth and development. If you have made a good choice of providers and work with them as partners, chances are your child will adjust to the situation.

What Is Attachment?

Children need to develop a secure relationship with at least one adult in their first year of life. Infants between 6 and 9 months old will begin to develop a preference for one of their caregivers —usually their mother or father. As this happens, children often react to other people with cries and avoidance behavior. This stage is called *attachment* or *bonding*. Psychologists believe it is necessary for children to develop a secure, attached relationship with their primary caregiver in order to develop a sense of independence, trust in others, and the ability to form friendships and bonds throughout life.

Will Child Care Affect You and Your Child's Bonding?

Some research with infants indicates that there may be some problems, while other studies show little difference between children reared at home and those who spent the same early years in child care.

You should know that bonding problems are higher when a child is:

cared for in changing, unstable child care situations;
put in child care before their first birthday; or
put in child care full-time rather than part-time.

It is best to wait to place an infant in child care after their first birthday (at least on a full-time basis). If you cannot do this, try to find child care that is stable and consistent, preferably with only one person caring for your child. If that care is good, attachment will develop between your child

and their caregiver. You will also want to be sure that you have a warm and nurturing relationship with your child when you are providing care yourself. If these conditions exist, you probably don't need to worry that your child will have difficulty bonding.

Children have different temperaments and will either go through stages easily or with great difficulty. The bonding stage is, however, one of the most important stages and you should try to give the most love and security you possibly can whether or not your child is in child care during this time.

Child Care Centers versus Family Homes

It is important to know your child's personality, health, and social needs in order to choose the best possible child care setting.

A *family child care home* will offer an environment similar to your home. There will be fewer children and the children will be at different ages and stages. If your child is shy, gets sick a lot, or needs special attention, a licensed family child care home may be the best place. Many parents prefer to put infants into family child care. Family child care is a good option when parents want to have siblings cared for together. As you make your decision, talk with each provider about the specific needs of your child.

A *child care center* offers care for more children and generally groups them by age. Each group has one or more teachers who provide care. Child care centers offer a variety of programs and will benefit children who enjoy larger groups, need directed activities, and like lots of friends to play with.

As you search for care, keep in mind that the type of care is not as important as the quality of care. Matching the environment with your child's needs is the most important decision.

Will Your Child Get Sick More Often Because of Child Care?

The chances of your child getting more colds, flu, or diarrhea may be higher because of child care. One simple reason for this is the number of children they are around. Centers that care for larger numbers of children and are open over 15 hours a day are more likely to have increased cases of illness. Both centers and family child care homes need to follow good health habits. They should help you teach your child proper hygiene by encouraging hand-washing. Equipment should be regularly cleaned. Also, if centers or family child care homes follow their policies for handling sick children, less illness may be spread to the other children.

Will Your Child Love the Child Care Provider More Than You?

One of the qualities of a good child care provider is the ability to really love and care for your child. If this happens, your child will probably return the affection. A good provider-child attachment is good for your child and will not affect their love for you. If you have been doing a good job of parenting—providing the love, nurturance, physical care, and guidance your child needs when you are together—there is no doubt that you will continue to be the most important person in their life.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

What Do I Expect From My Child Care Provider?

Joan Sprain, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Washington County
Reviewed by Ron Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist

Choosing and using child care is one of the most important tasks of parenting. Many parents experience feelings of guilt and anxiety with this experience. Understanding yourself and your expectations of your provider can help you build a positive partnership and reduce anxiety.

Look At Yourself First

The decision to have someone care for your child can challenge the attitudes, values, and decisions that you've made as a parent.

For example, if you are unhappy with your job or your decision to work outside the home you may have a hard time feeling comfortable with your child care situation. You may resent your provider's time with your child and choose not to develop a relationship with him or her. You could expect too little or too much from your child care provider because you wish you could provide full-time care for your child. Feeling satisfied with your decision to work outside the home will help you feel better about your decision to use child care.

If you are married, look at your relationship. Have you talked about your expectations regarding quality care? Who will take major responsibility for working with the provider or will it be shared? What will happen when your child or provider is sick? All of these expectations between partners need to be discussed up front. Confusion about who does what and different feelings about using child care will affect the parent-provider relationship.

Also, consider what you need from your provider. What are your beliefs regarding child care and parenting? How do you feel about pacifiers, infant feeding, toilet training, discipline, and education? What are the values you want your child to learn? Do you want religion included in your child's daily care? How will you communicate these to your provider?

How do you want him or her to communicate with you? When do you want to be called if there's a problem during the day? Determine how involved you can be in the child care experience. Do you want to be able to drop in? Do you want to get involved in center activities?

Respect your child care provider as a professional. No matter how friendly you may become, remember, this is a business. Never ask your provider to break licensing rules, tax laws, or provisions of your contract to meet your needs. Pay on time. Pick up your child on time. Common courtesy is important. Keep in mind that you have a responsibility to keep your end of the bargain.

What You Can Expect From The Provider

There is no perfect provider just like there is no perfect parent. No provider will care for your child exactly as you would. When you choose child care, look for qualities that are the most important to you. Recognize that differences can add to your child's experience.

Here are some considerations on what to expect from child care providers:

For Your Child

1. Does the provider understand how a child develops and grows and does he adapt care and education to your child's needs?
2. Does she allow the children to choose from a variety of activities?
3. Does he create multi-cultural and nonsexist experiences and materials for all ages?
4. Is there a balance of rest and active movement throughout the day?
5. Does the provider create outdoor experiences?
6. Does she respond quickly and directly to your child's needs, desires, and messages, and adapt her responses to differences in children?
7. Does he give opportunities for your child to communicate?

8. Does she help your child's successful completion of a task by providing support?
9. Is he alert for signs of your child's stress and try to help reduce it?
10. Does she provide opportunities for the development of self-esteem and self-control?
11. Is he responsible for all children under his supervision?
12. Does she provide a safe, nurturing, and positive environment that lets your child feel comfortable and cared for?

For You The Parent

1. Does the provider respect your right as a parent to share in decisions about your child's care and education?
2. Does he share his knowledge and insights about your child with you as part of regular communication?
3. Does she meet minimum requirements for licensing and re-licensing? She should comply with licensing or food program regulations.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Finding Child Care: Getting Started

Joan Sprain, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Washington County
Reviewed by Ron Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist

Finding the best child care for your family's needs is an important parenting task. You need to know what your goals are, as well as what options are available in order to make the best decision. This can take a lot of time and energy.

You want to be sure to investigate all the options. Even before you actually become a parent, you should begin to search out quality child care, especially since finding care for infants can be difficult.

Step One: What Are Your Family's Needs?

Your first step is to decide on your family's child care needs. Before contacting any caregiver, decide how many hours you need the care and the total amount you can pay for it. You should also decide on the location you need. Your child's age, personality, and any other special needs should be considered, along with your own child-rearing philosophy and goals.

Step Two: What Are Your Options?

Your second step is to identify the child care options that best meet your needs. These may include in-home care, family day care, center care, and short-term cooperatives and preschools. (For more information, see the fact sheet entitled *Child Care: What Are My Options?).* It's a good idea to visit a few different care sites with your children. This will give you a better idea of the choices available.

Step Three: Begin Your Search

Now you're ready to begin your search for child care. You can start looking first by telling family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and other acquaintances that you will need child care. Many parents prefer this more personal way. It can be helpful to hear other parents' experiences and recommendations. Finding part-time care (1–6 hours) for nonworking times when you just need some time away may be easier through tips from other people. You may also find legal unlicensed care (where the caregiver cares for children from only one other family) and in-home care through talking to other parents.

Other sources of child care information include want ads and community or work bulletin boards. The Yellow Pages provide information on child care centers, in-home child care agencies, and referral agencies.

You can also find licensed child care information through agencies that provide referrals. Many times these agencies are a part of county social services. Their purpose is to provide referrals on all types of licensed care. *However, they do not provide recommendations or guarantee quality.*

The care providers supply information to the referral agency themselves. There may or may not be a charge. Some employers will pay for this service.

Most referral agencies provide a list of current providers in the community requested. You may even be able to identify where care is needed, your preferences on smoking, pets, or other details, and the maximum cost you are willing to accept.

The box on the following page offers further sources for information on referral services. You can also contact your county's social services.

Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network 1990-91

For information on child care resources, call the Minnesota Department of Human Service's Child Care Link number (available after October 1, 1990), 1-800-475-LINK(5465), or the number below in your locality.

Anoka County Community Health and Social Services:
612-422-7146

Carlton County Human Service Center:
(Cloquet) 218-879-4583
(Other areas) 1-800-642-9082

Child Care Choices, Inc.:
(St. Cloud) 612-251-5081
(Other areas) 1-800-288-8549

Child Care Resource & Referral:
Kanabec, Pine, Mille Lacs Counties,
East Central Regional Development Commission
(Mora) 612-679-4065
(Other areas) 1-800-323-7126

North Mankato
(Mankato) 507-389-5087
(Other areas) 1-800-373-2782

Rochester
(Olmsted County) 507-287-2022
(Other areas) 1-800-462-1660

Scott and Carver Counties
612-496-2321

Wadena
(Wadena) 218-631-4413
(Other areas) 1-800-660-9108

Community Action Council, Dakota County - Child Care Resource & Referral:
612-431-7752

Family Resource Center, Chisago and Isanti Counties:
612-257-2400

Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association's Child Care Information Network:
612-341-2066
Child Care Resource Ctr/Southside
(So. Mpls.) 612-823-5261

Heartland Community Action Agency:
(Willmar) 612-235-0850
(Other areas) 1-800-992-1710

Itasca County Human Service:
218-327-2981

Lakes and Prairies CCRR:
(Moorhead) 218-233-7514
(Other areas) 1-800-452-3646

Leech Lake Child Care Resource & Referral:
(Cass Lake) 218-335-8271
(Other areas) 1-800-331-3465

Mahube Community Council, Inc.:
(Mahnomen) 218-935-5022
(Park Rapids) 218-732-7204

Parenting Resource Center, Inc.:
(Austin) 507-433-0692
(Other areas) 1-800-247-5039 x692

Prairie Five Community Action Council, Inc.:
(Montevideo) 612-269-8727
(Other areas) 1-800-292-KIDS (5437)

Resource for Child Caring - Child Care Referral Service for Ramsey County:
612-641-0332

Rice County Social Services:
(Faribault) 507-334-0031
(Northfield) 507-645-4723

SCOPE Resource Center, Inc - Child Care Resource & Referral Service for Steele County:
507-455-2560

St. Louis County Social Service Dept.:
(Duluth) 218-726-2273
(Duluth after 4:30 p.m., Sat. & Sun.) 218-727-8538
(Iron Range) 218-749-7188
(Iron Range after 4:30 p.m., Sat. & Sun.) 1-800-232-1300

Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council, Inc.:
(Worthington) 507-376-4195
(Other areas) 1-800-658-2444

Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.:
(Crookston) 218-281-6672
(Other areas) 1-800-543-7382

Washington County Community Social Services:
612-779-5023

Western Community Action, Inc.:
(Marshall) 507-537-1416
(Other areas after 10/1/90) 1-800-658-2448

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HOME ECONOMICS

This information is intended to help parents make the best decision about the selection of child care for their family. The Minnesota Extension Service does not recommend any particular providers or any specific type of care.

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Finding Child Care: Questions To Ask

Joan Sprain, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Washington County
Reviewed by Ron Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist

The first steps in finding child care are to determine your needs and a list of potential providers (see fact sheet entitled *Finding Child Care: Getting Started).* After that is done, you can begin to narrow down your choices by interviewing providers. Although most of the following information applies to family and center care, you could also use it for any child care situation.

Consider more than one child care provider. Even if you like the first one you visit, it's useful to compare your impressions with others. The more time you spend on this important decision, the more likely you will be happy with your choice.

Telephone Interviewing

Interviewing providers over the phone can be an efficient way to gather more information. When you call, introduce yourself, state how you got the provider's name, and your reason for calling. If it is a center, ask to speak with the director. Ask if this is a good time to call and if there is an opening.

Give the provider your name, as well as the name, age, and sex of your child and when care is needed. Tell them that you'd like 10–15 minutes of their time to answer a few questions.

The following list of questions can be used to check off as you interview the provider.

- ❑ Do you have an opening?
- ❑ What are your hours?
- ❑ Are you licensed? If so, how long have you been?
- ❑ How many children do you care for? What are their ages and sex?
- ❑ How many are full-time? How many are part-time?
- ❑ What is your vacation and illness policy?
- ❑ What are your fees? If it is a center, are there sliding fees?
- ❑ Are you a member of the food program (the federally funded Child Care Food Program—CCFP)?
- ❑ What training or experience do you have?
- ❑ Do you smoke?
- ❑ Do you have pets?

In addition, you can ask the following questions in either a telephone or face-to-face interview.

- ❑ Tell me about yourself. How did you decide to become a provider? What do you like most about being a provider? How long do you plan to be one? Does your family support your business?
- ❑ Can you describe what a typical day might be like for my child?
- ❑ How do you handle emergencies?
- ❑ Do you have infant and child cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training? Do you carry liability insurance?
- ❑ Are children ever transported in a vehicle while in your care? If so, do you have a valid driver's license and what is your driving record?
- ❑ Can parents "drop in" for a visit?
- ❑ Describe the feedback I will receive about my child at the end of the day.
- ❑ How many days did parents need to use alternative care this past year?
- ❑ What are some things you hope my child will learn here?
- ❑ What would you do if you and I disagreed about something?
- ❑ How much staff turnover has there been in the past year?
- ❑ What do you want to know about me (and/or my partner and child)?
- ❑ Can you provide me with a list of references?

Age-specific Information

There are also several questions related to the age of your child that you should ask. These include the following:

- ❑ Do you hold infants during feeding?
- ❑ How much time do infants spend in the crib, play pen, and/or walker?
- ❑ Describe how you would play with my infant.
- ❑ Describe how you deal with parent/child separation.

- What will I be expected to provide?
- What type of diapers would you prefer? Can I use cloth?
- Describe how you discipline.
- Describe how you would handle toilet training.
- Describe organized activities you would provide for the children.

Face-to-Face Interviewing

Even if you like the way a provider answered your questions over the phone, don't stop there. Ask when you (and your partner) could meet with the provider to gather more information and to allow them to interview you. This will also give you a chance to observe the provider(s) in action and inspect the site. Here are a few more questions to ask:

- Can you show me the equipment and toys you have?
- Where do children nap?
- What health precautions do you take? Show me how you have child-proofed your home.
- What are your house rules?
- Can I see your contract?

Pay Attention to Your Observations

Trust your instincts when you interview the provider. Any strong negative feelings are usually a good sign that this arrangement will not work for you and your child.

On the other hand, if you can make the following conclusions, chances are you've found quality care.

—The provider appears to love children and seems to be a warm and friendly person that you think you could develop a respectful, trusting relationship with.

—The provider also seems to show a balance between running a business and nurturing the children.

—The children you observed seemed happy. The provider understands what children can and like to do at different ages and provides opportunities to help them develop. Your child's self-esteem would benefit from the care.

—There appears to be a comfortable, safe, and healthy environment for the children.

Making Your Final Choice

Take time to think carefully about all the information you have gathered. You may have to compromise some of your expectations to fit the available choices. But don't give too much up. You can always re-think your options. Once you decide, contact the provider as soon as possible to reserve space. If the provider does not give you a written policy and contract, be sure to clarify your agreement in writing.

Make a follow-up appointment with the provider to review arrangements and to sign any necessary forms. You may want to schedule a two-week trial arrangement. If you take this extra time up front, you will be less likely to experience any unpleasant surprises later. And most importantly, your child may also be happier in the child care you have selected.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Selecting a Child Care Site

Diane Corrin, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Hennepin County
Reviewed by Harold Alexander, Extension Interior Design Specialist

To find a quality day care site you need to look for several things. Not only does it involve care in a friendly, loving, and warm environment, but the care should also promote your child's intellectual, physical, social, and emotional growth.

The physical environment of the care site is very important since your child may be spending up to 10 hours there every day. A clean, comfortable atmosphere is desirable. Surroundings should encourage learning and individuality as well as provide enough space for playtime and rest.

Just because your child is in day care doesn't mean he or she needs to be deprived of proper care and opportunities to learn and grow. You can find a child care site that promotes your child's learning and growth in many areas. To do this, the atmosphere, space, and facilities need to permit a number of activities (both indoors and outdoors) that are appropriate for your child at his or her age and developmental stage.

You should keep both your child's age and developmental stage in mind when visiting a site. This will help you evaluate the site's potential in meeting your child's needs as he or she develops.

A visit to a child care site is highly recommended whether the site is a family care home or a child care center. On your visit, you should observe and examine a number of factors including the activities and equipment offered, the physical space provided, and the level of safety and sanitation followed. The following information summarizes some of the important things to look for.

Indoor Spaces

It is suggested that 35 square feet per child be available. The space should be free of hazards (for example, matches, knives, plastic bags, etc.). Stairways need gates and railings and doors need locks and latches, especially where hazardous items are stored.

Look for spaces that are well lit, both naturally and artificially. Heating and ventilation systems should provide constant temperatures around 68° F. Electrical outlets and cords should be covered or shielded. Look for emergency exits in case of a fire, and for fire extinguishers and smoke detectors. Is an operable telephone and first aid kit easily accessible?

Outdoor Spaces

Fifty to 75 square feet per child is recommended to allow ample room for kids to learn and grow. Children need lots of room to run, jump, and move around freely. There should also be some shady spots as well as some sunny ones.

Sanitation. The site should be free of dirt, rubbish, peeling paint, insects, and vermin (both indoors and outdoors). Ask to see if the site has been tested or inspected for lead, asbestos, and radon. Is the area tobacco-free if this is your preference?

Ask about the water supply. Municipal water should be satisfactory. Private well water needs to be tested annually. Hot water should not be hotter than 120° F.

Is the kitchen and/or food preparation area clean? Is it a pleasant place to eat? Is there ample storage for food, utensils, and pots and pans? Is there space for a child who becomes sick and needs care until the parent can come?

Do pets live in the home? If so, are they in good health, housed properly, and innoculated? Is excrement inaccessible?

Age/Stage Needs

The following describes the basic needs of three of the basic age/developmental stages of children.

Newborns and infants. Needs are simple at this stage—crib or playpen, infant seat or high chair, waterproof mattress, rug, changing table, diaper pail, etc. Soft, cuddly, easily washed items that are safe and in good condition are also necessary.

Toddlers. Needs are similar to those of newborns and infants, but also include a safe place to crawl and room to take those first steps. Most toddlers play alone. Look for easy ways for them to move from one space to another.

Preschoolers. Needs include more space. Play spaces should also be varied and include room for activity as well as rest. Storage space is needed for personal items. A child-size toilet or potty chair and a way to wash their own hands are also necessary. Preschoolers work individually, in small groups, and begin to like larger groups too. Children need toys and materials designed to enhance their development. Some providers arrange their spaces into activities such as:

Creative/Aesthetic—includes space for an easel, table, waterbased opaque paint, large color crayons, clay, newsprint, paste, textile, and wood.

Intellectual—includes space for games, books, puzzles, paper, pencils, plants, pets, measuring cups and spoons.

Dramatic Expression—includes space for dress-up clothes, blocks, puppets, and puppet theater.

Large Muscle—includes space for large boxes, pillows, large wheel toys, balls, swing, and slide.

Motor Skills—includes space for game, interlocking forms, blocks, trikes, bikes, and wagons.

Sensory—includes space for toys and activities to stimulate the senses of smell, speech, hearing, and touch.

There are many legal requirements that licensed day care homes and centers must follow. Refer to the factsheet entitled *Licensed Child Care: What Does It Mean for My Child?* for more information on licensing, and to the factsheet entitled *Child Care Options* for a discussion on the choices available to you.

Selecting a quality day care center or home is never simple. If possible, it is a good idea to visit more than one child care site. When visiting a center, take your child with you if you can, and go when the center is open and full of busy children.

The following checklist can be used to evaluate each child care site.

Child Care Site Checklist

Setting

Is the building in good condition?	yes	no
Are the rooms large and uncluttered?	yes	no
Are spaces clean, fresh, bright, and cheery as well as functional?	yes	no
Is there child-sized furniture?	yes	no
Are outdoor and indoor spaces available?	yes	no
Is there room to jump, run, and move around freely?	yes	no
Are there quiet corners as well as other activity areas?	yes	no
Are there individual storage areas for each child?	yes	no
Are temperature and humidity levels comfortable?	yes	no
Are there pleasant and appropriate eating areas?	yes	no

Safety

Is there an alternative exit outside?	yes	no
Are areas free of sharp or jagged edges?	yes	no
Is furniture stable and secure?	yes	no
Are harmful substances securely stored?	yes	no
Is the bathroom easily accessible for handwashing and use of the toilet?	yes	no
Are spaces well lit?	yes	no
Is fresh air provided—free of odors, and tobacco?	yes	no
Is the environment free of asbestos, lead, and radon?	yes	no
Are there heat covers on the radiators?	yes	no
Are there covers on electrical outlets when they are not in use?	yes	no
Is there a smoke detector in each appropriate area?	yes	no
Are there soft surfaces around playground equipment?	yes	no
Are equipment and toys in good condition?	yes	no
Are outdoor play areas secure and/or fenced?	yes	no
Are first-aid supplies readily available?	yes	no
Is there an appropriate garbage disposal system?	yes	no
Is the food preparation area clean?	yes	no

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

The Child Care Food Program: Promoting Healthy Eating Habits

Peter Tallas, Assistant Professor and Extension Nutritionist
Linda Bradley, Youth EFNEP Coordinator

Your child's health depends a lot on what they eat. If meals are varied as well as nutritionally balanced, he or she will be more likely to enjoy good health now and in the future.

A nutritious diet will help your child develop physically and mentally to the best of his or her ability. And since early eating habits may determine adult eating habits later, it is important to establish good habits early on, at home as well as at day care. As research is indicating more and more, a nutritious diet may help your child avoid chronic diseases, such as heart disease and cancer, later on in life. Since food is so important, you need to consider your child's feeding at the day care you select.

To help you evaluate the food program in different child care situations, you should be able to answer the following questions.

Is your day care provider a participant in the Child Care Food Program (CCFP)?

This program, administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Minnesota Department of Education, is part of the National School Lunch Act. The purpose of CCFP is to improve and maintain the health of children by providing nutritious meals that offer a variety of foods. The age of the children served is generally 12 years and under.

How does the CCFP operate?

Under this program, licensed child care providers are reimbursed by the USDA for the money they spend on food for your child. CCFP was set up to guarantee that your child receives a wholesome and nutritious diet while in day care.

Who is in charge of the CCFP?

Although the USDA and the Minnesota Department of Education have overall responsibility for the CCFP, on a day-to-day basis the program is administered by separate sponsoring organizations. There are 12 sponsors operating in Minnesota. These non-profit organizations make sure that the day care provider meets all the government requirements for participation in the CCFP.

Is the CCFP available for all child care providers?

All licensed family and group family day care homes, outside-school-hours care centers, and child care centers may participate in the CCFP. However, only the *centers* may participate as independent institutions, without guidance of a sponsor.

What kind of foods are served by the day care provider under the CCFP?

The serving size and type of food for breakfast, snacks, and lunch/supper must meet CCFP guidelines for children of many different ages. These meal guidelines were designed to satisfy the individual needs of your infant or child, and are based on the latest scientific research. The CCFP has identified four food groups or categories that must be served to your child daily, although not necessarily all at the same meal or snack. Table 1 summarizes these four groups.

Table 1 Four Food Groups

Category name	*Examples of food*
Fluid milk	Whole milk, low-fat milk, skim milk, cultured buttermilk, or flavored milk made from these fluid milks.
Fruits and vegetables	All fruits and vegetables and their full-strength juices.
Bread and bread alternates	Baked goods, pasta products, cereal grains, and breakfast cereals. Must be whole-grain or enriched.
Meat and meat alternates	Lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, dried peas, and beans. Alternates also include peanuts, soynuts, tree nuts or seeds, and their respective butters.

Do some of the planned menus get too boring?

Many day care providers rotate their menus enough so that the same meals don't occur too close together. Sponsors also must approve these menus and they encourage providers to serve a wide variety of foods.

What if my child needs to be on a restrictive diet, due to an allergy or sickness?

The special needs of your child do not mean that you cannot use a CCFP-sponsored day care provider.

What size are the servings of food and how many can I expect to be offered to my child?

The serving sizes for the four food categories are determined by the USDA. Sizes depend on the meal served (breakfast, snack, or lunch/supper) as well as the age of the child. Table 2 provides a summary of the required meal pattern.

What must a day care provider do to be part of CCFP?

Besides maintaining a day care license, providers must attend two hours of training in nutrition and safe food handling. Also, they must keep daily records of all meals and snacks fed to the children, and regularly submit them to the sponsor. Sponsors verify that all meals are nutritious and follow USDA guidelines. They also provide the two-hour yearly training, make periodic inspections of the day care site, and offer advice on nutrition, the feeding environment, and food safety.

What kind of training does the CCFP sponsor give to the child care provider?

The day care provider is taught to provide nutritious meals with a lot of variation. If children are offered a wide variety of foods, they will learn to enjoy many different foods, and their nutritional health will improve as they enter adulthood.

Providers are also taught the importance of a healthy mealtime atmosphere. This can have a positive effect on your child's growing relationship with food and eating. Toward this end, family-style meal service is encouraged.

Do all sponsors offer similar benefits to the day care provider?

Table 2 USDA Serving Sizes

Type of Meal Food Served	*Age of Child (in years) 1–3*	*3–6*	*6–12*
Breakfast			
Milk	1/2 cup	3/4 cup	1 cup
Fruit, vegetable, or juice	1/4 cup	1/2 cup	1/2 cup
Bread or bread alternate	1/2 slice	1/2 slice	1 slice
or cold dry cereal	1/4 cup (1/3 oz.)	1/3 cup (1/2 oz.)	3/4 cup (1 oz.)
or cooked cereal	1/4 cup	1/4 cup	1/2 cup
Snack			
Milk	1/2 cup	1/2 cup	1 cup
Fruit, vegetable, or juice	1/2 cup	1/2 cup	3/4 cup
Bread or bread alternate	1/2 slice	1/2 slice	1 slice
Meat or meat alternate	1/2 oz.	1/2 oz.	1 oz.
Lunch/Supper			
Milk	1/2 cup	3/4 cup	1 cup
Vegetables and/or fruit (two or more)	1/4 cup (total)	1/2 cup (total)	3/4 cup (total)
Bread or bread alternate	1/2 slice	1/2 slice	1 slice
Meat, poultry, fish,	1/2 oz.	1/2 oz.	1 oz.
or cheese	1 oz.	1-1/2 oz.	2 oz.
or cooked beans, peas	1/4 cup	3/8 cup	1/2 cup
or egg	1	1	1
or nut butters	2 Tbs.	3 Tbs.	4 Tbs.

Although all sponsors require that the minimum requirements of the program be satisfied by the day care provider, they don't all offer the same additional benefits. Some sponsors distribute more extensive nutrition or food safety information to the provider than others. Some may offer additional training. Remember that you can benefit from the training that the day care provider receives from the sponsor.

For further information about the Child Care Food Program, contact your local Minnesota county extension office or the Minnesota Department of Education.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Licensed Child Care: What Does it Mean For My Child?

Rose Allen, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Ramsey County
Reviewed by Ron Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist

You've probably heard the term *licensed child care.* Minnesota state law requires licensing for most types of child care.

For example, child care centers, including Head Start and Montessori, are licensed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Family child care homes are licensed by the county in which they are located.

How does licensing affect the quality of care your child receives? This publication will try to give you some answers.

What Is Licensing?

Child care programs vary considerably. Licensing simply means that a set of minimum standards have been met. You still need to carefully screen all programs to make sure they meet your own standards. Otherwise, there is no guarantee that you are choosing the best situation for your child.

The following are some of the advantages licensing provides for you and your child:

Participation in Resource and Referral Lists. Your county can provide you with a list of child care openings. Only licensed providers can be listed.

Regular Inspection of the Child Care Center or Family Child Care Home. In order to be licensed, a center or home will be inspected by a trained licenser. These inspections are done when the center or home originally begins operating and every time the license is renewed, which is about every 2 years for centers and once a year for family child care homes.

Qualification Requirements for the Caregivers. A licensed family child care provider must be an adult (18 years or older) that has shown to be in good physical and mental health. Some counties also run criminal background checks on the provider and their family. This check screens for criminal activity, child abuse, and chemical dependency. Group family child care providers are required to have training in a certified child development program or early childhood education.

Accreditation of Child Care

There are a number of programs providing accreditation for family child care homes and child care centers. Accreditation establishes higher standards than licensing. Centers may be accredited through the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. A number of family child care accreditation programs also exist. When you are shopping for child care, ask if the center is accredited or plans to become accredited.

Child care center staff includes the director, teachers, assistant teachers, aides, volunteers, and substitutes. Aides must be at least 16 years old and be directly supervised by a teacher or assistant teacher, who must be adults. Each employee must meet certain qualifications of work experience and education to qualify for their jobs.

Update Training of Caregivers. All child care workers must learn basic first aid and CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). In addition, family child care providers must take at least 6 hours of ongoing training every year in child development, nutrition, safety, business management, and a variety of other topics related to their work.

Child care center employees are required to complete training to equal 2% of the total hours they work each year.

Provides Guidelines for the Number of Children that Caregivers Can Work With. The table on the next page gives these guidelines.

Child Care Food Program. Licensed providers can participate in a government-subsidized child care food program. This program covers some of the cost of feeding your child and makes sure that the food served is nutritious and prepared safely.

Tax Credits and Employer Pre-tax Set-aside Programs. In order for you to take advantage of the Minnesota Child Care Tax Credit and any pre-tax

Table 1 Guidelines on the Number of Children for Each Type of Care

Type of Care Age of Child	Number of children per caregiver	Maximum number of children
Family Child Care		
Children under age 11	up to 10	up to 10 (including their own)
Children under school age	up to 6	
Toddlers under age 2-1/2	up to 3	
Infants under age 1	up to 2	
Group Family Child Care (with a helper)		up to 14 (including their own)
Children under school age	up to 10	
Toddlers age 2-1/2 or younger	up to 4	
Infants under age 1	up to 3	
Child Care Centers		Maximum number of children in a group
School-age child (kindergarten to 13 years)	1-15	30
Preschooler (33 months to kindergarten)	1-10	20
Toddler (16 months to 32 months)	1-7	14
Infant (under 16 months)	1-4	8

child care set-aside programs provided by your employer, you need to be using legally licensed child care.

Professional Support. Licensed child care providers have the opportunity to belong to a number of associations that provide professional support and training. These help enhance the quality of the care your children receive.

Generally, choosing a licensed provider will indicate that the family child care provider or child care center is serious about the work they do. It guarantees that they have been inspected and screened. Through licensing, they agree to comply with a set of health, safety, and training standards and to maintain an appropriate level of care through limiting the number and ages of children they care for. Finding licensed day care is a good way to begin your search for quality care for your child.

Legal Unlicensed Care

Examples of legal unlicensed care include the following:

In-Home Care. An adult who comes in to your home to care for your child. They may live in or come in during the day.

Sick Child Care. An adult who comes in to your home to care for your child when he or she is ill.

Care For Two. A family child care provider can care for children from one family other than his or her own without a license. An example would be a mother of two preschoolers caring for your preschool child.

For more information on child care licensing regulations contact:

Public Documents Division
State Registrar
Department of Administration
State of Minnesota
517 University Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55115

Your licensed provider will also have a copy of the regulations for you to inspect.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Quality Child Care: How Do I Know It When I See It?

Rose Allen, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Ramsey County
Reviewed by Ron Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist

Finding out about all the options open to you is only the first step in selecting child care. The next step is to determine the quality of care in the child care centers or family child care homes you are looking at. This can be the most difficult part of the process. To make sure you are selecting quality care for your child, you should be able to answer yes to most, if not all, of the following questions.

Are caregivers caring for only as many children as they can handle?

If this is true, your children will be more likely to receive the attention they need and be in a safer environment.

Are children cared for in small groups?

Children in small groups are more cooperative, respond better to the caregiver, and are more likely to participate in activities.

Are caregivers well trained in all aspects of child care?

Caring for children requires special skills and knowledge. Trained caregivers will understand how to provide a safe, caring environment for your child.

Will children have the same person care for them over a period of time?

One of the greatest needs your child has is to know that every day the same person or people will be caring for him or her.

Will the physical environment around the children be safe, spacious, and pleasant?

Your child needs room for play time as well as quiet time. The space should also be safe and comfortable.

Will the care environment be nurturing and loving and provide enough interaction between caregiver and child?

Your child is a unique individual who has special needs. The caregiver should take the time to get to know your child and understand his or her own needs.

Will children be encouraged to engage in a variety of activities throughout the day that are appropriate to their age?

Children need different activities at different ages to help them develop. Look for toys, outdoor play space, and group as well as individual activities. Be cautious about too much television watching.

Is there a balance between structured activities and free time?

Children also need different kinds of structure at different ages. Younger children need the freedom to explore in an unstructured environment. Group activities are beneficial to older children. All children need a combination of freedom and structure in their day.

Are parents encouraged to participate in the activities at the child care center or family child care home?

Are you encouraged to visit your child at any time? Find out what is expected of you as the parent. Are there opportunities to meet other parents or ways you can help the provider with special activities?

Does the child care center director or family child care provider have a contract and clear set of rules that each family understands?

Make sure you read and sign all agreements and contracts. Most providers have rules and it is important that you go over them together in order to learn how the center or home operates.

Do both parents and provider understand what is expected of them in supporting each other's efforts?

You both need to respect each other's work. This is necessary so you can build a parent-provider partnership that will benefit your child.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

This information is intended to help parents make the best decision about the selection of child care for their family. The Minnesota Extension Service does not recommend any particular providers or any specific type of care.

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
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Child Care Options

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Reviewed by Ron Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist

There are many options open to you in seeking child care. While other fact sheets in this series talk about licensing, questions to ask, food programs, and quality, this one simply describes the various full- and part-time options available.

Full-time Child Care

If you need full-time care for your child, you can choose from several options. These may involve care in a family home setting, a child care center, your own home, or a facility in your workplace.

Family Child Care. This type of care is provided in another caregiver's home. While most family care providers accept children from infancy through school age, some providers care for only one specific age group. The care may be provided in a very relaxed, nurturing, homelike atmosphere or it may be in a more structured, educational setting. Your choice of the right setting depends on you and your child's needs.

When family child care providers care for more than one family's children, they must be licensed through the State Department of Human Services. See the fact sheet entitled *Licensed Child Care: What Does It Mean For My Child?* for more information on the numbers and ages of children that a child care home can legally care for. Depending on the number of caregivers and/or helpers, private home facilities can care for between 10 and 14 children, including the provider's own children. Only so many of these can be under school age.

Child Care Centers. This type of care is provided in a facility other than a private home. Centers, like family care settings, may specialize in a certain age group or offer care for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children. Fees will vary, depending on how they are funded. Some centers offer a sliding-fee scale or scholarships for low-income families.

Centers that care for more than three children for more than three hours a day must also be licensed by the State Department of Human Services. They must follow certain health and safety standards in their facility, as well as requirements for staffing and educational programs.

Some centers provide care at night during normal sleeping hours.

In-home Care. Another option involves an adult caregiver (sometimes a relative) caring for your child in your own home. You must pay the caregiver minimum wage and provide certain benefits if they're working over 20 hours per week. This may be too expensive for a family with less than 3 children. You may locate this type of care through a placement agency (bonded or unbonded) or hire someone on your own.

Employer-sponsored or Employer-supported Child Care. Some employers will provide and pay for child care facilities for their employees. Others will subsidize care in their own facility, in one or more chosen sites (either at a center or family home setting), or in a site selected by the parent.

Employer support to child care can also be in the form of donation and contributions to child care programs, support for community child care councils, information and referral services, and family-oriented personnel policies.

Parent Care. You may also be able to consider full-time care for your child by yourself, your partner, or a combination. Work schedules can sometimes be juggled to split the child care responsibilities evenly.

Special Needs Care. Some children need special care because of a handicap. Special services and programs are available for handicapped children from at least 6 weeks to not more than 13 years. Check your county's social services department for programs available in your community.

Part-time Child Care

In addition to working out part-time care in the options already mentioned, there are also some unique part-time care situations that can work for you.

Drop-in Care. This type of care (offered separately or along with other services in a child care center or family home setting) provides supervised play on an irregular or as-needed basis (usually from 3-4 hours a day). You must pre-register your child and they may not attend more than 45 hours per calendar month. Staff may be professionals, volunteers, or parents. You will usually have to pay an hourly rate.

Migrant Child Care. For parents working in temporary agricultural jobs, the state and federal government runs free, full-time child care centers during the busiest seasons. Programs are available for children to develop their health, education, and nutrition.

Parent Babysitting Cooperative. Another option for part-time care involves a group of families sharing child care. Instead of money, "points" are assigned for services based on number of children, hours of care, etc. Everyone in the co-op must follow agreed-upon guidelines and share the recordkeeping responsibilities. No license is required.

Play Group. Similar to co-op babysitting, parents (usually mothers) may take turns providing activities for a group of children, including their own. Most play groups meet once or twice a week for 2-3 hours. This arrangement can free the primary caregiver's time, as well as provide playmates for their children.

School-age Child Care. Beginning in kindergarten and continuing until age 13, this type of care can provide supervision and planned activities for children before and after school and on school holidays. In addition to centers and family home settings, school-age child care can be offered by public schools, youth recreation groups, churches, and other community groups. Fees will vary, depending on ages of children, hours, services provided, and sources of funding.

Sick Child Care. When your child is ill, you can have an adult come into your home to provide care or bring your child to a sick care program in a licensed day care, drop-in, or night care program. There are also some programs run exclusively for sick children.

Pre-schools. There are various types of pre-school programs for children from 33 months old to school-age (kindergarten).

Nursery Schools. This type of pre-school program provides physical, intellectual, social, and developmental activities for 3- to 5-year-olds. They sometimes are based on a particular religious, political, or philosophical belief and may be part of a child care center. Most nursery schools operate for less than 3 hours a session, 2 to 5 times a week, and follow a school-year schedule. Fees will vary, depending on schedule and funding.

Nursery schools may voluntarily register with the Minnesota State Education Department and follow their guidelines for their facility, staff, and programs.

Nursery School Cooperatives. Similar to a part-time nursery school, this program requires parents to take turns helping professional teachers run the school and teach. Fees will vary, depending on schedule, sources of funding, and how much parents participate.

Head Start. This is a federally funded program for 3- to 5-year-olds from low-income families. Even though there is no charge, parents must be involved in this thorough child development program that works with health, nutrition, education, and social services. Head Start programs can be part-day, full-day, or home-based. They usually follow a school-year schedule.

There is not one, single best type of care for all families. Instead, parents need to choose the quality and type of care that will best meet their child's needs, as well as reflect their own values. Through careful selection, including visits to different facilities, parents can choose the right child care for their child.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Understanding Child Care Contracts and Rules

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Knowing the ground rules is important to a successful relationship with a child care provider. Parents can avoid misunderstandings if they know who is responsible for what. Some providers may have a written contract and/or a written set of rules that they make available to parents. Others may even keep a copy on file and go over it with parents when a new child enters their care.

What Are Child Care Contracts and Rules?

A contract spells out the agreement that parents make with a provider when they place their child in a provider's care. It can include the hours, costs, and services provided by the caregiver. Some providers may also have a set of rules covering emergencies, sick-child policies, sleeping arrangements, supplies that parents need to provide, as well as many other issues that parents and providers need to agree on. Contracts and rules may be written or verbal when parents first enroll their child in child care. Putting the contract or rules in writing will make things much clearer for both sides when misunderstandings arise. Parents might want to compile their own list if their provider does not have anything formally written out.

The following list covers some of the specific areas that should be covered in the contract and rules. Parents may need to bring these points up themselves if their provider doesn't discuss them.

The following boxes can be checked after a review of a provider's contracts and rules.

Operations

- ❑ What are the hours and days the child care home or center is open, including regular daily hours as well as vacation and holiday schedules?
- ❑ What do fees include and when is payment expected?
- ❑ What is the policy on caring for children beyond the hours of operation, such as who will care for the child and are there additional fees?
- ❑ What meals and snacks are served?
- ❑ What are the procedures for enrolling and withdrawing the child, including the length of time and if written or verbal notification is required?
- ❑ What are the provisions for trial enrollment?
- ❑ What are the provisions for when a provider is ill, has an emergency, vacation, or holiday? How is payment handled and who provides back-up care?
- ❑ What is the provider's insurance coverage?
- ❑ What are the ages and number of children in the facility?
- ❑ What are the sign-in procedures?
- ❑ Does the provider have proof of licensing?
- ❑ What parent conference opportunities are there?
- ❑ What are the policies on caring for more than one child from one family, including fees and reserving space for additional children?

Illness and Medication

- ❑ When should a child not attend child care? What is the provider's definition of a "sick" child, including physical symptoms?
- ❑ What are the procedures when a child becomes ill while at child care, including how soon a child needs to be picked up when ill?
- ❑ When is written authorization necessary in order for the provider to give a child medicine?
- ❑ What are the procedures for notification of exposure to contagious diseases from both parents and providers?

Emergency Procedures

- ❑ What are the provisions for inclement weather, fire, or other emergencies?

- What are the procedures for notification and documentation of injuries that occur both at home and at child care?
- What are the procedures for notifying parents if the provider has an emergency and cannot provide care?
- How will the provider handle the care of children who are not picked up at the close of hours—where will parents need to go to retrieve their children?

Child Guidance and Educational Programs

- What would be an example of a typical daily schedule?
- What would a description of the provider's child development philosophy include?
- How would the provider deal with the different developmental needs of the children in their care?
- What is the policy on television use?
- Does the provider use community facilities and participate in community activities?
- What is the policy on child guidance? What does the provider do when a child behaves inappropriately?
- What would be the parent/provider cooperative plan for the timing and method of toilet training?
- What are the provider's religious, political, or philosophical beliefs on child care? Does he or she support nondiscriminatory practices in his or her business?
- Does the provider have a list of classes that he or she has taken (CPR, first aid, child development) in order to meet licensing requirements?

Daily Activities and Rules

- What are some sample menus of nutritious meals and snacks?
- Are there any labeling requirements for food brought from home?
- What is the schedule and what are the arrangements for the children's rest time?
- What are the provider's transportation plans and requirements?
- Does the provider have any pets?
- What is the policy on smoking?
- What are the policies on toys and treats from home?
- What outdoor activities are the children involved in? What is the policy for accommodating parents' wishes on keeping their child indoors?

What Parents Need to Provide

- What supplies do parents need to provide (food, diapers, changes of clothing, car seat, fees for special events, bedding, etc.)?
- Does the provider keep signed immunization forms on each child? Also signed release forms allowing him or her to administer medication?
- Does he or she keep permission forms to allow him or her to transport children?
- The provider should be given phone numbers where parents or other persons authorized to pick up their children can be reached.

For Further Information

The following sources can provide further information on many aspects of child care:

—County Social Services, Child Care Licensing for family child care homes
—State Department of Human Services for child care centers
—Your local child care resource and referral service
—Your attorney
—Child Protection.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Communicating With Your Provider

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The way you feel about using child care is largely a result of your relationship with your child care provider. Even if you have carefully selected a family child care home or child care center after considering many important issues—health and safety standards, number of children, food program, and caregiver qualifications—you are still leaving your son or daughter with someone you really don't know.

Communicate Every Day

Even when you are in a hurry to get to work or return home after a long day, the time you spend touching bases with your child care provider will help your provider do a better job.

Talk to your provider. The more your provider knows about what is happening in a child's family, the better he or she will be at providing care and guidance to fit your child's needs.

Listen to your provider. What did your child do that day? What's happening with other children in his or her care? Your child care provider is someone you need to know.

Show appreciation for what he or she does. Caring for children all day is hard work. Children provide some great rewards, but as a parent you need to remember that you can't take your provider's work for granted. Notice his or her successes. Remember to say thanks. Take the time to express your appreciation.

Respect the confidentiality of your relationship. If you do communicate regularly with your child care provider, most likely you will exchange confidential information about yourself, your child, and your family. Your provider will probably do the same. It's important that both you and your provider respect the confidentiality of this information.

Share daily pleasures. Your child care provider may spend more waking hours with your child than you do on any given day. He or she talks with the children in his or her care, feeds them, understands how they are feeling, knows their favorite activities, and observes them as they develop and grow. Don't hurry home without hearing about your child's day.

The more you understand about how your child spent his or her day, the better you will understand how he or she is doing in child care. Child care providers hope that by sharing information, parents will feel more comfortable about leaving their children in their care.

Take advantage of efforts your child care provider makes to communicate. Some common methods are:

—conversations at pick-up and drop-off time
—bulletin boards
—newsletters
—parent meetings or social events

Communicating with your provider will help you feel more involved with your child's care. Communication is an important key to quality care—it's essential for both you and your provider to develop a parenting partnership.

Communication can also prevent conflicts between parents and child care providers. Differences that are discussed early can often be resolved before they become major issues. Sometimes, however, you may need to deal with conflict concerning the care of your child.

Communicating About Difficult Issues

In any relationship, conflict is inevitable. To be human is to experience conflict. Differences in opinion, values, wants, and needs are all a part of daily life.

Many of us have learned that conflict is bad, something to be avoided. Conflict, if handled constructively, can result in greater understanding and problem-solving between interested parties.

In the parent-child care provider relationship, there is a strong chance of conflict. One reason for this is that parenting is an emotional process consisting of a variety of feelings, attitudes, and values. Another reason is that there is no one "right" way to parent.

Common Conflicts

The following are some common reasons that parents become dissatisfied with child care arrangements:

—a desire for more educational stimulation
—caregiver undependability
—lack of social stimulation from peers
—caregiver neglect
—caregiver values are different from their own
—unhealthy facility conditions
—child mistreatment by caregiver and others
—poor communication or coordination with the caregiver
—problems in child's adjustment
—misunderstandings about policies such as vacation and holiday pay, field trips, etc.

Research shows that providers have conflicts with parents because of differing parenting values, limited interest in the child, and lack of respect for the provider. Common actions that bring about these conflicts include not paying on time, arriving late to pick up children, or not treating the provider as a professional.

Handling Conflict

Many parents will quit using the provider's services instead of confronting a difficult problem. Although a change in child care may be one solution, it may also *not* be the best one for your child.

It's important to think through the problem before confronting the provider. What happens if it does not get resolved? Is it worth confronting? Is it just a "pet peeve" or is it causing true concern for you and your child? Would it cause concern if your life was less stressful? How have you contributed to the conflict?

It is useful to separate the conflict into two aspects: emotion and content. In the parent-provider role it is important to consider the emotions of the individuals involved. Emotions that create conflict usually include feelings of guilt, shame, jealousy, anger, pressure, feeling left out, and worry. Another emotional issue contributing to conflict is the issue of control or power over the child's life. Shared parenting means that each person will have less total control or power.

The content involved in conflict might relate to conflicting needs, disagreements over policies and practices, and differing ideas of roles.

If you think it is worth trying to resolve a problem, take time to set an appointment with your provider. Most communication occurs when children are dropped off or picked up. This is usually *not* a good time to deal with a conflict. Plan a time to discuss your concerns when your child isn't present .

Focus On The Emotions First

The following guidelines will help you in your relationship with your child care provider:

1. Remember to treat your child care provider with respect.
2. Listen until you understand your provider's point of view. Your provider will be more receptive to your needs if you have been positive about his or her work in the past.
3. State your own views, needs, and feelings. Be honest. Use "I" statements like, "I'm uncomfortable with my child calling you 'Mom.' I'm not clear on your practices about names."

Focus On The Solution Second

1. Define the problem in terms of needs. For example, "My son Johnny likes it here and I would like to see our differences resolved so he can stay."
2. Talk about possible solutions (this might include raising rates).
3. Select the solution that will best meet both parties' needs.
4. Plan who will do what, and agree on a deadline.
5. Implement the plan.
6. Discuss the solution at a later date to determine if it's working for both you and the provider.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Child Care: Raising Children Together

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Child care is a partnership. Good child care provides parents with an extended family to help share in the challenges and joys of raising children.

As a parent, you may be more successful in using child care if you remember the following:

- Child care is a process—not a one-time decision that you make and don't think about again. Finding good child care is only the first step. Working in partnership with others who provide care for your child requires attention.
- Before you look for child care think about what is important to you as a parent. This will help you share the task of parenting with your child care provider.
- Don't take child care for granted. Pay on time, pick your child up on time, provide the supplies your provider needs, and complete all the paper work required.
- Periodically re-assess your child care situation. Is it working for you? Is it working for your child? Ask your provider if it's working for him or her.
- Consider child care to be an important part of your family.

Developing Good Eating Habits in Children

It's not uncommon for you to worry about how your child is eating. Because your child is in child care, you may feel a loss of control over your child's eating habits. You will probably also notice that your child's eating patterns will change.

- Your child will probably be exposed to a variety of foods in child care.
- Being with other children, especially if they are at different ages, may help your child develop better feeding skills.
- If eating is a struggle between you and your child, it may have become a power issue. A more relaxed eating atmosphere in a child care setting can, in fact, be better for your child. You cannot expect your provider to use food to direct your child's behavior.
- The meal pattern at child care may make it necessary to change your family meal schedule.
- Check your provider's menus regularly. This helps you plan meals for your family that complement what is being served at child care.

Your Child May Bite or Get Bitten

Biting is one of the toughest issues to deal with for parents and providers. When children bite, providers need to balance the concerns of all the parents. If your child is biting you may feel:

- guilty because your child is harming others;
- concerned about your child's relationship with other people; and/or
- ashamed because your child's behavior reflects your skills as a parent.

If your child is biting, you need to work closely with your provider in finding ways to handle the behavior. Try to deal with your child in the same manner that the provider does. If something works, tell each other so you can both try it.

If you're a parent with a child in child care where biting is going on, you may feel:

- guilty because you've put your child in a situation where they could get harmed;
- tempted to seek revenge (you may get angry at the caregiver and/or the biting child and their parents).

If your child is in care with a biter, understand that biting is disruptive for all the children and makes the provider's job more difficult. Find out what your provider is doing to deal with the situation. Blaming

the child won't help. Understanding why they are biting and finding ways to redirect this behavior is part of the provider's job. Try to remain calm. Biting will not go on forever.

Toilet Training Is a Shared Responsibility

Having a child in group care can be helpful when it comes to toilet training. Your child may become interested in toilet training earlier because he or she will see other children using the bathroom. Rely on your provider's experience to know when your child is ready to begin training and to help you understand how the process is going. Don't expect immediate success overnight.

Here are some suggestions on how you can cooperatively work on toilet training with your provider:

- ❑ Talk about the signs your child is showing that would indicate he or she is ready to begin training. It's important that you both agree on when to begin training.
- ❑ Agree on how you will both work on the toilet-training process. Use the same techniques.
- ❑ Know your child's daily schedule. When you're home make sure you bring your child to the bathroom on a similar schedule to child care.
- ❑ Try to use the same rituals and words.
- ❑ Try to use the same method of praise or reinforcement when your child uses the toilet successfully.
- ❑ Find out how the provider handles toileting accidents. It's best not to make a big issue out of it or let other children ridicule your child. At home, try to do the same.
- ❑ Make sure you provide plenty of changes of clothing so your child will have clean clothing in the event of an accident.
- ❑ Be familiar with your provider's toilet facilities. Your home may have different equipment. It's good to understand the differences so you can draw comparisons for your child.

Celebrating Holidays and Birthdays in Child Care

It's a good idea to find out how providers deal with holidays before you select child care. This is particularly true if you have specific beliefs about observing holidays.

Working together with your provider can make celebrations fun for all the children in his or her care. Find out what is expected of parents. For example, are children allowed to bring treats on their birthdays? Would your provider prefer you bring other items like hats and toys? What is the policy for exchanging gifts?

Religious holidays can be an opportunity to teach all the children about the different ways families celebrate. If you celebrate holidays that are different from those celebrated by the other children in child care, it's a good opportunity to share your traditions with the provider. First see if it is appropriate to celebrate in the child care setting. If you have strong feelings about particular holidays, let your provider know.

Working Together on Guiding Your Child's Behavior

As a parent, you have certain rules that you expect your child to learn and follow. Your caregiver also has a set of rules that the children he or she cares for must follow.

When you choose a provider, find out what their rules are and how the provider will work with your child when he or she breaks a rule.

Minnesota licensing rules state that "Discipline by caregivers must be constructive, positive, and suited to the age of the child. Methods of intervention, guidance, and redirection must be used. . . No discipline will be used which is physically or emotionally harmful to a child. Discipline will not be used which is humiliating or frightening and will not be related to food, toilet training, or napping."

Children need to learn self-control over their behavior so that they will act appropriately when their parent or caregiver isn't there. You and your caregiver can work together to establish similar rules for your child to follow. Work cooperatively, using the same guidance methods to help your child build self-control.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Developmentally Appropriate Care: What Does It Mean?

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The term ***developmentally appropriate care*** is commonly used by child care professionals to describe care that takes into account the level of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of a child.

While there is no one right way to care for children, there are guidelines that focus on how a child develops and the care that is appropriate at various stages. These guidelines help both child care providers and parents understand ways to care for children while helping them develop positive self-esteem.

The following guidelines have been developed by early childhood and child care professionals. These guidelines focus on the idea of developmental appropriateness which is defined in two parts: ***age appropriateness*** or the universal, predictable sequences of growth and change that occur in children as they go through their early years of life; and ***individual appropriateness*** or the unique growth sequence of each child with their own pattern and timing, as well as individual personality, learning style, and family background experiences.

General Features of Developmentally Appropriate Care

Child care providers that practice developmentally appropriate care have the following list of characteristics. They

- —are patient and supportive with children;
- —promote creativity, discovery, and exploration;
- —encourage children to take initiative in selecting activities;
- —understand the individual capabilities of children;
- —interact with the children by talking to them as well as listening to what they have to say;
- —allow children to do things for themselves;
- —offer choices of activities and materials;
- —set and enforce reasonable limits; and
- —are willing to use different methods of care to meet each child's abilities and needs.

Appropriate Care for Infants and Toddlers

Infants and toddlers learn by experiencing the environment—by seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling, and by physically moving around. They learn a sense of trust through interaction with consistent, caring adults.

Adults not only meet physical needs but spend time holding, playing, and talking with the infant. The adult helps the infant learn by pointing out things to look at, touch, and hear.

Toilet training, feeding, and dressing are taught without criticism and provide opportunities to let the child do for themselves. Homes and centers are "child-proofed" to allow the child safe exploration.

For two-year-olds, simple books, pictures, puzzles, and music are provided. Time and space for jumping, running, and dancing are arranged. Language skills are encouraged by describing to the child what the child is doing, repeating new words, and reading aloud. Adults know that children in this age group cannot understand the idea of sharing.

Appropriate Care for Three-, Four- and Five-year-olds

Three-year-olds are provided with learning activities that emphasize language, large motor physical activity, and movement. Activities include puzzles and blocks, wheel toys and climbers, dramatic play acting and story telling.

Four-year-olds enjoy a greater variety of experiences and more activities like cutting paper and

fabric, other art activities and cooking. They can recognize shapes, colors, and use basic math and problem-solving skills.

Some four-year-olds and most five-year-olds combine ideas, have a growing memory and are developing fine motor skills. They display a growing interest in the written language. They are developing an interest in the community and enjoy special events and trips.

Adults listen, encourage creative play, join in activities, build self-esteem, and set consistent limits.

Developmentally Appropriate Equipment and Space Guidelines

Infants benefit from the following equipment: crib, play yard, infant seat, high chair, waterproof mattress, changing table. Infants need colorful pictures, objects they can grab and hit (such as crib gyms), and soft objects they can learn to pick up. Older infants need safe space for rolling, sitting, and crawling.

Toddlers use the same things as infants plus they need safe crawl space and room when taking those first steps. Most toddlers play alone. Look for easy ways for them to move from one space to another.

Toddlers love to explore. Good toys at this age are containers filled with blocks, pull toys, and stacking containers.

Preschoolers need more space. Play spaces should be varied. In addition, they need active as well as quiet spaces. They should also have a place to store personal items. A child-size toilet or potty chair and a way to wash their own hands are also helpful. They work both individually and in small groups and are beginning to like to be in larger groups too.

Preschoolers need a variety of toys for play. Art materials, puzzles, toys that produce sounds, and tricycles are typical equipment for this age.

Developmentally Appropriate Care to Prepare Your Child for School

Some child care centers and family child care homes promote teaching your child skills that prepare them for school. While early academic learning gives children skills, there is little evidence that children show long-term benefit in school performance. Some research shows that too much emphasis on structured learning at an early age causes children to be less interested in school.

There are, however, a number of non-academic skills your child can develop both at home and in child care to prepare them for school. These include the following:

Observing or the ability to notice specific things in nature and to understand what other people are doing.

Listening, knowing what sounds mean, and being able to repeat sounds.

Following directions in order to accomplish simple tasks and knowing left from right.

Classifying and sorting items by shape, color, size, etc. and the ability to tell you why objects are similar or different.

Remembering and telling you about recent activities and being able to play games that require memory skills.

Creating and playing pretend games; feeling comfortable with doing things differently from other children.

Cooperating and understanding how to work with others without being overly competitive.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
HOME ECONOMICS

Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
Minnesota Extension Service UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Preparing Children for Child Care

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New experiences are part of growing up. All children experience some change in their lives as they mature. However, if the change is not handled well, it can cause anxiety in children. A new child care experience, whether it is the first one or a changed one, is a common new experience for many children. This factsheet explores some of the ways that you can make this change easier for your children and yourself.

Choose Your Child Care Situation Carefully

As a parent, you have a big responsibility to choose the right child care for your child. Take time in making your decision. A careful search for child care will help you feel better about your decision. This is very important. You need to feel confident that your child is being cared for by people you trust, in a safe environment, and in a situation that allows your child to grow and develop to the best of his or her abilities.

Talk With Your Child About What Is Happening

New experiences can be scary. You can ease a lot of fears by talking to your children about going to child care if your children can understand. Let them know what is different about the new situation, as well as what is the same. Children need to know that they will come home at the end of the day to a family where they are loved very much. A good book to read to your child as you prepare him or her for child care is *Going to Day Care* by Fred Rogers.

Share Your Positive Attitude About Child Care With Your Child

Your child will feel good about going to child care if you feel good about your decision. Talk with your child about the toys, people, and activities he or she will experience in child care. Let your child know that going to child care is necessary and can be fun.

Begin New Child Care Situations Gradually

It's frightening to be put in a new situation. Parents can help ease the transition by bringing their child to child care gradually. If it's possible, try putting your child in only part time—for a few hours or half a day—for the first few days. This will also help the child care provider get to know your child before he or she spends full days there. You may find it helpful to spend time at the child care site yourself. Your presence will be comforting. Work together with the child care provider in creating a smooth transition to the child care routine. He or she can help your child adjust to new situations.

Establish Good Communication With Your Child Care Provider

Leaving a child in someone else's care can be hard for parents. You may worry about your child's behavior, whether or not the provider and the other children will like your child, and if the provider can understand and fulfill your child's needs. Let your provider know as much as possible about your child. They need to know what words your child uses to ask for things, their nap, eating, and toilet habits, their likes and dislikes, and information about their general development. A quality provider will take your child's unique characteristics into consideration as they care for him or her. They will also provide you with some insights on how you both can work together to help your child adjust to a new situation.

Help Your Child Say Goodbye And Hello

It's called transition time. This is when parents and children separate in the morning and return together

in the evening. When child care is new, transition time can be very difficult not only for parents and children, but also for the child care providers. Children need to learn to trust the new situation. They also need to trust their parents and to understand that their leaving them in child care is not abandonment. They need to know that you will return.

How Parents Can Help Their Child Adjust To A New Child Care Situation

The following list can help you help your child:

- Spend time at the child care center or family child care home. If your child needs to leave the room while you are there, tell him to go with the group and that you will wait for him. This way, he can leave you and find that you are still there when he returns.
- Allow your child to move toward the caretaker or other children at her own pace.
- When you leave, always make sure your child knows you are leaving. Say goodbye and tell him you'll be back to pick him up later in the day. Leave quickly and don't make your goodbyes long. Avoid sneaking out to prevent a scene. In most cases, the crying will stop quickly after you've left.
- Be on time when you pick up your child. Picking up your child every day at the same time will help build your child's trust and help her understand that she is not being abandoned.
- Let your child bring a piece of home with him; a special blanket, toy, or teddy can be very comforting. Photos of family members, neighbors, and pets can be left with the provider to help remind your child of familiar people if he feels lonely during the day. (Check with your provider about his or her rules for bringing things from home.)
- Your child may regress during her adjustment to child care. Thumbsucking, wetting pants, and other behaviors may occur. The less attention you pay to these behaviors, the sooner they will disappear.
- Plan plenty of time, if possible, when you drop off or pick up your child. Children need time to say goodbye to you and to get involved in the activities at child care. At the end of the day, they need time to say goodbye to playmates. Your child may sometimes be unwilling to leave. It's not unusual for children to want to stay put when they are involved in an activity. When you come at the end of the day to take your child home, notice your child first and then talk to the provider about how the day has gone. This is a good way to show your child you are glad to see him and behavior problems may be avoided.

Expect A Reasonable Amount of Adjustment Time

Every child is different. Some children will adjust to a new child care situation almost immediately. A few others will take several months. Some children will seem to adjust to the situation quickly, but then experience difficulty a few weeks or months later.

As a parent, it's a good idea to check out how things are going with your child. For young children, you need to observe their behavior at home. Are they eating, sleeping, and interacting with the family normally? For older children, you need to talk with them about their day. Do things seem to be going well?

Talk with the child care provider. How does he or she feel your child's adjustment is going? Is there an effort to make your child feel comfortable? Your child may cry when you leave, but in most cases she will recover quickly. If separation is a problem, talk to your provider about how long it takes your child to settle in for the day.

If you feel confident about your choice of child care and you know your child has trouble adapting to new situations, it's best to keep them in that setting. Changing child care will mean that your child will have to start the process of adjusting all over again.

If your child seems to be very unhappy with the child care situation and your provider is making every effort to help, it may be a case where the child care you have selected doesn't fit your child's needs. In a case like this, a change in child care may be your best option.

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Child Care: PARENT-PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP
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Child Care Dilemmas: What Do I Do When . . .

Rose Allen, County Extension Agent, Home Economics—Ramsey County
Reviewed by Ron Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist

No matter how good you feel about the child care that you have selected for your child, you still need to plan for certain situations. Everyday problems such as a sick child or financial restraints can change the ideal situation into a sticky one. This factsheet addresses some of these problems and possible solutions. The key is to plan for them *before* they happen.

My Child Is Sick And Can't Go To Child Care

You can plan on your child getting sick at one time or another. Before your child gets sick, check with your employer's human resources or personnel department on their policies for sick child care.

When you cannot miss work, arrange back-up care. Possibilities include a neighbor or relative who knows your child well. There are public and private agencies who will provide in-home care for sick children.

Sick child care centers are available in some cases. Some employers even cover a part of the daily fee.

Keep in mind that when your child is really ill he or she needs to be in the care of either a parent or someone who is close to him or her, as well as separated from other children to prevent spread of illness.

My Child Care Provider Is Sick And Can't Care For My Child

At the time you select a provider it is a good idea to cover what happens when he or she gets sick. Is there a back-up person who can care for the children or are the parents expected to find alternative care? Are you required to pay the provider for days when he or she is ill and cannot care for your child?

If your provider doesn't have a back-up plan, you need to make arrangements for your child. Some possibilities include:

—keeping a list of relatives or friends who would be willing to care for your child for a week or less,

—compiling a list of other providers in the area who do drop-in child care, or

—finding out in advance what sick child care policies exist at your work. Some work places keep lists of temporary providers for employees.

I Work Odd Hours And Can't Find Child Care

Most family child care and child care centers are open during regular work hours. If you work during the day but have early or late hours, a child care center may offer the flexibility you need. If you work nights and/or weekends, you may have more trouble. Check with the following places for lists of child care providers and their hours of service:

—a local resource and referral agency

—co-workers, relatives, or friends who have children

—your work's human resource department.

I Need Help Making Ends Meet

Talk to your provider and let them know what's happening. If this is a short-term situation, try to arrange for a payment plan after paying at least part of the bill. If your provider is agreeable, consider offering to help with care for his or her children in exchange for a reduced rate. If you have other skills such as sewing, yardwork, or accounting, consider offering these skills as partial payment for your child care. Keep in mind that your financial problems will create financial problems for the provider as well. (See the factsheet entitled *Planning for Child Care Costs.*)

If you're having long-term financial problems, you need to find help with your child care costs. Find out what your county social service department can do to help. Ask for information about the sliding fee program.

I'm Going To Be Late Picking Up My Child

Call your provider. Let them know that you will be late. To avoid problems, try to plan in advance for times when you will be late. The following tips can help:

—Arrange for two or three people who will pick up your child when you can't. Let your provider know who they are and how they can be reached. Most providers will require written consent to allow another person to pick up your child.

—Get to know other parents who use the same family child care provider or child care center. When problems arise, you can agree to provide short-term care for each others' children.

—Find out what your provider's policy is regarding late pick-up. Is there a charge for caring for your child beyond a certain time? If so, how much? How long will they hold a child who has not been picked up? What is their plan when a child stays beyond closing time? If a parent does not contact the provider, by law some providers call the police or child protection authorities and have the child put in protective custody. You need to know how to find your child if this happens. (See the factsheet entitled *Understanding Child Care Contracts and Rules.)*

My Child Has Bruises Or Marks When I Pick Her Up From Child Care

Your first step is to ask your provider to explain what happened. Ask them how your child was injured. Get as many details about the incident as you can. If your child is old enough, ask her what happened. Do the stories match?

If your child frequently has bruises or marks, it may be a good idea to take him to a doctor for medical attention. Ask your doctor if the injuries could be explained by the reasons you have been given.

Some children regularly hurt themselves during play activities. If the injury seems related to a particular piece of play equipment or furniture, point this out immediately to your provider. Ask that the item be removed or modified so your child will have a safe environment.

If you suspect that your provider, or someone in the home or center, is abusing your child, report it immediately to your local child care licenser or child protection agency and remove your child from the program.

I Have Had A Change In My Personal, Home, Or Work Life That Is Affecting My Child

When you and your family have a change, whether it's good or bad, it's a good idea to talk about it with the person who cares for your child. This person is a partner in caring for your youngster. They need to understand your situation so they can respond appropriately to your child.

If you or your family are going through some tough times, your child care provider can play an important role by providing stability for your child. It's important to involve them and keep them informed.

My Child Seems To Be Sick A Lot Since He's Been In Child Care

Some kids are more prone to illness than others. They may have a chronic cold, ear infection, or always get a bug when it's going around. Discuss this with your child's doctor. If your child fits this description, you may want to consider using child care where your child will be exposed to fewer children. A family child care provider who cares for three or four children might be ideal.

Another option is to examine your provider's sick-child policy. Are other children coming to child care when they really should be kept at home? Ask your provider about this; let them know you are concerned. Keep your child home when he or she is sick. As inconvenient as it may be, it is your responsibility to reduce the spread of infection. Proper handwashing in the child care center or home—before and after meals, after toileting, and diaper changes—can help reduce the spread of germs that can make your child ill.

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Child Care Food: Is it Nutritious and Safe?

Peter Tallas, Assistant Professor and Extension Nutritionist
Linda Bradley, Youth EFNEP Coordinator

Good nutrition is important for your child for many reasons. For one thing, proper nutrition is necessary for body growth and development. Without it the brain, nervous system, bones, teeth, muscles, eyes, heart, and lungs will not grow and work as they should.

Your child will also learn, think, play, and work with others better if they are eating right. Signs of poor nutrition are restlessness, irritability, and a withdrawn personality. You should be concerned with your child's nutrition both at home and in your child care situation.

To make the most of your child's nutritional intake, to develop a good food relationship between child and child care provider, and to ensure food safety, you should be able to answer some basic questions about food when you are selecting child care.

Nutrition for Infants

The following questions are important if your child is very young.

- What types of food intake records are kept?

- A food record for your child should be made available to you at least every two weeks, so that you can keep track of what your child is eating.

- Who evaluates the nutritional content of the meals at your child care provider? A dietitian or nutritionist knows what is required for a balanced and varied diet for children at specific ages.

- Who supplies and prepares the formula for your child?

- Do you know whose responsibility it is to supply the formula? Meet the person who mixes the formula and be sure that they are preparing the formula correctly.

- Are infants held during feeding? Holding an infant promotes a healthy feeding relationship—both physically and emotionally.

Nutrition for Toddlers

If your child is in the toddler stage, the following questions are important to answer.

- At what age does your child care provider stop bottle-feeding? Will they follow your instructions? The age restriction may interfere with meeting your child's nutritional needs if they only take fluids from a bottle.

- Who supplies the baby food? Know whose responsibility it is to supply the baby food on a daily basis.

- What foods are served? Are they similar to food you serve at home?

- Are written menus available? Look them over to see if they have a variety of nutritious foods included in them.

- What kind of snacks are provided? Snacks should contribute to a balanced daily diet. They should be nutritious as well as have a variety of flavors and textures.

- What beverages are served? Those that are 100% fruit juices are excellent sources of nutrients, including vitamin C. Whole milk is a good source of calcium, vitamins A and D, and the necessary calories for healthy growing bones and teeth. Water should be available to children at all times to replace the fluids they lose in their active lives.

See the factsheet entitled *The Child Care Food Program: Promoting Healthy Eating Habits* for further information on suggested meals and meal portions for specific ages.

Safety

Safety should also be considered in your evaluation of child care facilities. Consider the following questions.

- Is the facility visibly clean? A clean child care environment helps prevent the transmission of illnesses.

- Who prepares the food? Meet the person who prepares the children's food. Ask him or her if he or she receives on-going training in food preparation for children. You may also be interested in learning what recipes and ingredients are used.

- Is the food prepared on-site or off-site? The advantages of having on-site food preparation is that there is less chance of contamination of the food and there is more flexibility in feeding times.

- What is done with leftover formula and baby food?

Baby Formula. The Minnesota Extension Service recommends that open cans of unmixed formula may be kept in the refrigerator for up to 48 hours. Leftover mixed formula in the bottle may be kept in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours. Check with the provider to see what their policy is.

Talk to the person who will be feeding your infant and give special written instructions whenever possible. Leftover formula that remains in a bottle after a child has been fed should not be kept and used later. It is a perfect environment for bacteria growth. Unused powdered formula can be kept tightly covered on the shelf for up to a month.

Baby Food. The recommendations taken from *"No-Nonsense Nutrition For Baby's First Year"* (McGraw-Hill, 1985) say that opened jars of food and juices may be kept up to 72 hours in a refrigerator. The Minnesota Extension Service recommends that cooked fruit and vegetables may be kept for up to 3 days in the refrigerator. Raw fruit and cooked meats may be refrigerated no more than 2 days. Baby food should always be served from a container other than the jar it came in. Take out only the amount of food you think the child will eat. If the child does not eat it all, food should *not* be returned to the original jar.*

*Note: When the baby is fed from the jar of food, the bacteria from the baby's mouth contaminates the food so that bacteria will grow rapidly in the jar. In addition, salivary amylase from the baby's mouth breaks down the starch and deteriorates the product.

Most food poisoning can be controlled by cooking and refrigeration. Since most bacteria gets into food through careless handling, it is important that everything in the food preparation area be clean. Also, hot food should be kept hot (140-165°F) and cold food should be kept cold (40°F or colder). Never keep any food out at room temperature for more than two hours.

- How are dishes cleaned or sanitized?

A dishwasher with a very hot water rinse, a boiling water rinse sink, or a disinfectant rinse for dishes helps to keep down the spreading of illnesses and microorganisms.

Feeding Relationship

It is important that you feel comfortable leaving your child in the child care situation you have selected. In addition to your child's feeding, you also need to consider the relationship that you develop with your care provider. You may have some very specific ideas on how you want your child fed. You need to be assured that the provider will carry out your wishes as much as possible. Communication is very important between provider and parent.

Visit the child care setting during mealtime so that you can evaluate the following: how the children are fed, the feeding environment, the amount of food and the manner in which it is served to the children, and whether food is used as reward or punishment. Food should be served in a positive environment without reward or punishment.

The feeding relationship between parent, provider, and child needs to be comfortable and consistent. Always remember that the role of a parent and a child care provider is to provide a variety of nutritious food for the child. It is then the child's role to determine how much and what to eat. It is not the role of the parent or provider to force feed the child. When selecting care for your child be sure to consider nutrition, food safety, and the kind of feeding relationship you would like to have between you, your child, and the child care provider.

Many resources are available on child nutrition and food safety. For further information, contact your local Minnesota county extension office.

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