

BANANAS CHOOSING CHILD CARE HANDOUT

Child Care Issues For Expectant & New Parents

Child care can be a powerful issue for new parents. Many people are surprised by the strong feelings stirred up when they become parents, but the deep love and responsibility you feel for your baby can be a source of anxiety as well as great joy. Most new parents say they were shocked by the realization that their lives would never be the same. Some say that their relationship with their own parents and partners changed and took on different meanings, for better or for worse. Others say their own ability to cope or feel in control was never as shaky as it was in those early months (years) of parenthood. With all this turmoil as the background for leaving a child in another's care, it is no wonder that new parents often feel confused and anxious at the very thought.

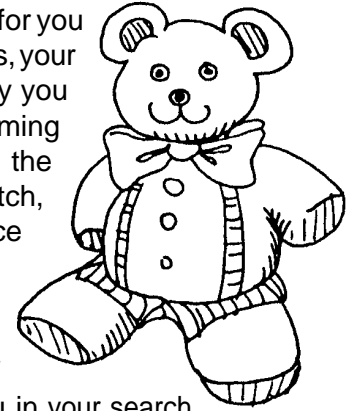
All Parents Need Child Care

Whether you are at home with your baby and want time for yourself (or other family members), or whether you're going back to school or returning to outside work, you will eventually have to (and want to) look for a substitute caregiver. In any case, you will have a variety of options from which to choose. You will also have the hard work of interviewing and making a choice that best meets your needs. You may go through a period of some anxiety, guilt or worry (call it what you will). Often these feelings drive you to seek the best care. You will find out as you go through this process that both you and your child can grow and develop and still remain the apples of each other's eyes.

What's Really Available?

You have a number of child care choices. There are licensed settings – either family child care homes or child care centers that care for groups of children. There are women (most, but not all, providers are women) who will take care of children from one family in the caregiver's home. There are in-home caregivers who work in (and sometimes live in) a parent's home. There are caregivers hired and shared by two or more families to reduce costs and provide companionship for their children. There are also other informal parent-organized care situations, such as exchanges, play-groups or babysitting co-ops.

Which kind of care will work for you depends on your preferences, your finances and how frequently you need the care. Luck and timing also play a role in making the perfect parent-provider match, although nothing can replace the hard work of knowing your options and pursuing them. BANANAS has a number of *Choosing Child Care Handouts* to help you in your search, including *Choosing Infant and Toddler Care*. This Handout describes the various options for infant care and gives you information on what regulations (if any) apply to each type of care. Another Handout, "*Separating from Infants and Toddlers*," discusses the practical and emotional aspects of leaving a young child in care. Request our Publication List for a complete list of our Handouts or check our website at www.bananasinc.org. As you search for and begin to use child care, we hope these publications will be informative and supportive.



Issues For Stay-At-Home Parents

The availability of child care for stay-at-home parents is closely tied to what these parents can afford and how often they need child care. Many licensed child care programs (especially child care centers) will only consider enrolling children who need full-time or regular part-time care. Many caregivers who come into a parent's home want regular ongoing work. But there are still some family child care providers and in-home caregivers (especially teenagers) who welcome caring for children who need occasional care. Planning ahead and scouting around for care well before it's needed is important.

Parents who stay at home frequently turn to others for child care – exchanging care with each other, hiring an in-home caregiver to share with a friend, organizing a babysitting co-op or forming a playgroup. While some parents want time to themselves, many parents are looking for a child-centered social network to relieve their isolation. To find other parents, contact BANANAS for our publications on parent-created care and look

through our files of parents looking for playgroups and exchanges. Contact other parents you may have met in your childbirth classes and support groups or who you frequently see in the grocery store or at the park. Parents at home are in the minority in many neighborhoods. If you are staying at home with your baby, reach out to others and take time for yourself. Although sporadic child care can be difficult to arrange, it is well worth the effort.

Issues For Parents Who Work Outside The Home

The child care choices of working parents also depend on financial resources and scheduling. Most parents face the added dilemma of deciding when to return to work and whether to work full- or part-time. Often these choices must be made during a short and frequently unpaid maternity leave when parents are exhausted financially as well as emotionally. BANANAS offers a special workshop every month called “Choosing Infant Care” to assist parents in sorting out the issues connected with returning to work after the birth of a baby. Call for dates and times or check the events calendar on our website at www.bananasinc.org.

Why Doesn't BANANAS Make Recommendations?

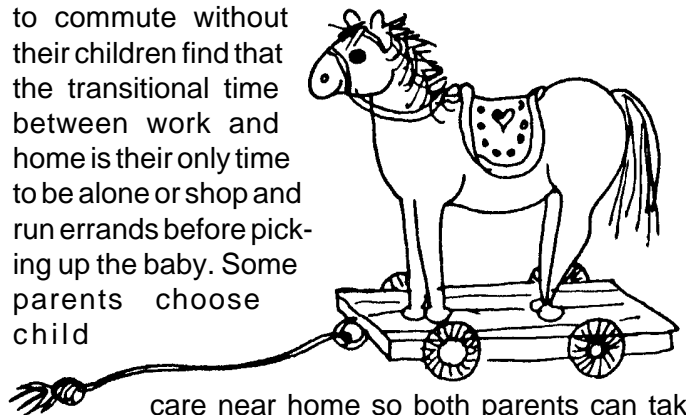
BANANAS' child care counselors are available to help you explore your options and feelings. We are not able, however, to recommend a particular provider or even a particular type of child care. We attempt to keep our information as complete and as current as possible but we try to remain non-judgmental to be fair to all parents and providers.

Choosing child care is a very personal decision involving a parent's values and expectations balanced against what is really available and how much parents can afford to pay. No one – no matter how knowledgeable about children and child care – can make the decision for you. In our files, you will find many providers and programs which are good, loving choices for your baby and some that are not right for you. The quality of the programs and providers will become apparent to you as you visit and check out references.

Commuting With Baby

There are different opinions about choosing child care which is near work or near home. As with most parenting decisions, no one way is the best. Having a child close to your job or school allows you to visit and to continue breastfeeding if you so choose. It reduces your response time in case of illness or emergencies and gives you a few more minutes with your baby during the commute. On the other hand, parents who choose

to commute without their children find that the transitional time between work and home is their only time to be alone or shop and run errands before picking up the baby. Some parents choose child



care near home so both parents can take turns in taking the child to and from care. Decide which option will work best for your family.

Who's In Charge? (Besides Baby)

When you hire a caregiver to work in your home or to share with other families, you have more to say about the child care situation than when you use family child care or a child care center. In the first situation, you call the shots about acceptable activities, routines and practices. However, when you use licensed care, you are one of a number of families making requests and sometimes contradictory demands on the provider. If you are happy with the way the provider is caring for your baby, getting your way in other areas may seem less important. You are always in charge of where you decide to put your child in care. Having made that choice, however, you must be prepared to be flexible and make compromises.

Employer Issues

A work atmosphere which is supportive to families is invaluable. Know your employee benefits. Ask your employer to consider flexible work options if possible. Advocate for parents' rights to use their own sick and vacation leave to care for their sick children. Ask your employer to explore “DCAPS” – a benefit which allows employees to set aside a portion of their pre-tax income to pay for child care. This can save both employees and employers money. Obtain permission to turn a bulletin board into a parent communication center where parents can post notices.

Common Child Care Myths

You will receive lots of advice from friends and relatives and the media. Separating truth from fiction can be very difficult. Following are some of the most common myths about child care:

Myth: It's never too soon to look for child care.

Planning ahead is important but, believe it or not,

parents can plan too soon. Although you can (and should) do much of the research on local child care options while you are pregnant – interviewing caregivers, talking to other parents, visiting local programs, putting your “to be born” on waiting lists, etc. – we advise to not actually choose the situation until after your baby arrives. No one can prepare you for the feelings you will have after your child is born. For example, you may have always thought you would return to work immediately, but your feelings and the baby’s needs may dictate otherwise. Also, no one can predict what kind of a baby you will have, easy going and undemanding or colicky or in need of specialized care. Begin thinking about child care early but give yourself time before making that final decision.

Myth: Good child care is almost impossible to find.

No, it’s not impossible, but it is true that, unless you are very lucky, finding good child care will take lots of work. Yes, mediocre child care does exist but that is not the whole story. Don’t let scary stories defeat you before you begin your search. Keep an open mind about a variety of possibilities and types of care. Keep calling or coming back to BANANAS for more choices. Think positively.

Myth: After you find a good child care program, the rest is easy.

Your job doesn’t end just because you have chosen care. It takes work to maintain a good child care situation through open communication and mutual respect. Choosing care is only the first step in an ongoing process. Your needs, your child’s needs or the provider’s program will change over time. This is appropriate. You may need to adjust to new situations and sometimes you will need to find new care.

Myth: Children in child care are always sick.

The real myth is that children do not get sick when kept at home. Illness in childhood is inevitable. Children in child care do get sick and they may be exposed to more germs than if they weren’t in care. Their world as well as their germ pool is growing. The good news is that, while they may get sick more often now, they will probably get sick less when they are older because of their experience with illness and the resulting resistance they build. Plan on missing work four to eight days each year.

Myth: One caregiver can’t possibly take care of that many children.

Family child care providers can receive a license to care for six or eight children; or for 12 or 14 children, if

they hire an assistant. As a new parent who can’t seem to get anything done with just one child, the thought of caring for that many children probably seems overwhelming if not absolutely impossible. But there are many child care providers who are so well organized that they can manage the daily routine as well as meet the individual needs of each child (and each parent).

On the other hand, there are providers who may not manage as well and this will be apparent to you as you visit. Keep an open mind – don’t assume that only a one-to-one situation will work for your child. Remember, families used to be much larger and household tasks used to consume more of a homemaker’s time.

Myth: Abuse is common in child care.

Periodically, media reports and rumors run rampant about physical and sexual abuse in child care. These reports really reflect rare occurrences; the vast majority of abuse takes place in home settings – not in child care. Still, these stories tap into our darkest fears about losing control and our inability to protect our children. Although abuse is very rare, no one can give you complete assurances that it could never happen. But we can give you suggestions about minimizing the risk:

By law, parents have the right to check the complaint history of licensed child care providers with the State of California’s Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division, 510-622-2614. Once your child is enrolled in a program, be sure you have unannounced visiting privileges and do visit at various times. (The same is true if you employ an in-home caregiver.) If you have concerns, ask for a current roster of enrolled parents so you can check with other parents. Make sure you have an understanding with the provider that your child will never be taken off the premises without your knowledge and that “blanket” consent forms for field trips are not acceptable. Get to know any other people involved in the child care – assistants, family members, neighbors who drop by. Be sure the provider knows who has permission to pick up your child. You should respect that arrangement by always letting her know ahead of time about changes.

Always check out your concerns with the provider and with others in the program. Remember that active preschoolers will get minor bumps and bruises while in care and they will become sexually curious. BANANAS has materials explaining these normal milestones to help you decide whether there is cause for worry. If you have talked to everyone concerned and are still not satisfied, you can anonymously ask the local licensing office, 510-622-2602, to investigate your concerns.

Feel free to call BANANAS for more information on reporting procedures.

Myth: I'll have to give up nursing when my baby enters child care.

Many women who use child care successfully maintain a nursing schedule that fits their life style. Some parents select child care close to their worksite so the baby can be nursed during the lunch hour. This choice is most successful in situations where both the employer and the child care provider are very supportive, the parent's routine is predictable and the baby and parent are on similar schedules. Others nurse just before leaving the child in care and as soon as the child is picked up. Some moms decide to give their babies expressed milk and others supplement breast milk with formula. In any case, getting baby to "nurse" from a bottle, at least three times a week in early infancy, will help later if you want to continue nursing after your child enters child care. BANANAS offers a "Breastfeeding and Working" workshop as well as a "Breastfeeding and Working" Handout with more tips on this topic.

Myth: My baby will be "cheated" by being in child care.

Being in child care can be a rich and rewarding experience for a child. Babies growing up at home in traditional families are now the exception, not the norm, and in most cultures, other people besides parents assist in raising children. For "only" or first-born children, child care can provide those missing sibling experiences which help a child learn to give and take. Children are not cheated by quality child care.

Myth: My baby will love the provider more than me.

While frequently unspoken, this may be the most worrisome myth of all. The first time baby reaches out for a provider can strike a discordant note in a parent's heart. However, your baby is not going to stop loving you because of being in child care. If your little one becomes attached to the provider, it actually proves that you have made a good choice and that your baby is thriving in the child care setting.

These are a few of the most common myths. You may have others you want to discuss. Remember BANANAS Warmline, 658-6046, when you have concerns you are reluctant to discuss with your friends or pediatrician but can't stop worrying about.

More About BANANAS

To help you through any rocky times BANANAS can offer information on a variety of parenting topics, support groups, prenatal and postpartum exercise classes, breastfeeding support services and more. Ask for a copy of our Newsletter which announces classes, workshops and conferences sponsored by BANANAS. Or access the information on-line at www.bananasinc.org. The announcements pages of our Newsletter are full of parents looking for shares, playgroups and exchanges, and also list workshops and services for new and expectant parents offered by community agencies and organizations.

We have many free Handouts which may interest you. "Living with Ones and Twos," "Setting Limits" and "Separating from Infants and Toddlers" may have particular appeal. If you need help as you begin this new and frequently overwhelming role of being a parent, call BANANAS. If we can't help you, we'll try to find someone who can.

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