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Discovering Your Daycare Options: Types of Childcare and What's Right For You

Advantages and Disadvantages of In-Home Childcare

If you have small children, then you probably have to grapple with the realities of childcare. After all, most folks have to work for a living, and many do not have grandparents who can watch the little ones all of the time. For many a parent the search for the right daycare provider is hard to do.

Granted, there are numerous leaflets and booklets available that are designed to help you understand what to look for, but when it comes to that personal touch, they are not as accommodating. For example, should you choose the big daycare center or should you choose the small in-home childcare? By the book they all check out ok, but when it comes to understanding the pros and cons, you are unsure. To help you make the best decision possible for your children, here are the advantages and disadvantages of in-home childcare.

An in-home daycare is almost always run out of the individual provider's home. This means that when you enter the home, you will get a good "feel" of the atmosphere of the place. Is it dark and musty or is it airy, light and welcoming? If you have a good feel just walking into the place, this may be a good indicator on how children are treated there. At a daycare center, the corporate office usually chooses the colors and décor, and it is next to impossible to get a gut level feel for the atmosphere.

Since the in-home provider is residential, the odds are pretty good that she (or he) is located near your own home. This will cut down on driving time, which is a welcome fact when getting ready to spend some quality time with your children. After all, since you have been away for a long period of time, you will want to spend as much time with the kids as possible before having to enforce the bedtime. The close proximity of your in-home provider may be one of the biggest advantages!

Usually there are fewer children in an in-home setting. This will ensure that your child will get more personalized attention, and it will take away the institutional feel that sometimes permeates a daycare center setting. After all, an in-home provider will be able to shift gears quickly and accommodate the children in her (or his) care if they wish to do more coloring rather than moving on to the next scheduled activity. Similarly, if your child is shy by nature, she or he will probably do better in a setting that has fewer kids.

Since there is less overhead, the pricing of an in-home childcare is usually less than that of a daycare center. This is a wonderful advantage if you are on a budget but still want the best available care for your child.

If you need some flexibility, then an in-home provider probably has the advantage. Even though policies and procedures are in place about early drop-offs and late pick-ups, you might still be able to work out something with the provider without having to pay an arm and a leg.

Of course, there are also some disadvantages to an in-home childcare setting. For example, while you may assure your provider to the contrary, and while at face value she (or he) may accept your explanation; you will always feel awkward about dropping by unannounced for a surprise visit. These visits are important to your feeling comfortable with the setting and the provider, but since you are essentially intruding into someone's home, this might make it a little odd at times.

Another disadvantage that you may need to face is the fact that individuals other than your regular care provider have access to the home. While it may be uncomfortable to ask, you do want to make sure that there is nobody in the home with a criminal record, with a history of drug use, or who might be smoking around the children. Of course, you can only take the provider's word for this, since there is no way to actually obtain proof.

Many in-home providers are unlicensed. While this is not bad in and of itself, it does beg the question why the provider has chosen to remain thusly. Is she (or he) unable to comply with the rules of the governing agency, or is the provider simply not willing to go through the whole process. If the former is the case, then there may be safety issues at stake that you need to think about; if it is the latter, then your provider may be in the business for the money and not so much for the care of the children.

Daycare vs. In-Home Childcare: The Great Debate

If you have children who are in need of daycare, then you are undoubtedly privy to the great debate that centers on daycare vs. in-home childcare. Both have their merits, but it appears that there are lines drawn between the supporters of each choice that are very hard to overcome. Generally speaking, there are a number of reasons why either setting would work just fine, but to take a more objective look at the facility; here are some questions you need to ask:

What are the hours of operation? A daycare center will usually have structured hours and there is little flexibility when it comes to your having an emergency. On the other hand, in-home childcare facilitators will often be able to work with you if you run into trouble.

Perhaps they might agree to allow you to drop off your child extra early, or they will permit you to have your child stay extra late so you can finish that presentation that your boss is hounding you about. If you were to run into the same fix with a daycare center, you should usually expect to make alternate arrangements for pick-up or drop-off.

Where is it located? Some daycare centers have multiple centers and if you move you will be able to seamlessly move your child from one facility to another. In-home childcare is pretty much limited to the home of your childcare provider. If you move, you will either have to resign yourself to finding a new provider or you will have to do a lot of extra driving.

Is it licensed? Daycare centers are almost always licensed, and you might want to ask a lot of questions if they are not. In-home childcare may or may not be licensed, and there are only a few requirements why they should be. The problem with unlicensed care is simply the fact that you do not have the oversight of a governing agency to ensure that the facility is adequate.

Not having a license also means that the facility or home really does not have a lot to lose if they provide substandard care; the worst you can do is walk away and take your business elsewhere. If, on the other hand, a license is at stake, the provider will be a lot more accountable to you for the care she or he provides to the children.

Additionally, having a license will permit you to research the provider for outstanding violations and other reported problems. One caveat when it comes to unlicensed in-home childcare: while the provider may be wonderful, the same may not be said from other adults living in or having access to the home. Since no criminal and drug backgrounds are checked, you may have folks near your child that ordinarily you may not approve of.

What are the personnel like? Whether you are looking at a daycare center or an in-home provider, you want to make sure that they are able to perform child CPR, first aid, and know what to do in case of an emergency. Proof of such training should be accessible to you upon request. You may also wish to ask what kind of training the individuals in charge of your children have when it comes to child development and childcare.

Ask about the policy with respect to parental visits. Providers should welcome you with open arms when you visit without appointment. If there are locked doors, and if it takes a long time for the in-home provider to open up, you might have a problem. Similarly, if the daycare center is less than accommodating when you visit, you may wish to look somewhere else for a care provider.

As you can see, there are a number of things to check into before deciding on any kind of childcare. All things being equal, however, if you need flexibility, then an in-home childcare provider may have a slight edge. If, on the other hand, you do not have a particular need for flexibility but instead want an assurance that licenses are in place, and policies and procedures have a more professional look to them, then a daycare center will probably do the trick for you. But keep in mind that excellent quality care can be found in either setting.

Nix the Daycare and Consider In-Home Care Options

If you're thinking about using an in-home care option for your children that are under school age, then you're not alone. According to recent statistics in-home daycare for children is growing rapidly as a childcare choice for working parents. There are benefits and a few drawbacks of using a care option like this, and knowing what they are will help you make the best decision for you, and your children.

Some parents are choosing to opt out of the typical daycare center routine because it doesn't fit their emotional or physical requirements that they desire for their children. If you're one of

them that feel that a more loving and nurturing environment would be good for your children, then you'll join others that feel the same way. In-home daycares take children into their home on a daily or flexible schedule that's needed by the parents, and most are state regulated, and inspected on a periodic basis. Another benefit is that home care provides a small group of children a lot of interpersonal social interactions with different age levels. Your children will be able to not only be with older kids, but with a few of their own age too.

In-home daycares have the advantage over larger daycare centers of feeling less institutionalized, but you'll find that they're not closed as often, except for major holidays or personal illness. Many times in-home daycares will be found in smaller neighborhoods, and are just a hop, skip and jump from your own home.

Children love being able to recognize their neighborhood, and feel very comfortable playing with others that they know. For the fun activities such as crafts in a home daycare situation your children will be able to not only participate in group craft activities, but will be able to play and experiment making things on their own. Learning is much more personalized and focused because in-home childcare providers will often be trained in working with preschoolers, and kindergarten aged children.

Other benefits for parents are that in-home care is not as costly as daycare centers for children. Depending on the area in which you live, a price of \$20.00 off per week per child compared with a daycare center is a good deal. Of course typically larger daycare centers will give multi discounts if more than one child is enrolled, but some in-home care will do the same too.

Extra charges from in-home care are not as expensive either, nor is it charged as much because they're more flexible in attitude and their practices. It's a more personal attentive type of care, and interest in the family's personal situation. For example, if you're a few minutes late in picking up your child from daycare at an in-home service, you often won't be charged a late fee. These fees can add up in cost in a hurry, so it's nice to have.

Drawbacks of in-home care for your children are there and need to be understood. Anyone can open a daycare in their home, and quality ones will be run by the state, but there is the danger that some won't be, so check them out. Also, a few childcare providers might not have any child development training or safety classes beyond what's required by the state. This is not always true of course, but when placing your children in a care situation like this look for someone that has some child related college instruction under their belt.

The always present issue of illness from your in-home care provider for your children is there too. There's always the possibility that the home might shut down too due to illness or financial matters. You'll need to have a good back up plan with other types of care such as relatives, or on the list for emergency care at your local daycare center.

Using an in-home care option for your children is fast becoming a popular method of care. Only you can decide what's best for your children, so learn all you can about the issues. It's their safety emotionally and physically that is top priority, and if you find a good in-home daycare for your children make sure to stick with them, and thank them too for being there for you and your children.

Important Steps to Take in Becoming Licensed as an In-Home Childcare Provider

Becoming an in-home childcare provider is a wonderful step to take for the right individual! You will have the privilege of interacting with many children and the kids will enrich your life with their personalities, antics, and boundless love and affection that only children feel free to express so generously. Similarly, you will have a formative influence on them and are able to instill your values on their impressionable minds. Of course, there are some important steps to take in becoming licensed as an in-home childcare provider.

Before you can throw open your doors and invite parents to drop off their children, you will need to take some classes in infant and child first aid and CPR. This can usually be done by an afternoon spent with the Red Cross or another agency that offers the classes and will provide you with the adequate paperwork necessary to prove to your state agency that you have indeed taken this very important class.

Another class that a licensing agency will want you to take is one that deals with child development and childcare. While there are many options to choose from, it is important that you find out exactly which classes your licensing agency will accept. At times, they may even offer the classes themselves. While you may already know a lot of childcare and child development, it is not a bad idea to find out what current trends are. By the way, once you have obtained your license, you will need to keep it current by agreeing to attend annual training sessions with a set number of hours!

If you are planning to employ some helpers alongside you, they too will need to take the training.

You will need to fill out an application to be licensed. When the application is received, a representative of the licensing agency will make an appointment to take a look at your home. Since this will be your place of business, s/he will want to make sure that it is an adequate environment for the children. While it may appear a bit invasive, remember that it is done for a good cause, and that it is in your and the children's best interest to be alert to problem areas.

The agency representative will discuss with you which areas of the home are inadequate, what needs to be changed, rearranged, or simply moved out of reach. Did you know, for example, that there are a large number of houseplants that could be poisonous to children, and should be removed from any areas that the children will be playing in? Your local Fire Marshall may also send out a representative to ensure that your house is up to code, and has an adequate number of working fire extinguishers.

Renew your license every two years or as indicated.

There are certain other licensing requirements, depending on the kind of daycare you wish to run. For example, are you planning on running a daycare center that specializes in infants, or will you prefer to take children slightly older? Whatever you may decide, it is important to know that depending on the age group you are willing to take in, you may have to limit the number of older children – or younger children – that you can also accept. Additionally, there are

certain number ratios that need to be observed – depending on the number of children you will accept; you may need to hire a helper.

Additionally, you and anyone else who will be in the home while the children are present will quite possibly have to submit to a drug test, criminal background check, and maybe even a mental health check.

Read and understand the rules of licensure and implement ways to comply with them.

As you can see, there is so much more to becoming licensed as an in-home daycare provider than simply opening up your doors and your arms. These are important steps that take some time and dedication, but the results are well worth it. Additionally, the license will permit you to reach a whole new clientele that is in search of a licensed setting rather than an unlicensed one. So go ahead and contact your licensing agency today!

For the In-Home Child Care Provider: Rainy Day Tips to Keep the Kids Busy

Rainy days are inevitable and therefore it is essential for an in-home childcare provider to find ways to keep the children in her care both busy and entertained throughout the long day. There are many things you can do if you put your thinking cap on. Read on for some suggestions for the rainy day blahs.

Reading is always an excellent option. Read to the kids, take turns reading different passages of the book or give everyone a different book and trade after everyone is finished reading theirs. If the kids want to talk about the book or books and in particular the characters they liked the most and why.

You might even want to act out the book or perhaps create a play of your own with the kids and act it out. Another idea is to put on a puppet show to entertain everybody present. Children can fashion the most basic puppets out of old socks or paper bags. Both these options can while away hours and can bring about lots of smiles and laughter.

Make lunch more interesting on a rainy day by hosting an indoor picnic. Put a blanket down on the floor and then offer an assortment of foods such as small sandwiches in a variety of animal shapes made from cookie cutters, carrot and celery sticks, potato or macaroni salad, apples, grapes and so on. Put on a nature tape to make it seem even more realistic. Kids are likely to get a kick out of this. If the kids nap encourage them to lie down on the picnic blanket after lunch and have a rest.

Teach the kids how to make a simple craft or learn a new hobby. The public library should be full of books of instructional videos on things you can try. Suggestions include painting, latch hooking, knitting or crocheting. Keep in mind the age group(s) of the children you are taking care of. If one is too young for these crafts you might instead want to simply color or draw pictures. You don't want a fight to erupt between the children after all!

If you are an in-home childcare provider for girls, then have a fun rainy afternoon of playing dress up! Gather together lots of old dresses, fancy hats, shoes, gloves and scarves and take turns dressing up and pretending to walk down a catwalk like the models do at their shows. You might even want to give prizes for the most imaginative costume, the funniest costume, the most colorful ensemble and so on. You might even want to put a touch of play makeup on the girls to make them feel even more like fancy ladies in their evening finest.

Drape a blanket or a sheet over the living couch and chairs or over a table in the recreation room and pretend it is an indoor tent. Let the children play under their with their toys or make up a fun adventure like you are on a safari in Africa and are looking for elephant, giraffes, monkeys and the like. Encourage the children in your care to be as creative with their ideas as possible. You might even want to climb under the tent with them and read them a story about animals or being on a fun safari in a faraway place. Serve crackers, pretzels or trail mix and juice as a snack in the tent and have a hoot!

Move some furniture out of the center of the living room or recreation room, put some music on and do some exercises such as jogging on the spot, jumping jacks, bicycles, leg lifts, push ups and sit ups. However don't wear the kids out too much! Then after the exercises are done you might want to have more fun by turning the exercise time into a time to express themselves through dance. Show the children some of your dance moves and get them involved in the groove!

If the kids are still bored then maybe you should ask for suggestions or let them watch a cartoon on television or on a video. Also sometimes it is a good idea on a rainy day to just let the children go off into their prospective bedrooms and play with whatever toys they want to.

Great Nutritional Snack Ideas for the In-Home Child Care Provider

If you are an in-home child care provider you need some great nutritional snack ideas that keep the little in-between meals fun and tasty, but at the same time easy on the pocket book. Now keep in mind that many times the governing agency, if you are a licensed in-home child care provider, will set a standard of what a snack needs to have as a bare minimum to qualify as adequate. Usually the list looks something like this:

- Milk
- Fruit, vegetable, or juice
- Bread or an acceptable alternative
- Meat or an acceptable alternative

Of these choices, two out of four options need to be chosen to comprise an adequate snack. Assuming that the children in your care do not have any dietary needs that preclude the use of certain ingredients, here is a list of two quick and easy snack ideas you will love and the kids will gobble up.

Veggie-Kabobs

Cut into bite-sized pieces a medium squash (yellow works best), a zucchini, and a bell pepper. Thread the veggies on skewers and drizzle some Italian salad dressing over them. Barbeque the kabobs over a grill outside, or inside the oven for about five minutes on each side. Serve with crackers and a tall glass of milk. For younger kids, be sure to remove the skewers before serving!

Humming Hummus

You could purchase a tub of hummus, or simply make your own. To make your own, combine one can of drained chickpeas, five tablespoons of cold water, one tablespoon of olive oil, the juice of one small lemon, one quarter teaspoon of salt, one and one half tablespoons of sesame seed paste, and -depending on your and the children's taste for spices- a clove of garlic and half a green jalapeno pepper inside a blender. Blend for about half a minute, and then serve on chilled plates. For dipping, offer crackers, cucumber slices, or pita bread slices.

When preparing snacks for the children in your care, make sure that the portions you serve are actually kid-sized and not adult sized. It is easy to overdo it, but you want to make sure that the kids do not lose their appetites for the lunch or dinner that is to follow.

As an in-home daycare provider it is often tempting to rely on prepackaged snacks, and in a pinch they do come in handy, but as a general rule of thumb, keep in mind that the prepackaged goods are usually loaded with sodium and fat or sugar and are not as nutritious as you would like them to be. Here are some ideas for great standbys to use when in a time crunch:

Keep pre-sliced fruits and vegetables on hand. Many can be store bought, while others can be prepared the night before.

Always have some bagels and English muffins on hand. A bagel with tuna salad or an English muffin with some herbed cream cheese is a wonderful snack idea.

Cheese sticks can be your best friends! Cube them and serve them alongside other finger foods, such as grapes, carrot sticks, celery stick, or cucumber slices.

Bread sticks are great for dipping! Provide a smorgasbord of dips, such as hummus, tuna salad, cream cheese, and marmalade, and allow the kids to pick what they would like to eat. Careful though – no double dipping!

Keep some grated mozzarella cheese in your fridge. When you put this on a bagel or English muffin and add some pepperoni, you have a quick and easy mini pizza.

As you can see, whether you want to follow some tasty recipes to cook up the snacks with the kids, or if you want to rely on some tried and true standbys, there are some great nutritional snack ideas for the in-home childcare provider. Beware of the quick and easy snack many parents love to provide – chips – and its various cousins.

They are nothing but fat and carbohydrates, and no matter how you try to dress them up, they are still not healthy and may contribute to obesity in children. If you find that one the parents you work with persistently brings them, you might want to slip them the recipe for the vegetable kabobs or humming hummus and see if they want to try those out!

Terrific Tips for Helping Your Child Integrate With Their Child Care Provider

Children have fears just like adults, so if you're thinking about sending your children to a daycare center, then know how to prepare your children for this new and potentially scary change in their lifestyle, this is especially true for children that have never been in a daycare situation before. By being prepared for their new adventure, you'll get prepared for the change too. There are some very simple steps that you can make which will make their daycare experience a happy one.

Before you tell your children about going to daycare, look into the all of the available options that you have for care. More and more parents are choosing to send them to an in-home care situation at other people's houses. Some are nearby relatives, or older adults that are retired to watch their children too. If you can afford it a nanny is another option, but be prepared to shell out some big bucks for this type of care.

Highly experienced and credentialed nannies will often make more than the average worked in the U.S. Shared care providers in neighborhoods are becoming popular too where care is provided on a rotating basis by either the family, or if they have employed a nanny they will look after other children in their home. Check out all of your options and see what works for your family.

If a daycare provider at a center is chosen there are ways to get your children ready to work with them. One of the best ways is to take them by, and let them spend a day with the kids in their group, and with the teacher(s) that will be looking after them. It might be necessary to stay with them at the center, even if it means that you'll need to take a day off.

Make sure your child has the opportunity to see all the building that they'll be in, and ask for a tour of the playground area too. You could just spend part of the day, and go back within a few days when the activities are different because it could be more beneficial to your children to feel not pressured. Encourage your child to speak with others about how they like the center, a good idea is to ask the daycare provider to introduce your child to other children that are happy but have just started going to the center.

A caring childcare provider will let you take home a list of activities and schedules that will pertain to your child's age group. When you get home you can talk about what you did, and ask for your child's input about their experience. Ask them how they felt about their care giver, and if possible let them go as many times as they feel they want too back to the daycare center. This might be necessary anyway because daycares will often have several different teachers for the shifts at a center. Letting your child talk openly and honestly about how they felt, and what they want in daycare is the best way to prepare them for a working relationship with their daycare provider.

If you have doubts about your child's acceptance of the daycare you feel is best for them, talk with the administrator, and see if they can give you tips that will help your child feel more at ease about the situation. In the end you might have to search for another daycare if, after they have attended for a while, does not work. It will take some time for them to adjust, so make sure you and the center work with your child, and try different approaches to help them feel comfortable and accepted.

Finally, if all else fails look for other alternative childcare options. Some children need a more personalized setting to learn and grow in, like in-home care. Smaller groups and individualized lessons can be offered in that setting. Again, you might find it useful to let a nearby relative care for them until they are ready to enter the world of a daycare center. The choice is ultimately yours but always remember the child because they are the one in daycare.

When Staying at Home Becomes the Best Option for Your Child Care Needs

More and more mothers are deciding to stay at home to care for their children. It helps that many workplaces are beginning to acknowledge the importance of flexible work options and also the value of family time.

Some women decide to stay at home because childcare is simply too costly, while others may have a child with special needs or health considerations who needs mom home with him or her. Still other mothers simply want a more flexible schedule that affords them a balanced lifestyle between hours spent working and quality time spent with the children and the rest of the family.

Staying at home in many cases is the best option for your child care needs especially if you have very small children who require constant hands on care that only a mother can give. Keep in mind however that mothers are not the only ones who are beginning to take advantage of the many benefits to staying at home. More and more fathers are staying at home and reaping the benefits of extra family time as well.

Many women believe the advantages of staying at home far outweigh the disadvantages. There is no commuting back and forth to work in rush hour traffic, no need to put on a suit and pantyhose, no need to eat greasy foods for lunch at the cafeteria and there is plenty of time to spend time with the kids and sit in front of the computer and/or make business calls in your pajamas or casual clothes.

If the stay at home office appeals to you, it is important to keep in mind that your home first and foremost is the domain of your personal and family life and not your professional life. Set up a room or corner of a room for your office and preferably make it somewhere that is not close to your bedroom or the living room or kitchen. Make sure your spouse and children all understand that this is your office and it is from where your work is done.

It is a good idea to put a phone line in that is specifically for your work or business. An answering machine is also a must. Although you are working at home, remember that many people are not. In other words try to make and return all business related calls during business

hours. If getting a second line is impossible due to financial considerations then remember that any call you receive throughout the daytime could be a professional call and not necessarily a personal one. Always answer the telephone in a professional and courteous sounding manner.

Broadband cable or DSL are a must for the stay at home parent. You need Internet access that is fast and can provide everything you need to receive files via e-mail and check out websites. A wireless Internet connection is an excellent option for the stay at home parent.

Purchase a wireless router and card for your laptop and then you can take it anywhere throughout the house to do work while you also watch your children. Sit on the patio with it while your children play in the pool or sandbox, sit on the living room couch while your children play a game, and so on. You make your stay at home working experience much more versatile when you make the decision to go wireless.

More and more alternative employment options abound today than ever before. If flexibility is what you yearn for and you would like to be a stay at home parent down the line then consider telecommuting work. Telecommuting is an option that appeals to many workers. In this case a person works from home but stays connected by technology to either an outside employer or works independently as a contractor for a company.

Some people telecommute part of the time and go into the work place for the other half. This has many advantages for people with children. Self-employment is another option for stay at home parents that can be difficult at first but can allow the person to reap tremendous benefits once the business begins turning a profit. Making the decision to stay at home is a very important one that must be looked at from many different angles. One thing for sure is that the children are sure to be pleased to have mom or dad home on a steady basis throughout the daytime.

The Roles of a Mother's Helper in Regards to Child Care Duties

Whether you are a stay-at-home-mom or a working-at-home-mom or a working-outside-the-home-mom, having a "mother's helper" can tremendously lighten your workload. Of course, knowing how to get the most out of your mother's helper will help you achieve that goal. Since a mother's helper will work under your supervision, it really helps to know first, what you expect from your mother's helper in regards to childcare.

A young person who plans on working in the childcare field often fills the job of a mother's helper. Of course, this is not limited to these criteria. Above all, the role of a mother's helper is a flexible one because, as you know, a family's needs change from week to week and sometimes even from day to day. It may be a part-time position or a full time position depending on your needs. It may also include baby-sitting as well as household chores. Ultimately the roles may change every day, just as your needs and the needs of your family are likely to change.

A mother's helper should be able to do some cooking, cleaning and organizing or basically anything that will save you time so that you can focus on your work for the day, whether that

work is with your children or for a home business or both. Being realistic about what you and your helper can accomplish will make both of your jobs easier.

Determining what sort of help you need helps you to create a clear, easy to follow role for your mother's helper in your household. For example, if you are a stay at home mother who also runs a business at home, more than likely you would need your mother's helper to work in ways that allow you to get your work done.

More than likely, you will require more childcare than household cleaning. It always helps to determine these things ahead of time and communicate them as effectively as possible to your helper, this way your mother's helper will have the highest chance of working effectively in their role.

Sometimes having help with the seemingly endless loads of laundry that need to be washed can facilitate more time for you to spend with your children. This is just one of the ways a mother's helper can help with regards to child care.

Your helper might also spend time with your children so that you can do the laundry, or drop of the dry-cleaning, or catch up on emails. As you can see, it should be a flexible role and you, as the supervisor, should have an ultimate goal in mind when hiring a mother's helper. It also helps to have a list of expected tasks, so that your prospective mother's helper at least has an idea of what is expected of her.

Of course, understanding a mother's helper's role really begins with understanding your own role in the relationship. Whether you like it or not, you will be the boss. Now, that doesn't mean you have to be demanding (in fact, for the sake of the relationship, you should avoid being too demanding) but it does mean that your mother's helper will (and very much should) look to you for guidance and direction.

While mother's helpers can be pretty amazing, they still can't read your mind, so you will need to be clear on what you expect from your hired helper. Don't assume that your helper simply understands what is needed and expected from her on a daily basis. You know how easily situations can change from day to day in a busy household. It's very helpful to both of you to engage in something like a weekly meeting, just to be sure you are both on the same page with regards to what needs to be accomplished.

Most importantly a mother's helper's role should be a flexible one and there should always be a clear line of communication between you and your mother's helper. Your mother's helper will be able to offer you the specific help you need to do all of your jobs, whether they are parenting, household work, or professional work or all of the above, better and more effectively.

The Au pair Advantage: Reasons Why They Might Be a Great Child Care Option

An Au Pair is usually a young adult from a foreign country who does domestic work for a family in exchange for room and board and a chance to learn the family's language. The actual term "Au Pair" is French and, literally translated, means, "at the equal" or, less literally and more understandably "on equality". This meaning may have to do with the fact that Au Pairs do, very much become a part of your extended family by coming to live with you and help around the house and partake in the cultural exchange, thus, they become an "equal".

If the idea of having a child care provider live with your family and even become a part of your extended family sounds great to you, then, an Au Pair just might be the child care option that would work best for you and your family. Au Pairs can be a wonderful option for a family that seeks to make their child care provider a part of their own family. Understandably, Au Pairs are not for everyone, but for many they can be a great childcare option that can leave a unique and lasting impression on your family.

An Au Pair typically receives room and board and sometimes a small stipend. The advantage of simply having your childcare provider live with you and your family can be enormous, especially for the children. Having an Au Pair adds consistency to your children's care.

They will come to think of the Au Pair as a friend or extended family member, rather than simply a baby sitter or someone who substitutes for their parents when their parents can't be there. This results in seamless care for your children. Often the most difficult part of childcare can be the transition, for example, when you are dropping the kids off at the childcare facility or at the babysitters. With live in childcare in the form of an Au Pair, transitions like these are smoothed out.

Au Pairs offer help with light housework and other household tasks. While it is important to set rules and respect your Au Pair's needs and limitations, most Au Pairs are more than willing to take on some chores that will help the family have more quality time together, like laundry, some cleaning, cooking and helping to prepare meals. Au Pairs will definitely help to keep your children's rooms tidy, ensure that children are doing their part to contribute to household chores and help with homework, which will in turn help you to focus on your work.

Perhaps the biggest advantage to hosting an Au Pair is that Au Pairs may come from all over the world and therefore they can offer a unique cultural exchange for you and your family. This sort of cultural exchange can enrich your children's learning experience and expand their knowledge of the world around them. An Au Pair can be an excellent option for families that are seeking to introduce a foreign language to their children or who want to emphasize the importance of travel and knowledge of the world as an important part of their children's education.

If you have several children, having an Au Pair can be an effective and flexible solution to your childcare challenges. Au Pairs will care for more than one child and because they live with your family that care will be more specific and more targeted to your families needs. Let's face it, finding care that is specific to your families needs can be a challenge no matter what size family you have.

Whatever reason you may have for choosing an Au Pair, it is important to remember that, ultimately your child's care is always in your hands. You set the rules, with your children and with the Au Pair. However, in order for an Au Pair to feel like a member of the family and give care and support like a member of the family she should be treated as one. This will not only help your Au Pair to give the best care she can, but will help you kids to think of her and respect her as a part of the extended family.

The Benefits of Choosing a Nanny Over Daycare

If you have children and a job, then it is probably fair to assume that you are in need of some reliable childcare. You only want the very best for your children, and therefore you carefully screen and research your daycare options. One option that is well known for its fantastic results, and high price tag, is the nanny. If you are able to pay for the services of a nanny, you might find that this is the best way to go.

The benefits of choosing a nanny over daycare are ample:

Childcare will take place directly in your own home, and the child will not have to travel to a daycare center. This means that she or he will be in familiar surroundings with one on one care all day long while you are away at work. You do not have to worry about her choking on an inappropriate toy left by another child, or his catching a bad cold from another child.

You have some flexibility with respect to the hours. If your work schedule frequently changes at the drop of a hat, or if you need the ability to call home to let your childcare provider know that you will be running late, then a nanny will be your best option. Granted, you do not want to abuse the privilege, after all, the nanny has a life as well and will rely on the hours you originally agreed upon, but in a pinch she will be able to come through for you.

Since the childcare takes place in your own home, you get to dictate what snacks and meals are provided for your child. This is especially important if your child has certain dietary needs that have to be met in order to assure her or his well being. If you are nutritiously conscious, this will also permit you to ban the idea of crackers and sugary juices in favor of healthier options.

The one on one relationship your child will develop with the nanny will allow you to receive up to date reports on her or his development, creativity, social issues, emotional distress, as well as intellectual development.

Since most nannies are not opposed to a bit of light housework, you will come home to a house that is well kept, maintained, and where no toys are lying about all over the place.

Since your childcare is taking place at home, you will not have to worry about picking up your child, taking her home, preparing her for school the next day, and doing an assortment of other chores that take time away from just enjoying her company.

Nannies are usually checked out by their referring agency, and will have undergone a criminal background check and drug screen.

As opposed to a traditional daycare center, it is easy to see why a nanny offers so many benefits:

At a daycare facility, you are bound by their hours, and usually there is no room for negotiation. You will be fined if you are late picking up your child, and some fines may actually run as high as one dollar for each minute that you are late.

Since the number of children at a daycare facility varies, you know that your child will not get one on one attention as much as a nanny can provide. Depending on the staffing ration that the daycare center offers, your child will only receive a fraction of the attention during the course of a day.

Due to the large number of other children present, the odds are good that your child will be exposed to illness. Since you cannot control the environment and the adherence to hygiene standards, such as hand washing, it is important that your child is up and current on all vaccinations.

At a daycare center, the staff controls the schedule for the day. Even if you do not think that the naptime is adequate, there will be no exception made for your child. Your child will need to adhere to the same schedule as everyone else. If you have a nanny, on the other hand, you will be able to control not only the daily schedule but also any deviations, such as extra naptime if your child had a long night the evening before.

Why Child Care Co-ops Might Be the Best Bet for Your Family

Some parents require child care on a consistent basis because both parents work full time while other parents might only require child care services a couple of days a week or on occasion such as every Tuesday night, every second Wednesday afternoon or one Saturday a month. Child care co-ops are often an excellent bet for busy families because they are a group of people helping one another, each with a common goal- the best care giving possible for every child.

A childcare co-op is also sometimes referred to as a babysitter co-op and it is basically just "an organized collection of babysitting resources for parents." A childcare co-op provides parents with more than one option for their babysitting needs. Whether it is full time, part time or sporadic childcare that you require, a childcare co-op is likely to fit the bill.

A babysitter or childcare co-op is often created by way of a neighborhood group or association, churches, schools (most often elementary schools) or hospitals. The childcare co-op might have particular criteria that it expects its childcare providers or babysitters to follow and criteria necessary for parents looking for babysitting services as well. Not all co-ops are created equal, therefore it is important to speak with the individual who runs each particular group to find out specifically what they will accept or not accept in terms of applicants to the co-op.

Childcare co-ops are often very particular about hiring people who are extremely qualified to look after children. Many co-ops necessitate that the babysitters are over a particular age

(sixteen is usually the youngest that they will hire), that the person has taken a very general first aid course and would have the know how to respond quickly in an emergency situation, and some even expect that their babysitters have taken a special "babysitter safety and preparedness course."

Babysitting courses are sometimes put on by a community group or church for either a small fee or for free and once the individuals have passed the course they automatically are admitted as qualified babysitters into the child care co-op.

One option that often evolves out of a childcare co-op is to recruit a mother's helper. A mother's helper is a person who essentially helps out with childcare duties as well as light housework, meal preparation and sometimes, running errands for a stay at home parent. This sort of arrangement is common for families where one parent is a work at home parent and can only devote part of the day to taking care of the children, keeping the house clean and making meals. Many single parents who work at home also find the services of a mother's helper to be invaluable.

A mother's helper differs from that of a babysitter because the parent is present in the home and therefore the person is working in a supervised manner. As well the person generally does not assume total responsibility for the care of the children but instead divides her time between the children and whatever other household duties the parent requires. The day-to-day duties of a mother's helper tend to vary and the best way to describe this job is that the person is there to "perform duties as per the parent or family's specific needs."

The job of a mother's helper can be flexible in the hours and may be either part time or full time. Some people pay a mother's helper a wage while others pay a salary. As well in most cases this is a job where the person lives out but sometimes one of the requirements is that the person lives with the family.

A playgroup is another childcare option that often evolves out of a babysitter co-op. Playgroups work best for parents who work part time and can share childcare with other parents who work different hours. The size of the playgroup and the age groupings of children vary from one group to another.

This often affords an excellent opportunity for parents to socialize with each other as well as keep up on what is new with each family and child. Together the parents determine a schedule of who watches whose children on what days and for how many hours at a time and this goes for days when parents work, need to go to appointments or run errands and also when parents just want a few hours to themselves.

The Ins and Outs of Drop-In Daycare Centers

The last minute problem of needing a caregiver for children happens to every parent on the planet at some point. It doesn't matter how well the schedule is set, there are occasion where you'll need care for them. There are a lot of benefits of drop in daycare centers, but knowing

the rules will help you plan advance for care at the last minute. It's always best to have in place a back up because life just happens.

Drop in daycare centers are becoming very popular for over worked and harried parents. If you don't have a backup you, could find yourself locked out of a drop in service because of a lot factors. For example, most daycare drop in centers requires that kids must be pre registered to use in their drop in services, and this means paperwork. Also, you'll need to know that not all drop in centers for children have the same hours.

Typically, drop in care is from around eight in the morning to about ten at night. Some don't offer care on the weekends because employees do have a personal life. If services are in place it cuts off at before midnight, and daycare will charge more if the children are left after midnight because it runs into the next day.

There are the traditional daycare centers that offer drop off services, and some that are strictly drop in nature. You'll need to check out in advance the quality of the center that you leave your children with. Any center should hold the same credentials that meet your states guidelines and rules that apply to regular daycare centers.

Look for things such as do the employees have training in CPR (Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation), does it have a staff that's trained in care for all ages, and are there FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) criminal checks done on all employed at the center, not just care givers. For your children's personal safety other factors are important, such as does the center follow the regulations for employee per child ratios of care.

Fees are another area that can be very flexible, and depend a lot on where you live in the U.S. The larger metropolitan areas such as will have larger costs associated with drop in daycare, and less populated areas will have costs run from six to twelve dollars per hour of care. Because it's specialized care on a part time basis all costs will be higher than a typical daycare for daytime workers.

In the drop in daycare service industry you'll find that other fees will apply too. Extra costs for food or diaper use are often charged, and many drop in services required a standardized fee of up to \$100.00 for registration. Caring for your children on special holidays like Christmas with very late hours will be another cost that will be higher than a regular daycare center.

Even though there are some negative aspects to drop in services, your children will get a lot benefits, as well as you. Quality drop off services will have lots of planned activities that can allow children to join at a moments notice. You'll find lots of craft activities based around the age and abilities of children and you'll see, if weather permits it, outside group activities that will encourage interactive play and physical exercise, too.

Drop in daycare centers will have themes for daytime and nighttime that will cater to children of all ages. Some have activities like stargazing with simple telescopes or binoculars, and others might have a few hours of looking at bugs, or catching butterflies with nets. You child will have a lot of fun, and will want to come back again and again.

Drop in services for daycare at anytime is a lifesaver for parents. If you carefully check out the care centers in your area they can also be a lot of fun for the children too. It's not hard to find one, you'll just need to be prepared and look for a quality center. It's true you'll have to pay a few fees, and you'll even have to go and pick them up, but it's no different than taking home a traditional babysitter and it's a lot safer too. With a drop in service it'll be easy too because you're prepared for anything.

How to Know if You Have the Right Mindset to be a Home Daycare Provider

So you want to stay home and open your own business! Who does not dream of this opportunity to forego the hustle and bustle of full time employment, rush hour commuting, and being away from family? Yet do you know if you have the right mindset to be a home daycare provider?

Here is a list of questions you need to ask yourself and answer honestly:

You know that children are a joy, but what about the time when those little golden-haired angels are less than angelic? Will you be able to still enjoy a child who screams incessantly, who is uncooperative, or who will not obey the first time you ask her or him to perform a task?

Do you enjoy being around people – adults as well as children? In other words, do you have an extrovert personality that does not favor any particular age group?

Are you a patient person? Will a dropped peanut butter sandwich that lands sticky side down on your carpet provoke you to anger, or will you be able to take it all in a stride? Will sticky fingerprints on the wall or the cabinet door drive you into a cleaning frenzy, or can you let it go for now?

Do you listen well? You know that small children take almost forever to get to the point, and sometimes you need to do some creative questioning to find out what they are really trying to tell you. Do you have the patience it takes to draw children out and to listen to them talk? If you are quick at finishing children's sentences for them, you are not a good listener – at least when it comes to listening to children.

Are you sensitive with respect to moods and needs? For example, are you able to draw out the shy child, get the uncoordinated child involved in a game, and make sure that even the non-aggressive child gets a turn with a coveted toy? Are you able to quickly tune in to the needs of the children around you, especially those needs that are not verbalized like the need for some juice or milk, but instead the need for companionship and acceptance into the group?

Are you organized, but able to change pace at a moment's notice? It is important to be an organized individual since children love and thrive on structure, but at the same time a slavish adherence to a schedule, especially when you can tell it is not working for the group on a particular day, will do very little for the children in your charge.

Are you able to stay off the phone? It may seem like such a little thing to take ten minutes here or there to catch up with friends and family, but children usually know that once you are on the phone you are not accessible. Can you avoid prolonged conversations in order to spend time with the little ones?

Is the television set your backup plan? If much of your daycare revolves around the television set, videos or video games, you need to reevaluate your mindset. The children will want the adult interaction as well as the interaction with other children; they most likely get enough television at home.

Are you able to roll with the punches? In other words, if your little object lesson gets derailed by a discussion on a totally different subject, are you able to shift gears and go with it? Do you enjoy improvisation?

Last but not least, do you love artwork, crafts, and dress up, and are not afraid of even glitter?

There is no shame in admitting that on some of the questions you might not answer as affirmatively as you know you would like to. You might have the right mindset to be a home daycare provider for older children while you might not do so well with younger ones or vice versa. Each age group has its own particular challenges, but you might be cut out more to meet one set of challenges than another. Keep this in mind when opening your business, and you and the children will have a wonderful experience!

Helpful Ways to Save Money on Childcare

Childcare expenses have a way of eating up a huge chunk of the family budget. If you are working, you will need childcare, but at the same time, with rising rents and mortgage interest rates that are going up as well, it is not surprising that more and more parents are looking for ways to cut back. You still want the very best care for your children while you have to go to work, but at the same time, you also need to meet your other financial obligations. Is there a way to do both?

Here are some helpful ways to save money on childcare:

Check with your human resources department to see if you can participate in a dependant care account. Many companies now offer this attractive benefit, which permits you to put a certain amount of money aside each month on a pre-tax basis. Yes, this is still money coming out of your own paycheck, but Uncle Sam will not levy any tax on it!

Depending how much money you put aside, the savings most certainly add up! Then, when your childcare bill is due, withdraw the money from the account and use it to pay the provider directly. Make sure, however, that you know exactly how much money you will need. Whatever you do not use at the end of the year is forfeited in many cases.

Talk to the grandparents and your trusted friends. If you can get by with only having part-time daycare, you will be able to cut down your spending significantly! Maybe grandma and grandpa can watch your child on Mondays and Wednesdays, or maybe a trusted friend is willing to keep your child at home on Fridays. Both ways, this is one or two fewer days that you need to pay for childcare, and the savings add up quickly.

Form a babysitting co-op. Perhaps you can talk to the parents of your child's friends and see how they are doing, and maybe you find some who are just as eager to tighten the belt as you are. By forming the co-op, you can spread around the childcare and every mom or dad can take a turn on a day off. Of course, if you all work the same hours, this will not work. Additionally, if the designated mom or dad gets sick, you will need to come up with an alternate plan.

Hire a college student to nanny for you and share her. Find one or two parents who are willing to pay toward hiring this student and then have her watch your children and the children of the other parents who are paying. This will allow the kids to become close friends, offers many of the same benefits as you would realize if you were to hire a nanny for your child alone, and will give you the flexibility you need to save some money.

Pay your taxes and take your childcare credit! It is amazing how many parents forget to take the credit each year for their child's daycare expenses. Make sure that you have someone help you file your taxes if you are not sure how to go about receiving this credit.

If you are working shift work, perhaps you could barter for childcare with another coworker who is on a different shift. If your kids are already friends, then it will become more like a play date and less like childcare to begin with. Just make sure that the both of you clearly define who provides the childcare on what days and during which hours.

If you are just now going back to work, try to find some work that has hours opposite your spouse's work-schedule. While this is not exactly a great way for a personal relationship to grow and flourish, it will save you a lot of money on childcare, and if this is the difference between making it or going under, then perhaps it is worthwhile for a time.

As you can see, there are a number of helpful ways to save money on childcare. While one size most certainly does not fit all, there are probably quite a few suggestions that will work for you in your situation.

What Parents Should Know About Online Babysitting Services

Online babysitting services are becoming more and more popular due to how busy most people's lives have become. The "point and click method" often takes less time for a parent and can yield as successful a result as doing it the traditional way. While not everyone is as quick to jump on the online babysitting services bandwagon more and more parents are choosing to go this route.

The process tends to be simple and straightforward. In order to join a babysitter service that is available, online parents need to pay a membership fee, which can vary from service to service. Professional babysitters, however, can join the service for free and post their own information relevant to the jobs they are seeking. This may include preferences such as number of children per household, age of children, or the location preferred.

There tend to be different rules and age restrictions from service to service and from one group of people to another. It is important for parents to realize that sitters who sign up free for the online service are not screened in any way.

There is no background or criminal checks done on the prospective sitters therefore parents are encouraged to proceed with caution if they choose to find a babysitter this way. The biggest advantage of an online babysitting service is convenience. It is a time efficient way to shop for a sitter and there are often a variety of individuals to choose from.

Despite the lack of screening or background checks, the online service would have certain personal information about the sitter in question at its disposal. As well the parents can contact the babysitter by telephone and arrange an interview and from there can either decide to ask for references or decide to continue to look further at other potential candidates.

Some parents interview many babysitters before settling on one while others find a person they like after only one or two interviews are done. Keep in mind that one's instinct about a person is often right therefore as parents do not discount how the babysitting candidate makes you feel. Introduce your child or children to the person when they come to your home for the interview if possible and see how they interact together.

Many online babysitting services connect parents with not just full time babysitters but also with babysitters for evenings and weekends as well. If parents like to have a "date night" every Thursday or every second Thursday then the online service can find someone who is available on that night as often as you need someone.

If parents work on Saturdays then that is not a problem either. You might even find one or two babysitters that you can telephone on a more or less regular basis on the occasions that you need someone. There are also last minute babysitters that can be found with the online service. Once you build trust and communication with a babysitter and if your child is pleased with her then that is sure to put a parent's mind at ease. After all leaving your child in the care of someone safe and responsible should be a top priority.

National online babysitting services tend to be the most common and are likely to have the largest pool of potential candidates, but there are plenty of regional services that should also have plenty of reliable individuals to choose from. Many of these services will have websites that will have descriptions and sometimes even photographs of the babysitters who are seeking work. Often there are testimonials of parents who used the service and were pleased with the results. Sometimes there are testimonials from babysitters as well who have had positive experiences with the families they have worked for.

While online babysitting services are still in their developmental stage, there are many parents and businesses to be found in suburban or rural areas that have created their own unique form

of babysitting services for busy parents and many of these can be found by checking the local newspaper, the yellow pages or simply word of mouth. There are neighborhood groups or associations that are likely to offer free or virtually free babysitting services and they are worth checking into. As well many churches operate babysitting services, as do some youth groups and other programs geared towards helping out moms in any way they can.

The Power of Preschool: Why It Is an Important First Step to Your Child's Education

Ah, preschool! For some parents the idea of sending their child to preschool is fraught with dilemmas. Many parents wonder if their child is ready for preschool or, conversely, if preschool is ready for their child. For some parents it is very difficult to face the fact that their child is growing into a school-aged child, as we all know, childhood does pass so quickly. Still for other parents, who like the idea of preschool for their child, there is the additional stress of choosing one that is appropriate for their child and his or her needs.

Whether or not to send your child to preschool is an important choice that you, as a parent, will have to make when your child turns three or four. One surefire way to avoid feeling pressured and ensure that you are making the right decision when the time comes is to put some thought into it ahead of time. Preschool can be a very important first step in your child's education for many reasons. In fact, while it is indeed a very personal choice for every family, there are so many benefits of sending your child to preschool that this will focus your attention, primarily, on those.

To begin with, children need to interact with other children in order to develop their social behaviors. Preschool is an excellent source of social experience and skills for your child. You do as much as you can to educate your child in the home, but for your child the experience of being around their peers and being exposed to new and different ideas and people is an invaluable to their learning experience. All the toys and time in the world cannot substitute for real, human interaction with other children.

Preschool is a powerful tool to help prepare your child for his or her future educational experience. Yes, it is a tool. Many parents make the mistake of thinking that preschool means the end of their influence on their child's education, but realistically it is only the beginning. You are constantly educating your child, even when you aren't thinking about it.

Preschool provides a more structured, outside the home learning experience for your child, yet it is one that you can remain very involved in. This experience can help your child adjust to the idea of learning outside the home and yet having their parents remain involved.

Preschool is a great learning experience for you. Yes, that's right, for you. You will want to be involved in your child's education no matter where it may be happening and preschool is your chance to adjust to the transition of communicating with teachers and administrators and child care professionals about your child's education.

Also, this could be the first time your child is away from home for any extended amount of time and while it is definitely an adjustment for your child it is also an adjustment for you. Take advantage of the time to work out any issues you may have in order to ensure that you, your child and your child's teachers are all working toward the same goal from here on in.

Preschool can be an excellent indicator of learning or developmental issues or problems that your child may have. Early detection of learning disabilities, problems or issues will help you, your child and your child's teachers to create an appropriate approach to your child's education. It can also significantly improve your child's chances of receiving the help and care he or she may need throughout their educational experience.

It is extremely important to keep an open mind to what is best for your child. Preschool can offer a child the educational, social and real-world experience that he or she will continue to need throughout life, whether in school or not. Remember; while sending your child to preschool may be a big decision you don't have to make it all at once. Take your time. Know your child, know yourself and know your options.

Definitely allow your child to participate in this decision. Listen to any questions, worries and concerns your child might have. Most importantly, children have a natural sense of curiosity and wonder at Preschool age and Preschool can offer your child a whole new world to explore.

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