



Family Child Care Options

Family child care providers care for a small number of children in their private homes. It is the type of out-of-home care most widely used by working parents. Family child care is prevalent in rural communities whose population cannot support full-sized center care. It often offers the most flexibility for working parents in terms of available hours of care, ability to care for siblings of all ages, and near-home location.

The Advantages of Family Child Care

Family child care is particularly popular with the parents of children younger than three years who prefer the homelike setting and small numbers of children that family day care provides. It is also popular with the parents of two or more children, because it enables siblings to be cared for together, thus reducing the number of arrangements that parents must make.

In addition, family child care is often the form of care best able to respond to the needs of school-age children and employees who work nontraditional hours. Family child care providers usually offer more flexible hours and are more likely than centers to accept mildly ill children. Family child care fees are generally no more expensive than center fees and are usually lower than care in the child's own home.

The Employers' Role

Recruitment and Education: Employers can support efforts to identify, recruit, and train community family child care providers near their facility or in neighborhoods where their employees live. Businesses can provide scholarships for provider education and accreditation, or provide funding for community-based child care resource and referral agencies to provide education and support services to family child care providers.

Family Child Care Networks: Companies can form or fund networks of family child care homes. Networking among family child care homes has been shown to improve the quality of care by connecting providers to important support services. Such services may include recruitment of new providers, book and toy lending libraries, centralized supply purchasing, liability insurance purchasing, transportation services, and fiscal management. Networks also allow for back-up services when one provider is ill, on vacation, or temporarily unavailable. Networks can be formed around specific needs, such as vacation or after-school care or for special needs children. The network can be maintained by contracting with a qualified community-based organization or by hiring an in-house specialist.

An employer can also contract with an existing network and secure reserved slots by providing their employees with vouchers or discounts, or providing cash or in-kind contributions to the network. By sponsoring or establishing a family child care network, employers can guarantee that the providers serve the employees' children either on an exclusive or priority basis, are available during all work shifts, offer care for mildly ill children, and meet high safety and quality standards.

Advantages

- T Offers low start-up and maintenance costs; can be established more quickly than an on-site care center;
- T Can accommodate the diverse needs of many parents, including those who work odd-hour shifts;
- T Offers flexibility in where the care is provided; homes may be located close to the employee's home, near the work site, or along the commuting route; and
- T Can be effective for businesses with multiple facilities.

Considerations

- X Can be difficult to recruit stable caregivers;
- X Requires adequate education and ongoing support to maintain consistently high quality care; and
- X May increase liability risks if the employer does not contract with a management organization.

At Aetna Life and Casualty in Hartford, Connecticut, 65% to 70% of the employees' children are cared for in family child care homes. Recognizing that family child care generally gets less support than center-based care, Aetna established the Family Day Care Community Development Project. Aetna provides safety kits to providers who have completed training sessions and who have demonstrated intent to register as a family child care provider. The Project also provides funding for efforts to improve the quality of family child care, such as sponsoring training conferences for family child care providers.

In Bozeman, Montana in 1990, the Patagonia Company took the lead in collaborating with the MSU Early Childhood Project and the local Child Care Resource & Referral agency, Child Care Connections, to form the *Bozeman Family Care Contract Network*. The Network provided family home child care options for children whose parents worked at Patagonia, and for other families in the community. Parents preferred the small-sized settings of family child care. Unlike other registered home providers, the Network providers passed a comprehensive screening process, participated in 12 hours of training each year, received monthly visits from a Network Coordinator, received grants for new materials and equipment, and had access to a telephone hot-line for immediate assistance with questions and concerns. Although Patagonia has since moved their operation out of Bozeman, many of the Network providers continue to offer care. Because of the training and support they had early on, they became a stable source of quality child care for families in the Bozeman community.



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