



Child Care Options To Consider

Whether you are a new parent or simply looking for new options, this document outlines many different types of child care arrangements. Each option has benefits and considerations, which we attempt to highlight in an informative way. This guide is intended to help families navigate their options and find an arrangement that is right for them.

If you would like assistance reviewing these options or if you have other questions regarding child care, please contact the [family care concierge specialists](#).

Carnegie Mellon University
Human Resources

In-home Care

Care that comes to you and is provided in your home. This care can be either full time to cover a typical work week, or part time, covering only days and times when you typically need help.

Nanny — An individual hired to care for your child(ren) on a recurring basis. This usually involves agreed upon compensation and in some cases benefits.

Family — A family member might be able to come to your home and watch your child(ren) for you on a recurring basis when you need coverage

Collaborative Care

Care that requires multiple families to pool resources and form a pod where children from different households share the same care provider. Typically, the care will take place in the homes of one or more of the associated families, but could also be in a neutral space. This care can be either full time to cover a typical work week, or part time, covering only days and times when you typically need help.

Nanny Share — Families form a group and split the cost of hiring a nanny to care for all of their children.

Family Pod — Parents from multiple families form a group where parents take turns caring for the children thereby allowing other parents to have time not dedicated to caregiving.

Learning Pod — Families form a group of school-aged children and all contribute to the cost of an instructor who supports the learning of all children in the pod.

Center-based Care

Care that takes place in a child care center or home-based daycare. This care can be either full time to cover a typical work week, or part time, covering only days and times when you typically need help.

Child Care Center — Families pay a fixed amount for the time their child spends in the center. Typically, the rates and schedule are agreed upon in advance and cover regular business hours.

Emergency Care — Families pay for the time their children spend in the center, but this care is unplanned and usually not for long term use.

Before and After Care — Certain programs can sync with the bussing schedules for nearby school districts and provide care for children before and after the school day so that parents can work a full day. Families pay for the amount of time their children spend in the program, which is typically less regulated than daycare.

In-home Care: Nannies

Nannies will come to your home on a regular basis and care for one or multiple children inside your home. Many people choose this option for the convenience of not having to transport their children, or for the protection this provides from some of the concerns of care in a child care center, such as exposure to illness. Additionally, having a child care provider singularly dedicated to your children often means they will have individualized attention and care that is difficult to find in child care facilities. Conversely, there are some drawbacks to this type of care, such as lack of accountability or supervision from other responsible adults to ensure quality care, and lack of social interaction for the children who stay at home.

Cost: For a single child, this will typically be one of the more expensive options, but it can increase in affordability if you have multiple children. Prices will vary from nanny to nanny, and if you use a nanny agency, there will likely be costs associated with their services as well. There may also be tax implications and, in some cases, questions about offering benefits.

Scheduling: There is typically more flexibility with nanny care arrangements, allowing for more customization of needs. However, it can be difficult to hire a quality nanny part time, as most will prefer more regular work to support their own work-life balance. Additionally, while a child care center may be able to provide coverage when an employee is sick or requests time off, a nanny will likely not have a backup and you will be left without child care on days that the nanny cannot come to work.

Ways to access: Often the process of finding a nanny can be long and frustrating, as the levels of trust for leaving children in the care of a single person, and opening your home to them, are higher. Also, since there is a large selection of individual characteristics, many families will search for just the right combination of pedagogy, values and personality. This can be time consuming as the best way to determine if a nanny is right for you is generally through an interview.

- **Care@Work** — CMU faculty, staff and graduate students have a free premium subscription to Care.com, which allows you to post a job for nannies to apply to and also allows you to search for nannies. This service also provides 15 days of subsidized backup care where care.com will send a nanny to your house for days you need coverage. This may come in handy if your regular nanny needs to take a day off.
- **Carelink** — This website provides a venue for members of the CMU community to connect with each other to offer services or post a job. The site might be particularly helpful when looking for a nanny who works on a part-time or intermittent basis.
- **Nanny Agency** — These agencies partner with professional nannies in your area and create comprehensive profiles for both nannies and families, working to create matches where both parties are happy. Nanny agencies take a lot of the work out of finding a nanny, but this service is not free.

In-home Care: Family

Some families are lucky enough to have relatives who are able to devote time and resources toward caring for their young children. These arrangements are often beneficial for young families in multiple ways, including strengthening familial bonds and reinforcing cultural norms and language that may not be as supported in child care programs or by nannies. There are some drawbacks to these arrangements as well, however. Typically, family members are not trained in child development and lack some of the skills and knowledge that professional child care workers might possess. Also, these arrangements typically provide fewer opportunities for children to socialize with children their own age.

Cost: Generally, arranging care between family members results in little to no cost for parents. However, sometimes these arrangements are made to be mutually beneficial and do include an exchange of money. These exchanges still typically occur at costs lower than that of hiring professional help, making this one of the most affordable child care options for families.

Scheduling: Scheduling for these arrangements will depend on when family members are available. Sometimes relatives have open availability to help, and others can only help in certain pockets of time. Ultimately, there does seem to be a good deal of flexibility here, but as with nannies, it is important to remember that there is likely no backup care for days when a relative is not able to care for your child.

Ways to access: There is no formal process for accessing care through a family member. This is entirely built upon personal relationships and every family will have different circumstances.

Collaborative Care: Nanny Shares

As discussed in the home-based care section, nannies will come to your home and provide care for one or multiple children. Sometimes, families that do not have the resources to pay for a nanny for their own household will join together with other parents and jointly pay for a nanny to watch all of their children. There are limits on how many children one nanny can care for at once, so these usually end up being small groups. Besides the financial benefit, this arrangement allows for more social interactions for the children in this type of care, and allows parents a bit more control over the environment and teaching methods. The drawbacks for this type of care include a lack of accountability and supervision of the nanny and slightly less focus on each child if the group is larger. There is also more exposure to possible illness, though not as much as you would find in a child care center. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are often strict cleaning protocols in a center that may not be observed by a nanny.

Cost: For a single child, this option proves to generally be more affordable than both individual nanny care and most child care programs, but may end up being comparable to some home-based child care programs. For multiple children, this could be a very economical option.

Scheduling: This arrangement allows for a bit more flexibility than traditional child care centers, but it requires that the schedules of multiple households be considered, so it is less flexible than hiring a nanny just for your own household. It is also important to remember that there is no backup care if the nanny is unable to work on certain days.

Ways to access: Nanny shares can be set up with families you know and have prior relationships with, or they can be set up with families who do not know each other. In order to seek out new families who may be interested in forming this type of group, there are a number of resources you can use to make connections.

- **Care@Work** — CMU faculty, staff and graduate students have a free premium subscription to Care.com, which allows you to post availability for a share group or search for groups who need additional members. This service also provides 15 days of subsidized backup care where care.com will send a nanny to your house for days you need coverage. This may come in handy if your regular nanny needs to take a day off.
- **Carelink** — This website provides a venue for members of the CMU community to connect with each other to offer services or post a job. The site can be used to connect with other families looking to set up a nanny share.
- **Nanny Lane** — This website allows you to search for nannies in your area, post a profile indicating that you would like a nanny share, and search the profiles of other families to see who else might want to join a group. This website is not associated with CMU.

Collaborative Care: Family Groups

Sometimes, families will choose to group together and engage in mutually supportive childcare arrangements with other families where parents each take turns caring for all of the children, thereby giving the other parents time that is not dedicated to caregiving. There are no professional caregivers involved in this scenario, which will typically see the children rotated between households on a regular basis. The benefits of this arrangement are the increased social attachments children can have with an extended group of people that they might not have if staying at home and of course, the affordability. Some considerations include limits on consistency of care, which is important for children's development since they need consistent expectations and reliable caregivers in order to feel emotionally secure. There are also varying levels of understanding of child development, as many of the parents involved may not have a background or training in that field.

Cost: There is no upfront cost for this arrangement, making it very affordable, but there may be some financial impact in terms of time spent on caregiving instead of focusing on employment.

Scheduling: Scheduling for this type of arrangement tends to be more flexible than that of a typical child care center; however, it will require taking the schedules of several households into consideration and possibly accounting for a regularly changing commute. Additionally, if one of the families cannot participate one a certain day, it may require some last minute rearrangements from the remaining families or it could mean that families do not have child care that day.

Ways to access: Family groups can be set up with families you know and have prior relationships with, or they can be set up with families who do not know each other. In order to seek out new families who may be interested in forming this type of group, there are resources you can use to make connections.

- **Carelink** — This website provides a venue for members of the CMU community to connect with each other to offer services or post a job. This website can also be used to connect with other families looking to set up a family group arrangement.
- **Care@Work** — CMU faculty, staff and graduate students have a free premium subscription to Care.com, which allows you to post availability for a share group or search for groups who need additional members. This service also provides 15 days of subsidized backup care where care.com will send a nanny to your house for days you need coverage. This may come in handy if your regular nanny needs to take a day off.

Collaborative Care: Learning Pods

Learning pods are small groups of families that have chosen to have their children educated by a private tutor or educator, for which they split the cost. The popularity of learning pods has increased dramatically with the onset of COVID-19, and while many of these pods originally served parents of homeschooled children, now they frequently serve children engaged in online or hybrid schooling. There are limits on how many children can feasibly be educated in a pod, but these groups tend to be larger than those found in nanny shares. Additionally, these pods function more smoothly when the children in the pod are all at a similar age level or attend the same school. The advantage of this arrangement is that children who would normally stay home get to receive guidance and instruction from a professional who can alleviate some of the burden placed on parents' role in supporting their child's education. This arrangement also allows for social interactions for the children in this type of care, and allows parents a bit more control over the environment and teaching methods. The considerations for this type of care include a lack of accountability and supervision of the educator and slightly less focus on each child if the group is larger.

Cost: Though splitting the cost of an educator can make it more affordable for families, quality educators can be very expensive to employ. Center-based programs that offer this type of service will typically be more affordable, although the service will be more like proctoring. Center-based services that offer private education can be extremely expensive as well, so it is important to compare the costs against comparable programs.

Scheduling: This arrangement allows for a bit more flexibility than traditional schools or homework help programs, but it requires that the schedules of multiple households be considered, so it is less flexible than keeping your children home. It is also important to remember that there is no backup care if the educator is unable to work on certain days.

Ways to access: Learning pods can be set up with families you know and have prior relationships with, or they can be set up with families who do not know each other. In order to seek out new families who may be interested in forming this type of group, there are resources you can use to make connections.

- **Carelink** — This website provides a venue for members of the CMU community to connect with each other to offer services or post a job. This website can also be used to connect with other families looking to set up a learning pod.
- **Care@Work** — CMU faculty, staff and graduate students have a free premium subscription to Care.com, which allows you to post availability for a learning pod and also allows you to search for pods who need members.

Center Based Care: Child Care Centers

A child care center is a program outside of your home where your child can receive care. There are a wide range of options in this category, with the most striking difference being between commercial child care centers and child care centers operated from a person's home. This is a common option for families, and the location of the center often becomes an important part of the selection process. There are many benefits of this type of care, including a selection of trained professionals who can educate your child and support their development, an opportunity for children to gain valuable social skills, a curriculum, and clear care expectations. Licensed child care providers must also adhere to a standard of health and safety protocols. Some potential drawbacks include exposure to illness, less individualized attention compared to other forms of care, travel time and cost.

Cost: The cost of child care can vary greatly based on the number of children enrolled in care, your child's age, and the amenities of the particular program. Child care centers often comprise a significant portion of a family's monthly budget. Home-based providers tend to be more affordable than child care centers that operate in a separate facility. Additionally, there are usually financial assistance options available through your state or county which could defray some of the expense for families that qualify.

Scheduling: Child care centers typically operate with a regular schedule, with closures/in service days planned in advance. Many are open more than 8 hours per day (for example, 7:30 a.m.–6 p.m.), to accommodate a range of work hours. Scheduling can be a significant factor for families, as there are usually additional fees associated with late pickups and there is typically no flexibility in operating hours.

Access: Child care centers can have lengthy waitlists up to a year or longer, depending on the specific program, location and age group. Thus, if you are pursuing this care option, it is recommended that you start as soon as possible. Once you contact a program, there is also typically an enrollment process that involves completing documentation, a tour of the center, and meeting with administrators or educators. Many individuals prefer to get recommendations from friends and family members who are satisfied with their child care arrangement. There are also resources to help you connect to a program that could work well for you.

- **Allegheny County/Trying Together Child Care Finder** — This tool allows you to find local child care programs and filter by location, the number and ages of children you're looking to enroll, and transportation.
- **COMPASS Program Finder** — Search for providers in Pennsylvania through COMPASS. This website also has information on financial assistance, early learning program options, and the Keystone STARS rating system.

Center Based Care: Emergency Care

Emergency Care (also called “backup” or “drop-off” care) refers to programs that provide unscheduled care for children. This can be a useful option if there is unexpected change in your regularly scheduled care arrangement or your need care at different times than usual. For example, you may need to use backup care if your nanny calls out at the last minute, or if you have an urgent personal situation that occurs outside of your regular child care center’s operating hours. Due to the nature of emergency care, this is not intended to be your primary source of child care. Emergency care is temporary, usually encompassing only a few hours or a few days.

Benefits of this option are that is extremely flexible, and can provide much-needed support when you need it the most. Some potential drawbacks include the relative scarcity of options, and the lack of familiarity with the educators and organization of the program.

Cost: As with child care centers, the cost can vary greatly. However, due to the nature of emergency care, some programs offer free or subsidized rates to support families navigating an unexpected change in care.

Scheduling: This option is extremely flexible, as little or no advance notice is required. Some programs encourage you to register or schedule in advance to ensure that you do have access to a space when the need arises.

Ways to Access: As noted above, emergency care tends to be the most limited of the care options in terms of accessibility. It is worthwhile to research emergency care available in your area before you need it so you have a plan if the need arises. These are two programs can provide back up care:

- **Care@Work** — Through the Care@Work program, eligible faculty, staff and graduate students have access to 15 days of backup care at a subsidized rate. These backup care days can be applied to a child care center or to an in-home care provider through either Care.com’s network or your personal network. Care@Work recommends providing as much notice as possible, but requests 48 hours notice.
- **Jeremiah’s Place** — Pittsburgh’s only crisis nursery is open 24/7, free of charge, for children ages 0–6.

Center Based Care: Before and After Care

To accommodate work schedules, families may require care outside of school's operating hours. Before and after school care covers brief periods of time either in the morning or afternoon to meet this need. Many times, such programs are offered through the schools themselves, but there are also outside programs that provide care to cover before and after school hours. Some programs may provide homework assistance, games and activities, or academic enrichment. The benefit of this care option is that it can allow families to better balance child care for school-aged children and work schedules without needing to pay for or find full-day child care. The potential drawbacks are that not all schools may offer before and after care options, transportation could be an issue if not at the school or along the bus route, and that this only covers a limited, set period time of time during the day.

Cost: As with other types of care, costs can vary. But the price for before and after care may be lower than other arrangements, as it typically only encompasses a brief period of time.

Scheduling: There is limited flexibility with this arrangement, as most offerings adhere to a set schedule in morning and afternoon. If the program is affiliated with a school or district, then the program is likely also closed with schools are closed. You will likely need to find another arrangement to cover holidays, summer breaks, and other closures.

Ways to Access: Your child's school (or the district) are the most direct and common ways to access before and after care. However, in the event that your school does not offer this type of care, the following resources could be useful.

- **Community Organizations** — Local non-profits such as the YCMA and The Boys and Girls Club may offer before and after care programs. These groups may partner with schools in the area to align their schedules with school hours, and also arrange for buses to stop by their facilities.
- **Allegheny County/Trying Together Child Care Finder** — This tool allows you to find local child care programs and filter by location, the number and ages of children you're looking to enroll, and transportation. While most of the featured centers will include full day care, some may have before and after care options available.
- **COMPASS Program Finder** — Search for providers in Pennsylvania through COMPASS. This website also has information on financial assistance, early learning program options, and the Keystone STARS rating system. While most of the featured centers will include full day care, some may have before and after care options available.