

Child Care Options To Consider

Carnegie Mellon University
Human Resources



When exploring child care options, there are many factors to consider when making the decision for which care arrangement is the best fit for your family. This document outlines several different types of child care arrangements, highlighting the benefits and considerations of each care option. This guide is intended to help families navigate their options to 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 at hrfamilycare@andrew.cmu.edu. You may also find our guide to [Choosing High Quality Care \[pdf\]](#) helpful as you explore options.

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In-home Care: Nannies

Nannies are care providers who will come to your home on a scheduled, recurring basis. In addition to child care, some nannies may also provide additional services such as light housekeeping and transportation for your child(ren). You will be able to customize your care arrangement with your nanny, so that the hours and days they work fit in with your schedule, and so that the care your child receives aligns with your beliefs and priorities. In-home child care can also reduce the exposure to illness, in comparison to child care centers. If your nanny is sick, traveling, or otherwise unavailable, you could experience a short gap in childcare that may be difficult to schedule last minute gap care for due to the short notice. (If you do experience an unexpected gap in child care, our **Interim Child Care Options** resource may be helpful). Due to the bond that will likely develop between your child and the nanny, changing your in-home provider may impact your child more deeply than a change in daycare would, as they may come to see the nanny as part of the family.

Cost: Nanny fees are typically paid weekly or monthly, at the average hourly rate of \$25-35/hour. You will likely be required to pay employment taxes for your nanny, based on the wages they earn. If you hire a nanny through an agency, many agencies will assume responsibility for the nanny's employment taxes but will require placement and service fees. Other expenses may include background checks, additional certifications such as CPR and first aid, and costs for raises, bonuses, and overtime.

Ways to Access: The process of hiring a nanny can be lengthy and time-consuming, as it can take time to find an individual you trust to care for your child(ren) and invite into your home. The best way to determine if a nanny is the right fit for your family is generally through an interview, where you can determine if the pedagogy, values, and personality of the nanny is in line with the type of caretaker you are seeking. You can find a nanny using the following resources.

- **Care for Business** - Eligible CMU faculty, staff, and graduate students have a free premium subscription to Care.com, where you can post a job listing seeking a nanny, or search through their database for a nanny in your area. This benefit also includes the [LifeCare Family](#) program, where you can connect with a care specialist who can provide personalized assistance by assisting with the nanny search process, narrowing down the field of caregivers to help find one that best fits your family's needs.

- **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. A listing of local agencies can be found in the **Hiring a Nanny** Resource.

In-home Care: Au Pairs

Au pairs are an option for in-home care, which provide a unique set of considerations. When you hire an au pair, you are offering to open your home and provide room and board to a caregiver from a different country who will typically live with you for a minimum of 1 year. This is a contracted position and is facilitated by an agency which will assist the Au Pair with securing a visa and transportation to the US. It is possible to renew contracts after the first year, or to look for a different au pair if the one you selected does not seem to be a good fit. Having a caregiver who is already in your home can reduce the headaches of transportation issues and provide support during your morning routine. This arrangement also provides exposure to the culture of the au pair that you select, providing an enriching experience for your child culturally, and perhaps, linguistically. In-home child care can also reduce exposure to illness when compared with child care centers. The loss of privacy can be an adjustment for some families. Many families often forget to consider the emotional investment they will be making when accepting an au pair into their home. Any changes to the provider may impact children more deeply than a change in a daycare would, as they may come to see the au pair as part of their family.

Cost: Fees for this type of service usually include an application fee, a matching fee, a program fee, a weekly stipend for the au pair, and about \$500 for classes they are required to attend as part of their visa. The total amount comes to about \$20,000 a year for most providers. For the Pittsburgh region, this is comparable in cost for a high-end daycare center for an infant. If you have multiple children, you may find this to be an affordable option and it is typically more affordable than hiring a nanny who lives outside of your home.

Ways to access: Au pairs are accessed through au pair agencies, where they can help connect you with a potential au pair or where you can view au pair profiles.

- **Care for Business** - Eligible CMU faculty, staff, and graduate students have a free premium subscription to Care.com, which can be used to search for an au pair. The au pairs listed on this site are primarily associated with GreatAuPair USA and Go Au Pair.

- **Au Pair in America** - An agency that provides intercultural child care for your family. Au Pair in America offers a 5% program discount and waives the application fee for all CMU faculty and staff with the discount code 402.

- **Local Agencies** - These agencies partner au pairs with families seeking child care services. A listing of local, non-CMU affiliated agencies can be found in the **Hiring an Au Pair** resource.

In-home Care: Families

Some families have relatives who are able and willing to devote time and resources toward caring for their young children. These arrangements are often beneficial for families in multiple ways, including strengthening familial bonds and reinforcing cultural norms and language in a way that is not possible to replicate or support in other types of care arrangements. However, there may be some drawbacks to these arrangements as well. Typically, family members are not trained or certified in child development, so family members may lack some of the skills and knowledge that professional child care workers may possess. Also, these arrangements typically provide fewer opportunities for children to socialize with children their own age.

Cost - The cost of arranging child care with family members will vary between different families. Some family members will provide care for little to no cost, while others do include an exchange of money. These exchanges typically still occur at costs lower than that of hiring a professional in-home caregiver.

Scheduling - Scheduling for family care arrangements will depend on the availability of your family member. Some relatives may have open availability to help, while others can only help in certain pockets of time.

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

In a nanny share, a family joins together with another family and jointly pay a nanny to watch all their children. This can be more cost effective than hiring a nanny for a singular child and/or household. Besides the financial benefit, this arrangement allows for more social interactions for the children and allows parents a bit more control over the environment. The care provided can be structured to be in line with the beliefs and priorities of the participating families. 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 possible exposure to illness, though not as much as you would find at 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 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 cares 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 for Business** – Eligible 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.

- **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 Care Share

Sometimes, families will choose to group together and engage in mutually supportive childcare arrangements with other families where parents 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 develop with an extended group of people, 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 may also be varying levels of understanding of child development, as 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. However 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 scheduling of several households into consideration, and possibly accounting for a regularly changing commute. Additionally, if one of the families cannot participate due to illness, travel, or other unexpected circumstances, it may require some last-minute care rearrangements from the remaining families.

Ways to access: Family care 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. To find new families who may be interested in forming this type of group, there are resources you can use to make the connections. More information on how to utilize the resources below can be found in the Forming Care Shares resource.

- **Care for Business** – Eligible CMU faculty, staff, and graduate students have a free premium subscription to Care.com, which allows users to connect with other families looking to set up family group arrangements. This service also includes 15 subsidized Backup Care days, where a Care Specialist can identify a vetted caregiver who can come to your home. This may come in handy for unexpected lapses in child care.

Collaborative 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 to this type of care, including access to trained professionals who can educate your child and support their development, with clear expectations of care established. This care setting also provides an opportunity for children to gain valuable social skills and learn through a structured curriculum. Licensed child care facilities must also adhere to a standard of health and safety protocols. Some potential drawbacks include exposure to illness, less individualized attention in comparison to other forms of care, travel time to go to and from a child care center, 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 program. Child care centers often comprise a significant portion of a family's monthly budget. There are financial assistance options available through your state, county, or employer which may defray some of the expense of enrolling at a child care center for families who qualify. An overview of some potential financial aid supports can be found in our **Affording Quality Child Care guide**.

Scheduling: Child care centers typically operate with a regular schedule, with closures and 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 no flexibility in operating hours.

Ways to access: Child care centers can have lengthy waitlists up to a year or longer, depending on the specific program, location, and age group. If you are pursuing this care option, starting as your search as soon as possible can increase your chances of getting into the program of your choice. Once you contact a program, there is also typically an enrolment 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.

- **Family Care Concierge Service** – CMU faculty, staff, and graduate students are eligible to receive personalized assistance from the university's Family Care Concierge Service. The concierge specialists can help search for child care center options. A complete overview of the concierge service can be found on the **Concierge Service FAQs [pdf]**.

- **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.

Collaborative Care: Emergency Care

Emergency Care (also called “backup” or “drop-off” care) refers to a program that provides unscheduled care for children. This can be a useful option if there is an unexpected change in your regularly scheduled care arrangement or you 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 is that it 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, in order 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 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 that you have a plan if the need arises. These are two programs that can provide Backup care:

- **Care for Business** – Through the Care for Business program, you 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 for Business recommends providing as much notice as possible to have a better chance of securing care, but requests 48 hours notice.

- **Interim Care Options** – This resource lists several local options for emergency and interim care needs. These organizations are not affiliated with CMU.

Collaborative Care: Before and After Care

Often times, 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 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 before and after care 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 itself) 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:

- **[Family Care Concierge Service](#)** – CMU faculty, staff, and graduate students are eligible to receive personalized assistance from the university's Family Care Concierge Service. The concierge specialists can help search for child care center options.
- **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 of children you're looking to enroll and their ages, and transportation. While most of the featured centers will include full day care, some may have before and after care options available.
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