

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Sharing a Child Care Provider

Many parents want their children to have the focused care in familiar surroundings that an in-home caregiver can provide, but find the costs are out of their reach. A shared arrangement can be an excellent way to reduce costs and give your child the added benefit of another child or several other children to play with.

In some shared arrangements, the child care provider rotates between homes on a weekly basis. Other families prefer to have the caregiver based in one home all the time. Some caregivers are shared between two families. Other arrangements may involve the sharing of one child care provider between several families.

All of these arrangements can be successful, depending on the needs of the families involved. A little pre-planning can go a long way in helping to determine what the best route is for you and for the other family (or families) involved.

Determining Your Needs

Before you jump into a shared arrangement, take some time to think about your own wishes and requirements, and what will work best for you and the families involved. Ask yourself:

- Would your child be happier with one other child or with several?
- Would your child be happiest with other children in his or her age group or would a mixed age arrangement be fine?
- Can you afford the cost of sharing with just one other family, or do you need to share the costs and child care with several families?
- What hours do you need child care for each day? Are these hours likely to fit with another family's needs?
- How close to your home or workplace does the other family need to be?

Tips on Choosing the Right Family to Share With

If you are planning to share child care with several families, you will need to apply the following criteria to each of the families involved:

- Do you share similar needs in terms of hours and type of child care? Does one family need extended hours? Does your child have any special needs?
- Do you share similar values and parenting beliefs? Discuss your approach to discipline, diet and activities.
- Will the caregiver rotate between homes on a weekly basis or be based in one home all the time?
- Does the other family's home meet your own safety and cleanliness standards?

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- Is the other family's home suitable for more than one child? Will extra toys and supplies need to be bought?
- Agree on all finances upfront. Discuss how much you can afford to pay your child care provider. Consider other additional costs—food, toys, supplies, etc.
- Discuss caregiver expectations. Do you want a formally trained nanny? An untrained but experienced child care provider? A neighboring mom with great skills with children?
- Discuss what will happen if one child is sick.
- Discuss emergency child care arrangements in case the caregiver is sick.
- Discuss how much notice should be given if one family decides to leave the arrangement.

Tips on Choosing the Right Child Care Provider

For more specific details, you may want to begin by checking out other child care articles on this site, such as *A Parent's Guide to Child Care Options.* This article gives detailed information on how to screen and interview an in-home caregiver, and reviews the criteria that you should use to assess the candidates. If you are sharing an in-home child care provider, you will also want to think about the following:

- A shared child care provider needs to be highly flexible and adaptable to meet changing locations and the requirements of two or more different employers.
- The candidate should have experience in caring for more than one child at a time.
- A shared child care provider needs to be able to cope with multi-tasks and should be ready to deal with emergencies.
- The candidate will need a great deal of patience.
- The work may be physically draining. Does the candidate have the health and energy level to keep up with the multi-task demands?
- Does the caregiver live close enough to both families to be able to rotate from one home to another?

Before you reach any final decisions, be sure that you and your child meet the other family/families involved, as well as with any potential caregivers. Speak to other parents in your community to get an idea of what has worked best for them, and ask for the names of caregivers that they can recommend. With all of the pre-planning discussed in this article, you will be well prepared to decide on a shared child care plan that suits everyone's needs.