



Updating Agencies, Professionals, and Individuals with Current Life Skills Information

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## Child Care and Working Parents

**B**alancing employment and child rearing can be a complex task when both parents work, or for single working parents. This balancing act is even more difficult when children are of preschool ages or younger. With a large number of mothers with infants and preschoolers entering the workforce as a result of welfare reform, child care has emerged as an issue of public concern. This issue of LifeSkills is focused on child care quality and access to child care for low-income working families.

## Child Care Quality: Does It Matter?

In a study released earlier this year from the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Deborah Lowe Vandell and Barbara Wolfe reported that child care quality does matter. There is a strong link between high quality care and school readiness. Children in high quality care are better able to get along with their peers, have better language skills, and are more successful in school than children in poor quality child care. According to Vandell and Wolfe, high quality child care settings are measured by children's experiences in child care settings, caregivers' behaviors with children, physical facilities, age-appropriate activities, child: adult ratio, group size and caregiver characteristics such as educational background and specialized training.

### Does child care quality affect maternal employment?

Quality of care may influence employment in several ways. Parents may be reluctant to leave their child in a low-quality, unsafe environment or with adults who do not provide a stimulating or warm environment for their child. This may be a particular problem for lower-income families, who have more limited choices of providers. In contrast, a high quality care environment may encourage employment and longer hours of work resulting in higher productivity. Parents may also be more likely to be on time to work and less likely to miss time from work if they know their children are in good hands. Vandell and Wolfe found available evidence to suggest that among low-income women, higher-quality child care may increase employment, stability of employment, and hours of work.

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## Access to Child Care for Low-Income Working Families

### Can low-income working families afford the price of child care?

Prices for child care vary considerably, by such factors as geographic area, type of provider and age of child. A 1999 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on Child Care in California provides the following information:

- Child care centers in the state charge an average of \$420 per month for preschool care and \$577 per month for infant care. This means that a family with an annual income of \$15,000 and

one preschool child in an average-priced center would spend more than one-third (34 percent) of its total monthly income on child care expenses. Average-priced infant care would represent an even higher share (46 percent) of monthly income for a family earning \$15,000.

- Family child care homes in California charge an average of \$422 per month for preschool children and \$432 per month for infants. This means that a family with an annual income of \$15,000 and one child in an average-

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University of California and U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

## Access to Child Care for Low-Income Working Families (cont.)

priced family child care home would spend 34 percent of its monthly income on care for a preschool child or 35 percent for an infant.

- Families who receive child care subsidies usually pay much smaller monthly co-payments, rather than the full market rate. Such co-payments are established under a sliding fee schedule, and are based on family size, income and the number of children in care. For example, a family with an annual income of \$15,000 and one preschooler or infant in an average-priced center in California would be charged a monthly co-payment of \$43, or about three percent of monthly income, as shown in Figure 1.

### Who is eligible for child care subsidies?

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is the major source of Federal funding allocated to states to subsidize the child care expenses of low- and moderate-income families so they can work, or attend education or training programs. Using CCDF dollars along with state funds, California has designed its own child care program within broad parameters specified under federal law.

- To be eligible for child care subsidies under the current guidelines (California's October 1997 state plan), a family of 3 must have income below \$30,306, or 75 percent of State Median Income.
- 1,382,000 children in California are estimated to be eligible for child care subsidies. More than one-third (35%) of these children are living in poverty.
- 101,000 children in California received child care subsidies through CCDF-funded programs in an average month in 1998. This estimate suggests that 7 percent of the eligible population were served with CCDF funds.
- The state of California has a priority system for determining who receives child care subsidies. Children receiving

cash welfare assistance through CalWORKS and children at-risk in the protective services system are guaranteed child care subsidies. Low-income working families receive subsidies as funds become available.

- In 1998, there were an estimated 200,000 children on the waiting list for government subsidies in California. Many counties in the state have waiting lists in excess of 1,000 children. Low-income families in California may have to wait for more than a year before they receive child care subsidies.

### Is there adequate supply of child care in California?

The adequacy of the supply of child care varies across California. For example, in Alpine County, licensed child care meets 78 percent of the need for all children; in Los Angeles County, supply meets only 17 percent of the need. Throughout the state of California, infant care is in short supply. For example, in Los Angeles County, San Diego County, San Francisco County, and Siskiyou County less than 5 percent of slots in licensed care centers are infant slots. Only 4 percent of all of the licensed and license-exempt centers, and only 33 percent of the licensed family child care homes listed with the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network provide care during odd hours, such as weekends, evenings or over night. **LS**

**Source:** *Child Care in California: A Short Report on Subsidies, Affordability, and Supply, December 1999*, published by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/Child-Care99/ca-rpt.htm>.

**Figure 1. Child Care Prices and Co-Payments for a Hypothetical California Family of Three Earning \$15,000 with One Child in Care**

	WITHOUT SUBSIDY		WITH SUBSIDY	
	Average Monthly Prices (Full Time Care)	% of Income (Family Income of \$15,000 Annually)	Monthly Co-Payments* (If receive subsidy)	% of Income* (Family Income of \$15,000 Annually)
<b>INFANT (1 year)</b>				
Center-based	\$577	46.1%	\$43	3.4%
Family child care home	\$432	34.6%	\$43	3.4%
<b>PRESCHOOLER (4 years)</b>				
Center-based	\$420	33.5%	\$43	3.4%
Family child care home	\$422	33.8%	\$43	3.4%

\* State policy does not prevent providers from charging parents additional amounts, above the co-payment, if the providers' rates exceed the state reimbursement level. Maximum reimbursement rates in California, however, exceed the statewide average prices. Figures in this table represent the minimum co-payment.  
(Source: Price data collected by the Urban Institute from the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, a statewide child care resource and referral agency, summer 1999. Co-payment data collected by the Urban Institute from the California Department of Education, summer 1999.)

## Federal Child Care Tax Credit

### What is Federal Child Care Tax Credit?

The federal child care tax credit allows parents to claim up to 30% of their child care expenses as a credit toward their federal tax returns. The tax credit is based on the income of the parents and the cost of child care. The child care tax credit cannot be taken as a cash refund. If you don't owe income tax, you cannot get the child care tax credit.

### Who may take the Federal Child Care Tax Credit?

Single or married parents who paid someone to care for their child under age 13 so they could work or look for work may be able to take the credit for child care expenses. For more information, contact the IRS for Form 2441 and Instructions for Form 2441. Use Form 2441 to figure the amount of your credit. To fill out Form 2441, you need your care provider's name, address and tax identifying information such as social security number (SSN), employer's identification number (EIN), or tax-exempt number. **LS**

For information about how you can get the Federal Child Care Tax Credit and free help filing your taxes, call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040. You can also visit the IRS Web Site at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

## Subsidized Child Care Services in California

Several state and federally subsidized child care programs are available to assist low-income working parents with dependent children. Some of the available services are listed below.

### Campus Child Development Programs

Campus child care centers provide care for children of students in California community colleges and four-year colleges. Child care may be provided all day or may be adjusted to a parent's class schedule. Programs are funded by a combination of parent fees, student body fees, and state funds.

### Migrant Child Care Programs

The migrant child care and development centers provide child care services to children of "migrant agricultural worker families" during peak growing season, usually between May and October. Centers offering this type of child care are operated by county offices of education, school districts and private nonprofit agencies.

### School Age Parenting and Infant Development Programs (SAPID)

The School Age Parenting and Infant Development Program assists mothers to complete junior high and high school by providing child care for their infants during the school day. In addition to providing child care, SAPID requires parenting classes and counseling for the school-age parents while they finish high school. These programs are operated by public high schools free of charge, and are located on or near high school campuses. There is no income eligibility requirement for SAPID programs.

### State Preschool Programs

State preschool programs provide partial-day child care to prepare three to five-year-old children from low income families for kindergarten. Priorities are given to children who are recipients of child protective services, or who are at risk of being neglected or abused. The preschools offer educational and social services, as well as health and nutrition programs. The

preschools emphasize parental education and involvement. Often, the children and parents participating in state preschools speak limited English. Therefore, some programs have bilingual components. State preschools are administered by school districts, county offices of education and private agencies.

### Head Start Programs

Head Start programs are administered and funded by federal agencies for children of primarily low-income, disadvantaged families. To be eligible for Head Start, a child generally must be at least three years old. Head Start programs are mostly partial-day programs that operate during the school year. Parent participation is required. Head Start is similar to the state preschool program. In some cases, Head Start and state preschool programs may be combined. The program is usually provided free of charge.

### School Age Community Child Care Services (LATCHKEY)

The Latchkey programs provide extended-day child care in safe environments for school age children during the hours immediately before and after school and during vacations. Latchkey programs are operated by school districts and nonprofit organizations. Children who are recipients of child protective services or are from families that meet the low income guideline are eligible. At least half of all program costs must be paid for through parent fees.

### Special Programs for Children with Severe Disabilities

Special programs for severely handicapped children provide supervision, care therapy, youth guidance and parental counseling to eligible families at no charge. This program is currently very small and only available in the Bay Area. The federal government also provides funds for infant and preschool programs for children with severe disabilities. Severely disabled children, from infants to 21 years of age, are eligible for these services. **LS**

## Child Care Resources

### California Child Care Resource & Referral Network

111 New Montgomery Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105  
Phone: (415) 882-0234  
Fax: (415) 882-6233  
Web site: <http://www.rrnetwork.org/>

This web site provides a listing by county of all state funded child care resource and referral agencies in California. The services are provided free to parents and child care providers.

### Community Care Licensing Agency

California Department of Social Services  
744 P Street, Mail Stop 1950  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Phone: (916) 324-4031  
Fax: (916) 323-8352  
Web site: <http://ccl.dss.cahwnet.gov/>

This web site provides information about how to obtain a license for providing child care, and contact information for local Community Care Licensing offices.

### California Head Start State Collaboration Office

California Department of Education  
560 J Street, Suite 220  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Phone: (916) 323-9727  
Fax: (916) 323-6853  
Web site: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/cyfsbranch/chssco/>

This web site provides an overview of Head Start and contact information for National Head Start Association, California Head Start Association and National Child Care Information Center.

### Child Care Subsidy Agency

California State Department of Education  
Child Development Division  
560 J Street, Suite 220  
Sacramento, CA 95814-4785  
Phone: (916) 324-8296  
Fax: (916) 323-6853  
Web site: [http://www.cde.ca.gov/cyfsbranch/child\\_development/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/cyfsbranch/child_development/)

This web site provides information on admission priorities and family fee schedules for state preschool programs.

### Child Care Connection Hotline: 1-800-KIDS-793

An information specialist is available to provide callers with answers to a variety of child care questions and refers callers to local child care resource and referral agencies. The phone line is answered Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. Non-California residents can also use the Child Care Connection hotline to be connected with a resource and referral agency serving their state.

### Child Abuse Reporting

To report suspected child abuse in California, call any state licensing office, any law enforcement office or any child protective office. For national child abuse information, call the Childhelp USA National Child Abuse Hotline (staffed 24 hours daily with professional crisis counselors): 1-800-4-A-CHILD or 1-800-2-A-CHILD (T.D.D.).

## Child Care Quality (cont.)

### Is there an economic justification for public intervention to improve the quality of child care, especially for children from lower-income families?

According to Vandell and Wolfe, the answer is yes. If high-quality child care can provide gains in cognitive ability, school readiness, and social behavior, children in low-income families should be given an opportunity to benefit from such experiences just as high-income children benefit. Government subsidies are necessary if

equal opportunity for high-quality care is to be afforded children in low-income families. Benefits of quality child care extend to all members of society by means of reduction in special education and grade retention, reduction in crime and more productive employees. **LS**

**Source:** Deborah Lowe Vandell and Barbara Wolfe, "Child Care Quality: Does It Matter and Does It Need to be Improved?", *Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, May 2000.*  
<http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality00/ccqual.htm>.

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# YOUR GUIDE TO CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE

Finding the right child care may take much time and energy. But most parents find this effort is rewarded many times over by their children's well-being and their own peace of mind.

## Signs of Quality Care

### In a quality care facility the caregiver(s) should:

- Be caring and nurturing
  - √ Respects and enjoys children
  - √ Shows affection
  - √ Responds sensitively to children's needs
- Guide appropriately and effectively
  - √ Provides fair/gentle guidance and discipline
  - √ Explains rules and limits clearly
  - √ Encourages responsibility
- Promote health and safety
  - √ Requires hand washing by staff and children
  - √ Has first aid and CPR training
  - √ Handles and stores food safely
  - √ Provides nutritious meals and snacks
  - √ Has developed emergency plans
- Provide educational activities to meet each child's developmental needs
  - √ Promotes language and literacy skills through conversation, games and stories
  - √ Provides a variety of individual and group learning activities
  - √ Helps with homework and educational projects
- Work well with parents
  - √ Welcomes parent visits and questions
  - √ Discusses children's development with parents



### In a quality care facility, the physical facilities should:

- Be safe and prepared to handle care of children
- Have space for play and care
- Include sufficient program materials for all types of play

### Suggestions for Parents:

- Be sure you feel really comfortable with the caregiver.
- Visit a variety of homes and centers before you choose.
- Visit at least twice at different times to see how the staff works with the children.
- Review the daily schedule of activities to see if they will help your child learn and grow.
- Make sure you approve of the kind of discipline the staff uses if children misbehave.
- Talk to your child about daily activities and watch for any changes in your child that might indicate a problem.

# UNA GUÍA PARA SELECCIONAR BUEN CUIDADO INFANTIL

Encontrar el cuidado infantil adecuado puede tomar mucho tiempo y esfuerzo. Pero para la mayoría de padres este esfuerzo es recompensado con creces al saber que sus niños están en buenas manos y no tienen que preocuparse a cada momento de su bienestar.

## Indicadores de buen cuidado infantil

### En un centro de cuidado infantil, quienes cuidan a los niños deben:

- Ser cariñosos y brindar una buena crianza
  - › Respetan a los niños y disfrutan de su compañía
  - › Son cariñosos con los niños
  - › Responden a las necesidades de los niños
- Guiar a los niños adecuada y eficazmente
  - › Proveen disciplina justa y cariñosa
  - › Explican las reglas y límites claramente
  - › Animan a los niños a ser responsables
- Fomenta la salud y seguridad
  - › Exige que los empleados y niños se laven las manos
  - › Ha recibido entrenamiento de primeros auxilios y CPR
  - › Sabe cómo conservar los alimentos en buen estado
  - › Sirve a los niños comidas y bocadillos nutritivos
  - › Cuenta con un plan en caso de emergencias
- Proporciona actividades educativas según las necesidades de cada niño
  - › Fomenta el desarrollo del lenguaje, la lectura y la escritura por medio de charlas, juegos y cuentos
  - › Ofrece una variedad de actividades de aprendizaje individuales y en grupo
  - › Ayuda con la tarea escolar y proyectos educativos
- Trabaja bien con los padres
  - › Invita a los padres a que visiten el centro y responde a sus preguntas
  - › Habla con los padres acerca del desarrollo de sus hijos



En un buen centro de cuidado infantil las instalaciones deben:

- Ser seguras y apropiadas para el cuidado de los niños
- Tener espacio para cuidar de los niños y un área donde pueda jugar
- Incluir suficientes materiales para una variedad de actividades y juegos

### Sugerencias para los padres:

- Asegúrese que se siente a gusto con quien va a cuidar a sus niños.
- Visite varios centros infantiles y guarderías antes de seleccionar una.
- Visite el lugar por lo menos dos veces, a distinta hora, para ver cómo cuidan a los niños.
- Revise el horario de actividades diarias para ver si fomentan el aprendizaje y desarrollo.
- Asegúrese que está de acuerdo con la disciplina que imparten cuando un niño no se comporta bien.
- Hable con sus niños acerca de lo que hacen diariamente y fíjese si hay un cambio en el comportamiento de sus niños que pueda indicar que existe un problema.