



Backup Child Care Options

This guide provides information for parents who do not have the option of placing their child under the care of relatives, neighbors and friends and who need to arrange for temporary/backup care for their child or children.

What Is Backup Care?

Backup care is short-term child care available to help families when extraordinary or unexpected events occur that disrupt regular child care arrangements. These include:

- Temporary business assignments
- Family emergencies
- Illness of a child
- Illness of a caregiver/nanny
- Vacations
- Holidays
- Inclement weather
- Major residential repair/construction

There are many expected child care breakdowns (e.g., scheduled holidays or a caregiver's planned time off). Unexpected breakdowns (e.g., caregiver illness or transportation problems) are also inevitable. However, with a little advance planning you can carefully evaluate and choose several backup options so last-minute scrambling and stress are minimized.

To prepare for care breakdowns:

- Know your company's policies regarding time off, flexible work arrangements, sick days and leaves of absence.
- Know whether your company offers emergency child care assistance, such as a backup care program.
- Coordinate several backup options—the more options you have, the better.
- Complete in advance any pre-registration forms a backup care provider may require.

Wendy and her husband Kevin are planning several backup care options in anticipation of expected and unexpected breakdowns in their in-home care arrangement. Their two-year old daughter, Josie, has an in-home caregiver and they want to be prepared for their nanny's vacations, sick days and other potential problems. "We need several quality caregivers," states Wendy. "I want to take time now to search for qualified caregivers so when my nanny is on vacation, is ill, or can't get to work because there's three feet of snow outside, I can just call the names on my backup list and go to work knowing my child is comfortable, safe and well cared for."

Identifying Your Needs

The first step in the process of finding the best backup care for your child is to identify your needs. Consider the following questions:

- Are you looking for care to routinely back up your regular child care arrangements?
- Is this care for a one-time event?
- How many children require care and what are their ages?
- Does your child have any special needs or preferences that may impact your choice of care?
- How long will care be needed and is overnight care required?
- Is your need for child care due to illness or an emergency requiring specialized medical care?



- Do you require other specialized qualifications of the caregiver (e.g., bilingual, athletic skills, experience caring for a child with special needs)?
- Will you require the caregiver to provide transportation for your child? (Will your child require any special accommodations during transport?)
- Do you have a preference as to where your child will be cared for (e.g., in-home care vs. a child care center)?
- Will your child be more comfortable in one setting versus another?
- Do you have a sense of what the costs will be?
- Have you budgeted for backup care?

Depending on your basic requirements, you're ready to begin searching for the backup care that satisfies your needs.

In-Home Child Care Options

Many parents choose an in-home caregiver to fill backup child care needs since one's own home is convenient and familiar. The background and qualifications you look for in an in-home child caregiver will depend on your needs and the amount of time you require care. You may also need to combine the services of different caregivers with different skills to satisfy your care requirements. In-home caregivers can be categorized into those without professional certification or those with certification qualifying them in a specific medical or therapeutic skill. *Note*—Respite caregivers who provide temporary care for children with special needs may be either certified or uncertified.

Uncertified Caregivers

Uncertified caregivers are most often baby sitters (including housekeepers and temporary nannies). The most general definition of a "baby sitter" is anyone who takes care of children on an hourly basis, but does not offer

(nor, in most cases, is he or she trained to offer) a predetermined schedule of structured physical and learning activities or prescribed and ongoing medical care.

While everyone is familiar with the typical use of a baby sitter (to care for a child on a part-time, hourly basis, which would not normally include overnight responsibilities), baby sitters are also the most common child care alternative sought by parents when other temporary child care needs arise. To this end, baby sitters should be capable of dealing with emergencies, including transportation requirements and the care of a mildly ill child, in addition to standard child care and household demands for as long as a situation demands. Baby sitters may also be capable of temporarily caring for a child with mild special needs.

Certified Caregivers

Some situations may require specialized care for your child. Illness or accident, or the care of a child with special needs often demand qualifications in a backup caregiver that an uncertified caregiver does not possess.

Certified caregivers include:

- Nursery nurses
- Certified Nurses' Aides (CNA)
- Home Health Aides (HHA)
- Licensed Practical Nurses/Licensed Vocational Nurses (LPN/LVN)
- Occupational Therapists (OT)
- Personal Care Aides (PCA)
- Physical Therapists (PT)
- Registered Nurses (RN)

Note—In situations where a physician prescribes a certified medical professional to assist in a child's in-home care, your insurance policy may provide coverage. Call your insurance agent or company for information.

Sources for Certified or Uncertified In-Home Caregivers

The following sources may be able to recommend, place or advertise for an in-home caregiver who meets your needs:

- Your company's benefits program (education and referral service, if offered) or wellness department
- Your current caregiver
- Friends and relatives
- Local colleges (specifically childhood education and/or nursing departments)
- Nanny or other employment agencies
- Internet sites (for example, Craigslist)
- Home health care agencies
- Mothers' networking groups
- Local child play centers that offer music, art, or gym classes, etc.

Another option, if you cannot find a caregiver, is to ask other parents if they would be willing to agree to a share situation with their caregiver (although this is typically a short-term solution).

Using an Agency

Agencies can be a valuable and efficient resource for finding reliable, certified or uncertified backup care. Depending on your needs, you may want to look for an agency that offers one or more of the following programs:

- **Guaranteed placement**—The agency can place a caregiver in your home with very short notice—within 48 hours, 24 hours or within a few hours.
- **Membership plan**—Some agencies offer a one-time membership fee that allows for unlimited usage (i.e., no additional agency fees for each caregiver hired) for a fixed period of time. (You are, however, still responsible for paying the caregiver's wages for the care provided.)

- **Reduced placement fee**—Some agencies charge less to place a temporary caregiver versus a permanent provider, or will waive the fee entirely.
- **Training program**—Some agencies offer caregiver training classes for those who care primarily for sick children, a valuable feature in certain circumstances.
- **CPR and first aid training**—Some agencies solicit only caregivers who are certified in these skills.
- **Instant access**—Agencies with instant access ensure that emergency requests are handled immediately. A cellular phone number, message service, designated phone/fax line, fax/modem request forms or paging system can greatly lower expected turnaround time.
- **Local service**—A local agency is more likely to locate a caregiver, especially on short notice, since its pool of candidates typically lives nearby.

A Note About In-Home Caregiver Fees

If the cost of paying any in-home caregiver (temporary or otherwise) exceeds a certain amount, as determined by the IRS, in a calendar year (in 2011, \$1,700), there are tax and income figures that must be reported. Conversely, if the cost of an individual caregiver is less than that amount annually, parents have no additional tax reporting liabilities.

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