

PLANNING AHEAD: A SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR GETTING THE CARE YOU NEED

The following guidelines are meant to assist you in utilizing our service as well as to maximize your ability to get the care you want, where you want it. Many parents are surprised to find out how far ahead they need to plan to get the care they want. There are also typical registration times for programs such as nursery schools, after school programs, and summer camps. While these guidelines may help you get the provider you want, they are not rules and the Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) can help you with even the most immediate child care needs.

Before the Baby, Infant (0-15 months) and Toddler (15-33 months) Care

It is never too soon to get preliminary information on child care in your area. You may want to discuss your options with a counselor and get a feel for what quality child care has to offer and the types of settings available.

Centers - If you want to get an infant slot in a child care center, you will want to get started immediately. Many centers have long wait lists for infants and you may need to get on one now to get into the center you desire.

In-home Care - If you want to hire a live-in or live-out caregiver for your home, you will want to start thinking about how you want to proceed right away. Whether you are searching on your own or intend to go through an agency, this can be a long process. Call CCRC for our guides, *Finding In-Home Care* and *Using In-Home/Relative Care*, as well as referrals to agencies providing in-home placement in your area. Once you have decided what agency you want to use or that you want to look on your own, start your search at least 3 months before you need care.

Family Child Care Homes - If you or your spouse is expecting, CCRC can provide you with the names of family child care providers in your area who will speak with expectant parents, however a family child care provider usually cannot guarantee an opening too far in advance. Family child care providers care for a small number of children at one time, and may have openings unexpectedly, or may not have openings for a long time. Once you have decided that family child care is the care you desire, you will want to start searching intensively for care no more than 2 to 3 months before you need care. A CCRC counselor will assist you throughout this time, and can provide up-to-date information about child care openings throughout your search.

Pre-school Care (2.9 - 5 years)

Centers - As with the infant/toddler slots, it is important to look for pre-school age slots as soon as you decide that this is the type of care you desire. Wait lists are often the rule rather than the exception, so call CCRC for referrals right away - 8 to 10 months before you need care is not too early to start looking. Some centers may be willing to hold a slot if you make a deposit or pay for the slot immediately, however directors cannot always guarantee a slot. Also be aware that some centers will only enroll children at a certain time of the year.

Nursery Schools - Some schools are more traditional in that they follow the school year calendar and offer half-day programs. These programs usually serve children ages 2 years, 9 months and older. Applications are often available in January for the following September with registration deadlines in March, so it is a good idea to look at schools in the fall or early winter.

Family Child Care Homes- See information under family child care homes above.

School-Age Child Care

This is a time of great change for both parent and child. The child care arrangements can become more complicated as children lead busier lives on school schedules. CCRC can help smooth this time of transition with referrals, information on transportation options, and extra-curricular activity information.

Kindergarten - Kindergarten care schedules can present a special challenge to parents. Some child care centers offer full-day kindergarten programs with certified teachers. If your child does not attend a center's own kindergarten program, some centers may offer before and/or after kindergarten care and may even provide transportation to and from local elementary schools. Traditional after-school programs (see below) often can't accommodate kindergarten schedules and many don't accept children under the age of 6. When you register your child for school, you should also make plans to meet after-school needs.

Family Child Care - Some family child care providers will provide school-age care. If they are in the neighborhood near your elementary school, your child may be able to join other children in walking to school from the provider, or be picked up and dropped off by the bus. For younger school children, the family child care home can be a welcome rest from the structured, large group environment at school. It is a good idea to check with providers in May or June about after-school care for the following September. You will want to find out if other school-age children will be in the home to provide peer interaction.

Afterschool Programs/Centers - Many public and private schools now offer after-school programs for children in kindergarten or first grade and up right on school grounds. This allows children to interact with their peers on a more relaxed level than during the school day. There are also private after-school care programs at places such as the YMCA and Boys' and Girls' Clubs. Programs not located on a school site may or may not have transportation. Registration for after-school programs usually occurs in April or May.

Summer Camps - Summer offers a great variety of activities for school-aged children. Summer camp can range from day camps to overnight camps, general activity camps to specialty camps. Specialty camps and overnight camps often fill up very quickly and applications for these camps are often available earlier than for other camps. November is not too soon to start looking into your options for these types of camp. Day camp registration generally occurs between March and May. CCRC receives information about various day camps throughout the spring, so March is not too soon to start your search.

Vacation Care, Sick Care, and Back-up Care

Regardless of your child's age, there will always be times when your child care arrangement will not be able to meet your needs. It is best to be prepared for these times before they happen with a plan of action and a list of back-up providers you can refer to. CCRC counselors are available to assist you with ideas and options for back-up care. It is never too soon to plan for this type of care!

Scholarships, subsidies, voucher and contracted slots

Your counselor will be able to assist you in determining which providers offer these options, and to help you determine if you may qualify for specific programs. Be aware that subsidized or contracted slots are limited in number and that there is often a wait list of up to a year or more at some centers. If you think you might be qualified for one of these programs, you must plan well in advance and be prepared to use alternate care while waiting.

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