

An important first step is determining what type of child care is right for your family. Quality child care options can include day care, in-home child care, nannies, au pairs, pre-school, and even the parent as the provider. Here are quality options and things to consider before making that ever-important decision as to who will provide that quality child care for your loved one.

Child Care

Finding adequate child care is also an important part of making the choice. "At first the idea of leaving her with anyone terrified me," recalls



Georgianne. "Getting adequate child care was a nightmare. I got a list of the places licensed in my area, but when I went to visit the very first one I was discouraged. The woman had three other children and the

home was in a depressing, stark apartment building. I just thought, no. In the end I paid a fortune for a series of nannies. They were all OK, but none of them stuck around much longer than six months."

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Very few companies provide day care or nurseries. Local social-services departments have few day-care facilities, and these are mostly filled by single or special-needs mothers. Some churches and temples have day-care facilities, however. Private day-care services tend to be expensive, but they are becoming more common. Baby-sitters can be a good, inexpensive option if you find one you like. Nannies can live in if you have the space, or can come in for the day. Also, if you have one child and work part-time, you may be able to share a nanny with another mother to cut costs. If you work part time, au pairs can work out if you have the room. However, they aren't expected to work more than five hours a day. Also, they may be very young and inexperienced with small children.

BABY GIFTS & GIFT BASKETS

Space--or lack of it--comes as a big surprise to many parents shopping for child care services. Summer may bring lighter classes and lower ratios, but come fall or a new year, classes can fill quickly. There's many an assumption that a neighborhood daycare will be bound to have openings, only to find that the particular class or age is full.

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Finding suitable child-care arrangements is often an ongoing worry for the working mother. What works when you have one baby will not be perfect when you have two preschool children. Often child-care problems get even more complicated when children start school: It's harder to find someone who wants to work for only two or three hours after school or during school vacations. And what do you do when your child is ill? Having both children and a job usually means:

- You have a reasonably understanding relationship with your employer.
- You are prepared to sacrifice some paid vacation days at those times when your child or baby-sitter is ill.
- Your partner is prepared to make some of these sacrifices, too.

Otherwise, the situation may become unworkable.

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