



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Child Care Concerns



Raising your grandchildren, although rewarding, may be challenging. And combining grandparenting with full-time or part-time work outside the home can be an even bigger struggle. Who will take care of your grandchildren while you're at work? How do you find someone who will help your grandchildren learn and grow?

Choosing a competent caregiver who can care for your grandchildren while you work, run errands, or take time for yourself is an important decision. It's crucial that you feel comfortable with the person (or people) who care for your grandchildren when you're not there. So how do you choose good child care, and how do you help your grandchildren make a smooth transition to another caregiver?

Types of Child Care

If you're looking for someone to care for your grandchildren, you have many different options. Here are the most common types of child care in most communities.

- **Child care centers:** In Georgia, child care centers care for 19 or more children. Some centers are quite large, caring for hundreds of children, while others are smaller. Child care centers usually have different groups or classes for children of different ages. Some centers are for-profit businesses or franchises. Others are run by not-for-profit organizations. Some child care centers care for children from infancy through elementary school. Others are limited to only a few age groups. Most child care

centers are open only during workday hours on weekdays, although some centers are beginning to offer weekend and evening care. Child care centers are licensed by the state.

- **Group child care homes:** Group child care homes in Georgia care for between 7 and 18 children. Children are usually in mixed-age groups, although infants and toddlers are separated from older children. Like centers, group child care homes are licensed by the state.

- **Family child care homes:** Family child care homes are usually run by one adult who cares for up to six children in his or her own home. Family child care providers usually try to set up a "home-like" environment for the children. Family child care providers are required to register with the state and to get regular training.

- **Informal care:** Many parents and grandparents choose to have friends, neighbors, or relatives care for their children. These people are known as "informal caregivers" because they do not usually have to go through a licensing or registration process. Babysitters and nannies are also considered informal caregivers. Informal care may happen in the caregiver's home or in the child's home. In many communities, informal caregivers are the only option available for adults who work evening or overnight hours.

- **Preschools:** Preschools are generally half-day educational programs for toddlers and

Child Care Concerns

preschoolers. Preschools may be run by for-profit or not-for-profit groups.

Child Care Quality Matters

What kind of child care arrangement is best for you and your grandchildren? Some adults worry that putting their children in child care will hurt their development, or believe that certain types of care are better. What researchers have discovered is that *where* a child receives care is less important than the quality of that care. High-quality care may help your grandchildren develop language, thinking, and social skills. Children who are in low-quality care are more likely to be aggressive than children in high-quality care.

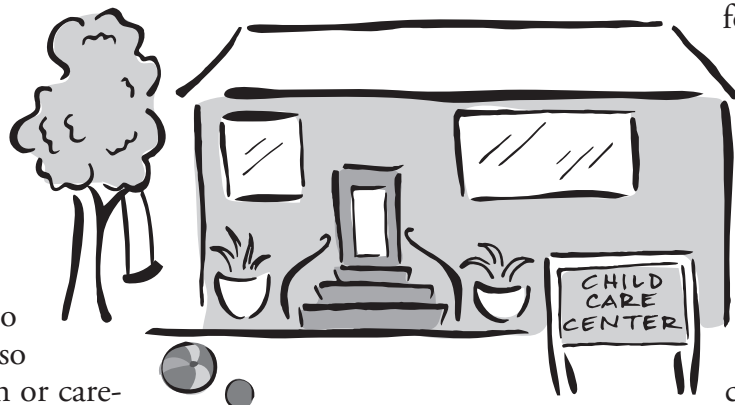
So how do you recognize high-quality care? Look for things like small adult-to-child ratios; well-trained, responsive caregivers; and a setting that provides stimulation and teaches children how to solve problems. You also need to find a program or caregiver who's a good "fit" with your grandchild. Here are some tips:

- **Find out what's available in your community.** Large cities will have a wide variety of child care available. Smaller communities may have fewer options. You can get the names of child care programs from your local child care resource and referral agency. The Georgia Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (800-466-5681) can tell you how to locate the resource and referral agency near you.

- **Visit and observe.** Be sure to visit the child care program or provider before you leave your

grandchildren. Count the number of children and adults. Children receive better-quality care in smaller groups with enough adults. Are there enough adults to provide good supervision and attention? Watch how the adults interact with other children. Do they get down at eye level? Are they warm and caring? Do they talk, laugh, sing, and smile with children? Is the space safe and inviting for children? Are there enough age-appropriate toys and activities available? Are toys safe and clean? Are children's needs met? A visit may help you get a feel for how your grandchildren would connect with the caregivers.

- **Ask questions.** Talk with the person or people who will be responsible for your grandchildren.



Find out what they know about how children grow and develop. Talk about how they would handle an emergency or a sick child. Ask what they would do if your grandchild cried when you dropped him off. Find

out whether they encourage you to visit the program. Ask how they will keep you updated on your grandchildren's progress. Make sure you feel comfortable with the child care provider you choose. If possible, look for someone whose child-rearing ideas are similar to yours.

- **Pay attention to logistics.** Find out how much the program costs. Be aware that many programs have scholarships or sliding fee scales for families who can't afford the whole cost. Ask whether the caregiver's hours of operation match your schedule. What time can you bring the children, and when do you need to

Child Care Concerns

pick them up? Try to avoid child care arrangements where you have to travel a long distance, or rush from work to pick up your grandchild. Ask to see the caregiver's Parent Handbook that describes the program's policies and rules.

- **Find out what you need to bring.** Different child care programs have different expectations. Most programs will expect you to supply diapers, wipes, a change of clothing, and any medications your grandchildren need. Some programs provide lunch; others expect you to send a lunch with your grandchild.

- **Be consistent.** It's important for your grandchildren to form strong, secure attachments with their regular caregivers. Check out child care programs carefully, and try to keep your grandchildren with the same caregivers for as long as possible.

You won't be happy about your child care arrangements until you are sure your grandchildren are in a safe, healthy, nurturing place. Take the extra time to find the highest quality care that meets your needs.

Child Care Centers Require Immunizations

If you are planning to enroll your grandchildren in child care, their immunizations should be up to date. Many child care programs will require you to supply a copy of each grandchild's immunization record that lists the dates of each immunization. An original, up-to-date certificate must be maintained on file at the child care center.

If you're not sure whether your grandchild has had all the necessary immunizations, talk to

your pediatrician or the local health center. They can help you figure out how to get your grandchildren's immunization records and how to decide which immunizations are needed. Take the time to be sure all of your grandchildren are immunized—it's an important step to protect their health.

Making the Transition into Child Care

Leaving your grandchildren in a child care program or with an unfamiliar caregiver for the first time may be hard for all of you. Your grandchildren will face new adults, new children, new places, new things, new routines, and new limits. They may be scared about being alone and upset with you for leaving them. You may worry that they will embarrass you by crying or misbehaving. These feelings are normal responses to the transition into something new. But with careful planning and preparation, you can help reduce the "first-week jitters."



Talk with your children about their new child care arrangements. Tell them where they are going, and discuss some of the things they might do. Even if they do not understand everything you say, they certainly will pick up your feelings of confidence. If possible, visit the program with your grandchildren before their first full day. Let them watch and explore with your encouragement and protection. Be sure they have a chance to meet their new caregivers when they visit.

Talk with the caregiver about your grandchildren before they begin the program. Explain your grandchildren's eating and sleeping schedules, any health concerns (such as allergies), and any situations at home that may affect

their behavior. Tell them about what upsets your grandchildren and how they can be comforted. If your grandchildren are taking prescription medicine, you will need to complete a permission form for your grandchildren to be given the medication in your absence. If possible, fill out and return all of the forms and paperwork the program needs before your grandchildren's first day.

On the day your grandchildren start in the program, be sure you bring all the clothes, equipment, and food the caregiver requests. Bring one of your grandchildren's favorite comfort items, such as a stuffed animal or a blanket, if the program permits it. Arrive a few minutes early so you can greet the caregiver, put away your grandchildren's things, and help them find an activity. Plan to spend a little extra time sitting with them and helping them get used to the new setting. Consider making their first day a half-day, or at least picking them up a little early. A full day in child care is a big adjustment for a young child who's used to being at home all day.

Some children may cry, scream, kick, or cling to you when you try to leave. When it's time to go, say goodbye calmly, and tell them when you will return. Don't sneak out without saying goodbye; this just makes the adjustment harder when your grandchildren realize you have left. Once you leave, don't go back to check on them. Even though it's hard, keep walking. Remember that you trust the caregiver to take good care of your grandchildren. It may help you feel better to call the caregiver in an hour to ask how your grandchildren are doing.

When you pick up your grandchildren, greet them with warmth and words that show you're

glad to see them. Ask them if they had a good day, and tell them you're proud of them for staying with the caregiver all day. Don't be surprised if they are both glad to see you and mad that you left. Spend a little extra one-on-one time with them that evening, and give some extra hugs and cuddles if needed.

Starting a new child care program may be stressful for your grandchildren. Some children tend to cling to you more, to change their eating and sleeping patterns, or to go back to behaviors like thumb-sucking as they make the transition. Some children need more time curled up in their grandparents' laps or sucking their thumbs. Don't be surprised if your grandchildren are well-behaved at child care (where they want to please these new adults) and misbehave more than usual at home (because you are safe and home is where they can blow off steam). Just be patient—these behaviors will change as your grandchildren make the adjustment into their new child care arrangement.

In Summary

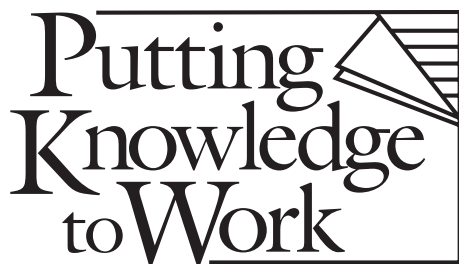
Choosing child care is an important decision. You need to look for a high-quality program that meets your family's needs, fits your schedule, and provides warmth and nurturing for your grandchildren. Making the transition into a new child care program is challenging for some children. Talk to them about what to expect, help caregivers learn how to comfort your grandchildren, and spend some extra time with grandchildren while they are adjusting. Above all, be patient—you and your caregiver can help your grandchildren learn to enjoy their child care experiences!

Leaving your grandchildren in a child care program or with an unfamiliar caregiver for the first time may be hard for all of you.

Child Care Concerns

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