

BANANAS CHOOSING CHILD CARE HANDOUT

Choosing Schoolage Child Care: Options For Care And Suggestions For Latchkey Kids

The problems connected to finding good child care do not vanish when your child enters kindergarten. In fact, frequently there are fewer child care choices for schoolage children than there are for preschoolers. School schedules can also make finding consistent care for children in this age group more problematic (e.g., summer vacations, year-round schools, spring breaks, shorter hours for kindergartners, school holidays when parents must work). And, parents still need to plan for those times when a child is ill. It may take some juggling and lots of pre-planning, but do not lose heart; by beginning your search early, you can find a situation that will work for you and your child.

What Are Your Options

This next section offers you an overview of the types of care commonly used for schoolage children. Not all of the types of care listed below may be available at or near your child's school.

Family Child Care Homes: These licensed programs which operate out of a provider's home are a natural choice for many parents. They are licensed to care for either 6 or 12 children and can choose to serve two additional schoolage children provided they reduce the number of infants in care and meet other standards. Please see our "*Choosing Family Child Care Handout*" for more on the regulations which apply when serving two additional schoolage children. Serving these two extra children can increase a family child care home's capacity to either 8 or 14. Family child care provides a small group setting (often with flexible hours) where a child can unwind at the end of a busy school day. They are often open earlier and stay open later than centers. Many family child care providers walk or drive young children both to and from school. Some providers who are located close to a school allow older children to walk back and forth in a group.

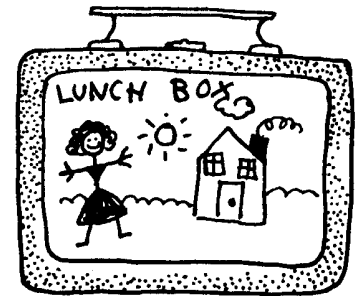
There are providers who care only for schoolage children. Most, however, care for a mixed age group of children from infants on up. Some family child care providers will allow mildly ill (non-contagious) children to come to child care when they are too ill to attend school. It is possible to recruit a friend or neighbor without that person having to go through the licensing process, since a family child care providers who cares for just the children from one family in addition to her own is exempt from licensing requirements.

Child Care Centers: These are licensed facilities which operate in non-home settings. Increasingly, local groups (such as school districts, YMCA's, Jewish Community Cen-

ters, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, etc.) are offering center-based care right on the school site. This can be very convenient for parents and eliminates any concern about how children will get to and from school. In some cases, centers are located off the school site but within walking distance. And, in some communities, centers use vans to pick up children from several schools and transport them to one central location. Center-based programs which are designed for schoolage children tailor their schedules to the children's need for care. They usually (but not always) operate full days during the summer and school holidays. Centers serve larger groups of children (15 to 20 or more) and they often have less flexible hours than family child care. Centers will usually accommodate a mildly ill child only during the time necessary for the parent to come and pick up the child.

(Both center-based care and family child care homes are licensed by Community Care Licensing, the Department of Social Services of the State of California. This is primarily a health and safety check of the facility and does not insure the quality of care. Only parents can do that by careful evaluation. The licensing office accepts calls from parents and is the appropriate channel through which to complain. The local DSS office can be reached by calling, 622-2602. BANANAS welcomes information – positive and negative – from parents, and we hope you call us with your concerns. However, we have no authority to monitor, investigate or revoke licenses.

In-Home Caregivers: These are adults or teenagers who come to your home to care for your child before and/or after school. You can usually arrange for a caregiver to transport or walk your child to or from school. However, finding one worker to provide both before and after school care may be difficult because what you're offering is a "split shift" job where the person is only needed for an hour or so in the morning and then a few hours again in the afternoon. It may be easier to find an in-home caregiver if you also have a younger child who needs care all day. Care in your home is more expensive than either family child care or a center. Teenagers charge \$3.00 or more per hour while adult rates begin at \$6-7 per hour. Looking for college students or teenagers with flexible schedules is a good way to start if this type of care sounds plausible to you. Remember that using this type of



care may not answer your needs for child care when your child is too ill to attend school or for full days during holidays or school breaks.

Shared Caregiver Arrangements: These are parent-created child care situations where one caregiver is hired to care for the schoolage children from two or more families. The care can take place in one home or it can rotate among the homes of the participating families. This type of care is more expensive than family child care or center-based care but less expensive than each family hiring its own caregiver. (More information on how to set up shared care is available in a “shares” booklet from our office for \$3.)

In-home caregivers and shared caregiver arrangements are completely controlled by the participating parents. There is no license for either type of care. All the responsibility for screening, calling references and selecting in-home caregivers rests with the parent-employer. Some parents ask caregivers to get a TB test. Parents can also ask the provider if s/he is in TRUSTLINE. This is a program in which providers submit their fingerprints to the Department of Justice. If there is no criminal conviction or substantiated child abuse history, then the provider is listed in the TRUSTLINE Registry. Since this is a relatively new program, few providers are listed as of this time but some parents are willing to help pay the \$120 fee in order to have a potential provider screened. Call (800)822-8490 to find out if a provider is listed in TRUSTLINE. BANANAS welcomes information – positive and negative – from parents on caregivers whose names you got from our caregiver referral files, 658-7353.

Recreation Programs or Classes: These kinds of programs are available at or near many schools. Some schools have on-site recreation leaders for after-school sports and/or crafts on an informal or drop-in basis. Local parks may also offer after-school recreation programs. Some schools allow private groups to offer on-site programs such as dance, math or foreign language classes. Most of these activities are not licensed by DSS and these programs usually do not assume responsibility for your child’s attendance. Some recreation programs are free; others operate for a low cost. Classes can be just as expensive or more expensive than child care. These programs can provide a supervised activity from one to five afternoons a week and might work well for a responsible older child who is growing resistant to “regular” child care. They also can provide the opportunity to participate in activities such as organized sports which get less attention in most schools these days. Check with your child’s school and the local recreation department to find out what programs or classes are offered to students. Remember, however, you will still probably need alternative plans for rainy days, or school holidays and for those times when your child is ill.

Care By Siblings: Older, responsible teenagers can provide safe care for younger brothers or sisters, but there are some issues to consider before making this choice. Will this arrangement still give the teen an opportunity to participate in activities with his friends or organized sports? Will the older child take the “job” seriously? Will the younger child take directions from the older sibling? Do the two children get along reasonably well when left alone? This option may work

best if it is only used part-time. Enrolling the younger child in one or two community activities or classes leaves the older child with an afternoon or two to pursue other interests.

Latchkey Care: This kind of care involves allowing an older child to come home from school alone and is a choice some families make either because there are not enough affordable programs or because the child has outgrown regular child care and refuses to go. While we are not advocating this option, we know that it is frequently used and we believe that parents who make this decision should be supported in making it work. Ignoring or condemning the parents of “latchkey” kids will not make the practice go away. There is a longer section at the end of this Handout which addresses this topic more fully, including suggestions on ways to safety-proof a latchkey child.

How To Look For Care

Begin with BANANAS – we have information on child care programs arranged according to the schools they serve. If you are lucky, there will be a number of options for your child. We can also refer you to in-home caregivers or can help you advertise for other parents to share a caregiver with you. You might also check with the staff at your child’s school, with the PTA and/or with other parents whose children attend the same school to plan together.

If you have lots of different types of care from which to choose, count your blessings. Your next step is to decide which type of care will work best for you and your child. Is your child the type who needs a smaller group after spending six hours in the classroom? If that is the case, you will want to consider family child care, an in-home caregiver or a share. Or, perhaps your child is one who would enjoy ending the day with many of the same friends from her classroom. If so, a center may have real appeal for both of you. You should investigate schoolage child care with these issues in mind:

- **What is your child’s opinion?** While you might prefer the convenience of an on-site center, your child may feel more secure staying with the family child care provider who provided preschool care. Such opinions are important to consider when making your final choice.
- **How will your child get to and from school?** (A consideration for programs located off the school site.) Does an adult accompany the children back and forth? If older children walk by themselves, does an adult make the first few trips with them to go over safety rules? What happens on rainy days? Does a program which transports the children have adequate liability insurance? Are there seatbelts for all children or is a certified school bus used?
- **What is planned for the children?** Do the children just “hang out” or are there activities planned which are age appropriate? Is there the opportunity to play and let off steam after a structured day at school?
- **How many children are in care?** Does a large center separate the children into smaller groups or are all the children kept together? Is your child the only schoolage child in a family child care home and if so, will s/he find this attractive or unacceptable?

- **What is the physical setting like?** Is there enough space indoors and out for the number of children in care? Are there quiet corners where a child can read or unwind? Can older children get away from younger ones and vice versa, or does the space dictate that the children must stay in one large group? Does each child have a “cubby” or other private space to store coats, school work, etc.?
 - **What are the skills and attitudes of the staff?** Do they seem to like working with schoolage children? What is their past experience with this age group? Are the methods of discipline appropriate for older children? What is the staff turnover rate?
 - **What about homework?** Some programs offer special assistance with homework. Others provide a space to work but don’t promise tutoring. Still others feel children need to play and leave homework to be done at home after dinner. As part of your evaluation process, find out what attitudes and practices the program has about homework.
 - **What is the communication like between the child care program and the school?** Does the child care program keep up with school events? Do they make sure that school notes get home to parents? Does the caregiver ever have an opportunity to talk to your child’s teacher?
 - **What if you are late coming home from work?** Will the program be able to provide “after hours” care for your child? Will you have to pay a late fee? (Most likely you will.)
 - **Does the child care program’s schedule meet your child’s needs?** Does it operate all day when there is a school holiday or longer hours for those frequent “minimum” days? Does it offer care during the Christmas or spring break or during the summer months?
 - **How much will it cost?** Some programs which also serve preschoolers charge a reduced rate for schoolage children. Others charge the same amount because the child takes up a licensed space in care. (It would be difficult, if not impossible, for a provider to find another child who just needs care when a schoolage child is away at school.) Many programs charge more for those days when school is closed and the children are in care all day. There are a small number of state subsidized programs which are free or operate on a sliding scale based on family income. (BANANAS can give you more information on which programs are subsidized in your area.) Find out what the care will cost. It is an important consideration in your search for schoolage care.
- **Recruit a Non-Working Parent:** Request permission from the principal to send a flyer to the parents whose children are in your child’s class (or even to the entire parent group). You might be able to hire a parent to care for your child. No license is needed if the person only cares for the children of one family. (BANANAS can assist with the licensing process if the person you recruit decides to provide after-school services for other families as well.) And, don’t forget to check out any “stay-at-home” neighbors.
 - **Talk with the Principal of Any Near-By Parochial or Private Schools:** Some of these schools offer child care for their own students. They may be interested in getting a license to serve children from other schools (especially if enrollment in their after-school program is low).
 - **Get Your PTA or Parent Group Interested:** While this takes more time, there have been successful schoolage programs in our area which were initiated by parent groups. (There are some child care organizations which will operate an on-site program if the school can provide the space.) No spare room at the school site?...explore any options near the school such as churches.

What Happens When Your Child Gets Sick?

Sick kids can’t go to school and even if your child care program will let a mildly ill child attend, parents still need to plan for those times a child is too sick for care or has a contagious disease. Is there a nonworking neighbor, friend or relative who might be able to provide a day or two of sick child care now and then? (This proposal may be more attractive if you offer to reciprocate in some way on the weekends.) Is your regular weekend caregiver sometimes available during the school day? If you do not already use a regular caregiver, call BANANAS for the names of caregivers or for registries who offer care during the weekdays. Periodically update this list because turnover is high in our in-home caregiver file. Find several people you like and trust and use them occasionally for weekend or nighttime child care so your child has an opportunity to get to know them. BANANAS also has a list of home health services or nurses’ registries which will send a worker to your home. Using in-home caregivers for sick child care is expensive. Plan on paying from \$8 to \$10 per hour – more if you use a placement agency. If some of these suggestions are possible, make the arrangements before you need them.

Some communities offer sick child care programs where an in-home caregiver can come to a parent’s home or a mildly ill child can attend a sick bay. But, the demands for such services far exceed the programs (or caregivers) available. This option can also be expensive. In our area, call the Sick Child Care Program, 526-SICK, if you live in Albany, Berkeley, Emeryville or North Oakland.

Many companies now allow parents to use their own sick leave to care for a sick child. If your employer is not this progressive yet, work with other parent employees to get this practice accepted and to expand the number of days available to you for this purpose. It’s hard to concentrate on your job if you are worried about your child and many parents feel best if they are the ones home nursing a sick child. In two-parent families, some parents decide beforehand to take

What To Do If You Have Few Or No Choices For Care

Here are some suggestions of what parents can do if their child’s school is one which has no child care choices:

- **Schoolage Shares:** With a little energy and determination you can create your own shared care. Talk to other parents in the neighborhood who you think might be interested in joining you. Ask the school if you can post a flyer or leave notes for the parents of other students to take home.

turns staying home to provide sick child care so all the burden doesn't fall on one parent (usually Mom).

Latchkey Child Care – Some Considerations

Leaving a child home alone is not something a parent does lightly. When making this decision a parent usually has run out of other affordable alternatives or has an older child who is balking at attending child care. Here are things to consider when evaluating whether you would use this option:

- How secure is the child with being left alone? The age of the child by itself is no indicator. Some older children still need the security and companionship provided by a child care program. Ask yourself how well the child does when he is occasionally left on his own for short time periods. Do you return to an anxious child or one happily occupied with toys or a book?
- Does your child know what to do in an emergency or does he tend to panic? Are there neighbors home during the time your child would be alone and would they be willing to come to the child's aid if there were a problem?
- Can your child be responsible with a house key?
- How secure do you feel about the way the child would occupy the time alone?
- How does your child feel about the prospect—eager to have the responsibility or unsure?
- How receptive is your employer to having your child phone you at work? (Many parents insist on a phone call each day when the child first arrives home.) Could you leave work if your child accidentally locked herself out?
- How do you feel about the situation? Even if you have a very responsible child and everything seems okay, it's not going to work if you are constantly going to be distracted and worried about your child.

Listen to your instincts and "gut level" feelings about leaving your child alone. And, remember, it doesn't have to be an irrevocable decision. Present it to your child on a trial basis, evaluate how it is working by discussing the situation with the child periodically and remain open to changing your mind if it simply isn't working for either of you.

Tips For Leaving Kids Alone

The following are suggestions for helping children who are home alone feel more safe and content:

- Tape a list of important phone numbers (your work number, nearest neighbor's number, the doctor or clinic, emergency services like 911) on the inside of the telephone receiver. Let your child know when it is appropriate to call you at work.
- Establish emergency procedures, including minor first aid, to use in case of accidents. Role playing to practice is helpful. Review these procedures periodically.
- List productive things your child can do until you arrive home. These might be "brainstormed" together and written in a special "after-school" calendar. Include fun activities such as making a dessert or caring for a pet as well as doing homework assignments and household chores. Decide about the status of television.

- Make use of a tape recorder or a central message board for leaving last-minute instructions which your child can check when s/he returns from school.
- Have a favorite nutritious snack (or its ingredients) ready when your child gets home. Periodically review cooking instructions. Make sure your child can safely use the stove or forbid its use. A child who likes to cook can be asked to begin dinner for the family.
- Set guidelines for what your child should do about telephone calls or strangers coming to the door when you are not home. Practice these through role playing.
- Discuss the rules for playing and playmates. Can the child go to someone else's house? When? For how long? Who can come to your house when you're not home? Children need companionship, but they also need rules.

These suggestions are based on an original list written by Jane Whitbread. In addition, there are a number of books which offer ideas to use with children who are staying home without their parents. Each family situation is different, and parents may want to read several books before deciding what will work best for their family. Many of the books listed below are available for review in BANANAS' reference library. Please make an appointment, 658-6046. BANANAS also has two videos on latchkey kids, *Guidance Club for Kids: Survival Skills for Latchkey Children* and *In Charge At Home* which parents can check out to view at home.

Latchkey Resource Books

Alone After School by Helen Swan and Victoria Houston. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1987.
Disaster Blasters: A Kids' Guide to Being Home Alone by Karin Kasdin. Avon Books, 1996.
Latchkey Kids: Their Safety & Care, by Marilyn Dreilinger, Bureau For At-Risk Youth, 1992
Safe At Home, Safe Alone by Thomas J. Long. Miles River Press, 1985.
School's Out! by Joan M. Bergstrom. Ten Speed Press, 1990.
Teaching Your Child to Be Home Alone by Earl Grollman. Free Press, 1992.

Books on First Aid

A Sigh of Relief: The First-Aid Handbook for Childhood Emergencies by Martin I. Green, editor. Bantam Books, 1994.
The Aware Bears by MacHovec, Oceana Educational Communications, 1991.

Schoolage Child Care – Exploring Your Options and Finding Solutions That Will Work For Your Child

Family child care...in-home caregiver...on-site or nearby center...after-school recreation programs.... Families need to decide which type of care will work best. And, even then, it is quite possible that the option that would work best for you may not be readily available. You may need to recruit or create an alternative. Remember, like so many other things, what works for one child in a family may not be the solution for brother or sister. Parents definitely need to start their search early, keep their minds open to different choices and plan on putting as much "leg work" into looking for schoolage child care as for any other type of care. We don't say it's easy, but the staff at BANANAS are parents too and we are available to give you support during your search.