

Make A Special Time With Your Child: Just as it is important to plan some special time for yourself, so it is also important to plan some special time for your own child after the others have gone home. One provider spends an hour alone with her children after the others have left. Another has a special activity planned each week – kindergym or an art class or something like that – so her child can enjoy special time with her parent.

...With A Little Help From Your Friends: It is really helpful to have one or more friends or colleagues who really understand the challenges of trying to combine parenting and teaching in one job. One provider reported that when the interaction between herself and her son got too difficult, she always had someone to call who would listen to her complaints and concerns. This helped her to continuously reevaluate her decision to have him in the program. You can also call BANANAS' WarmLine for advice and assistance.

Finally, the most important factor for success is your own commitment to making it work. If you believe it is important to keep your child with you, even if only for part of the day, then the inevitable conflicts which arise (and they will!) need not overwhelm you. Your decision should make you feel comfortable, solve the most problems and create the most opportunities for you and your child. And, keep working at it! As parents, that's the very best we can do for our children.

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Parent and Child Together in Family Child Care Will It Work For Me?

by Kay Martin

I am wondering about opening a family child care home and keeping my daughter with me. I need to work for financial and psychological reasons. I've checked into the possibility of working outside my home like I did all my adult life before my baby was born, and I've thought of putting my child in child care. But the places I've seen are either too expensive or somehow not right for me. How do you think it would work out for her and me if I were to open our home to other children?

For some answers to this question, BANANAS asked Kay Martin, mother and family child care provider, to share the results of including her son in the program she started when he was sixteen months old. She contacted other parents who operated their own programs and this Handout summarizes the experiences of a dozen families.

Many child care providers ask this question when they first think about doing child care. Some have tried it and have been excited and happy with the results. Others believe that the child and parent are both better off not even trying to deal with the stresses such a situation will inevitably create. Examining the potential advantages and disadvantages is perhaps the best way to evaluate whether it will work for you and your child. While thinking about the pros and cons, keep in mind that everyone is different and responds to situations in different ways. There is no right or wrong way.

What Are The Advantages?

One of the most important benefits seems to be that you will be able to be near your own child. You may not feel ready to turn over the care of your child to someone else, no matter how trustworthy or competent that person is. Many parents, even though they know they have to work, do not want to be separated from their young child for 5-10 hours a day. If you feel this way, opening a new program which includes your child may be a solution.

An Extended Family: More people to care for, but more people who care for you! Many family child care providers report that the children who attend their programs become siblings for their own child. As friendships develop between the caregiver and the families of the children cared for, these ties may become quite close, extending to out-of-hours child care exchanges, potluck dinners and other social events. It may be easier for you to assist your child in forming school-related friendships when you already know the neighboring parents and children.

Reducing Separation Anxieties: For some children who have difficulty separating from their parents, a year or two with a parent as the provider may ease the transition for the child from home to community. This benefit is expanded if the parent works with an assistant provider. When the time comes for your child to go to a new group situation, he will already have some good experiences in relating to adults other than his own parents.

One woman had a daughter with very intense separation difficulty. She spent a year trying to find an in-home caregiver or family child care home where her child could flourish, to no avail. Finally she began to work as an assistant in a family child care home which welcomed her daughter as well. Soon her daughter became confident and cheerful. The mother was glad to see a relationship develop between her daughter and the family child care provider that might help the girl overcome her separation anxiety.

Spending Quality Time With Your Child: When providing care for a group of children, you usually spend concentrated and quality time with your "charges." In fact, your child may get more attention from you when you keep her in a family child care setting than she would if you were at home full-time and your job were to manage the house. How

Talk To Your Child About How S/he Feels: If it is you that your child is having a hard time sharing, acknowledge the legitimacy of this feeling: *"Sometimes it seems as if I spend an awful lot of time with these other children. But this is Mommy's job and I like doing it. I know that sometimes it's hard."*

Make A Special Place For Your Child: Help your child to understand that even when you are caring for other children, there is always a place for him/her. This is one of the ways in which you may want to give a little extra consideration to him/her. If you hold children in your lap for stories, try to make a place for him/her if he wants it. If you take a small group of children to the kitchen to help prepare lunch, you may want to let him/her come each time, though the other children have to take turns. Make sure your child knows, *"I always have a place for you."*

Talk With Other Parents: It is helpful to let the parents of the children you are caring for know your rules and arrangements for your own child. Some parents may be reluctant to leave their child in such a program. They may want to talk about how their own child will feel if the provider's child gets special treatment. Being very clear about how you will handle the arrangement may ease parents' anxiety. If the parents then choose to put their child in your program, they have information to help their own child deal with her/his feelings about your child's special treatment.

An Assistant Is Helpful: If your set-up and finances allow it, you may want to work with an assistant who can take over an activity for you when you need to nurse your baby, or who can step in to mediate when you and your child have reached an impasse. One provider always has her assistant deal with her child when she is having a problem. Another provider uses the assistant to take over the group while she works on the problem with her child.

Avoid Burnout: In a full-day program, if you can afford to, plan to have some person who can take over at least one half day per week while you attend a class, get some exercise, do some errands, or in some way attend to personal needs. This is an important strategy to prevent "burnout." If you operate a part-day program, you may want to hire someone to care for your own child one or more afternoons per week in order to provide you with some kind of break.

begin to have some experiences outside the home. In order to enhance his emotional and social development, he needs to begin to deal with other adults and peers without the intervention of the parent. If he is with you all the time, how will this happen?

Spend some quiet time weighing these “pros and cons.” Then, once you have decided to go ahead with program which includes your own child, here are some suggestions...

Making It Work

Respect Your Child’s Privacy: If at all possible, keep the school or child care equipment and your child’s own toys separate. If this is not possible, have a place where your child can put her/his most prized objects out of reach before the other children arrive. (In one family, the child placed all her “special things” in the bathtub, behind the shower curtain!) Respecting her privacy (just as you expect the children to respect yours – for example, your bedroom may be off-limits) should help your child share more freely in the areas where it is expected of her. Consider making your child’s room off-limits to the other children as well. In the yard, you may establish a rule that all the equipment that is out is to be shared, but that she may keep her tricycle and her special gardening tools in the garage for use when school is not in session.

Another technique which may help your child to share is to encourage other children in your program to bring items from home to share with the group. (They too may bring objects which they do not want to share – these may be shown at group time and then put into a cubby.) If another child brings an item to share, emphasize this: “*Look, Joanne has decided to share her dump truck today.*” When your own child decides he can share something from his home, treat it in the same way: “*Matthew has brought a special book from his room for us to read together.*” Also, your child may enjoy, with your permission, borrowing objects from the school. You may also be able to borrow objects from your child, with permission, of course.

often that unstructured time slips away into endless chores! Every parent knows what this means! Having a family child care home seems to provide you with the right and responsibility of playing with and being a teacher for your own child among the others.

Greater Variety of Materials, Toys and Equipment: Because the family child care is in your home, you may purchase more or different equipment or a greater variety of learning materials than you would for your own child; your child can use and play with the program’s equipment when the other children aren’t there.

Some Children Are Just “Homebodies:” Some children really seem to need to spend a certain amount of time in their own homes daily, “hanging out” and “touching base” with their parents and their belongings. If your child is one who seems to need more time with you than the hours before and after attending child care, then this may be an option that works particularly well for your family.

Cost: Opening a family child care home may have economic advantages for the whole family. With full-time care for one child running between \$5,000 and \$9,600 per year (double that if you have more than one child in care!), it may simply be more economical for you to keep your child at home and earn an income while you are doing it. Many have found that it is too costly to go out to work because child care and other expenses may be close to the income earned.

If you own or rent your own home, certain tax deductions are allowed on the space used to care for other children. All expenses you incur for the program are deducted from the total fees you receive. Only income after deducting expenses is taxable. Contact BANANAS for more specifics.

Teaching and Showing Your Child About Other People: Another advantage to including your child in your program is that you will have many opportunities to share your ideas and values about life with your child. For example, when you comfort a child who is hurt or anxious, you are demonstrating helpful, supportive, caring behavior to your own child. In the best of circumstances, your child will also learn that your concern for other children does not diminish your love for her. You may find that she is less self-centered as a result.

What are The Disadvantages?

For all these advantages, even child care providers completely committed to having their child with them have experienced some drawbacks. You should carefully consider these potential pitfalls before making your decision. You might as well try to learn from other peoples' experiences!

Child May Act Less Mature: Most children are less mature around their parents than they are around other adults. This is particularly true if a child is tired, hungry or on the verge of getting sick. Ask yourself some questions: If she stays with you all the time, will she have enough experiences in learning self-control? Are you able to deal with such behavior in ways which are fair to your child? To the other children? To yourself? Many providers find it extremely difficult to be fair to their own child in the group setting. Her unpleasant behavior seems much less acceptable than the same behavior in another child. Likewise, her good behavior is experienced as more wonderful (or more expected) than the same behavior in other children. The parent-child relationship is intense and emotional. If your child is having a particular problem, it may be helpful to both of you to have some period of separation from each other.

Your Child May Have Problems Sharing You Or Possessions: Another potential problem is that many children experience severe stress at having to share their parent or their possessions or their home (more about ways of managing this later). They may rightly feel that they have no privacy, or they may feel pushed out. While ideally your child can learn to deal with these feelings, he may react toward you, as his parent, with anger or with aggression; he may withdraw, or show other signs of stress.

Your Child May Be Confused Over Who's Who and What's What: Another source of stress for your child may be her legitimate confusion between your role as a teacher and your role as a parent. Whereas she may accept certain limits from another teacher, she will test the same limits from you as a parent.

All Children Are Different: It may be that your success in providing care for your own child will depend on the nature of that child. If he is by nature shy in groups and fairly dependent on his parent and/or particularly demanding, it may be difficult for you to care for him and for others at the

same time (and you may need a break from each other, too). On the other hand, if you have an outgoing, independent child, your job will be that much easier.

Mixing Age Groups Can Be Complicated: You need to look at the best arrangements for each child in your family. For example, you have a three-year-old and a toddler. Should you keep both children with you and take in a wide age range? If you take children closer in age to one child, how will the other one react? Will the older child feel generalized "sibling rivalry" toward all the children you care for? Will she show signs of regression after being around younger children most of the time? On the other hand, if you choose to send her off to another program, will she feel "pushed out" of the home and be anxious about what goes on between her parent and her sibling when she's not there? If you serve older preschoolers, is there an appropriate place for your infant or toddler? What if the toddler's natural need to explore gets in the way of the older child's right to create without interruption? What if a three year old in your program has just spent 15 minutes constructing a town with blocks and your baby happily crawls through it? What if you are directing a cooking project and your baby needs to nurse? All of these dilemmas may present themselves.

Every Parent Needs A Break: Many providers have viewed their teaching or caring for other children as their "vacation" or "break" from their own children. It is their opportunity to relate as a professional adult to the world of work without having at the same time to function as a parent. For these providers, the time away from their children makes them more eager to greet their own children and spend time with them when they are reunited.

Being Fair: Most providers find they cannot apply the same rules to their own children which they apply to the group. For example, there may be a rule that all school equipment is to be shared. But, if you are using your whole house for child care, your child may have a special chair in the kitchen.

Many providers find it stressful to have to treat their own child in a special way. They also feel it is unfair to the other children. Some parents of the children enrolled in your program may also find this disturbing.

Getting To Know The Outside World: Many providers surveyed for this Handout feel that by the time a child reaches the age of three, he should