

BANANAS HANDOUT

Selling Your Family Child Care Program To Parents

"I've never had openings before. I don't understand why my program isn't full."

"I thought getting a large family child care license would work out well for me. Now, I cannot seem to attract enough families and, of course, I still have to pay my assistant."

BANANAS receives a large number of phone calls from family child care providers with openings in their programs. Even though there is still an overall shortage of child care, many programs do have openings. We don't give special referrals or "place" children in certain programs because we believe that parents should select the child care program in which to enroll their children. But that doesn't mean we can't offer some advice and support to providers.

First, we would like to share some information on the current child care situation. The majority of our calls continue to come from parents of infants and toddlers. The overwhelming preference these parents express to us is for *small group size*. As a result, the use of in-home caregivers is on the rise and family child care providers licensed for 12 or 14 are at a disadvantage. At the same time, some neighborhoods have a growing number of family child care homes. In these neighborhoods, two, three, even four providers within a city block are not uncommon. In these competitive situations some programs may not be able to survive without extensive marketing. Here are points to keep in mind when recruiting parents and their children:

- Parents are knowledgeable and cautious child care consumers. More than ever before, we are being asked questions about child care ratios and other licensing regulations. It is extremely important that providers keep their programs in compliance at all times. It may also help to read consumer guides on choosing child care (such as BANANAS' *Choosing Child Care* series or the pamphlets from the Department of Social Services).
- Try not to plan your budget based on having a full enrollment. You should be able to meet major responsibilities (e.g. house or car payments) even when your enrollment is down a child or two.
- Be sure you have a realistic idea of the child care needs of your neighborhood (most parents still request child care close to home). If, for example, there is a surplus of programs offering preschool care, you may want to offer care to a different age group. BANANAS can tell you the age groups being served by the providers in your section of our file – call us at 658-7353 or come by.
- Don't price yourself out of the market. While you may be tempted to raise your rates when you have openings, this may work against you in attracting new families. Charging as little as five dollars more per week than other nearby providers can result in parents not even bothering to call. BANANAS will be happy to share information with you on what the average rates are in your immediate neighborhood.
- If your business has turned sour since expanding to a large family child care license, analyze your "before" and "after" income. You may find that you came out ahead before you expanded or that the actual increase in income isn't worth the worry about keeping your program full or the additional responsibilities of employing an assistant. It may be a step ahead for you to step back to a license for six or eight.
- Advertise your program with an attractive flyer. Determine what is unique or especially appealing about your services and "sell yourself" in the flyer. Distribute the flyer anywhere parents are likely to see it – at BANANAS, on bulletin boards in churches, laundromats, supermarkets, playgrounds, etc. List a time on the flyer when prospective parents can be sure to reach you – and then be there to receive their phone calls. (Remember to put your facility license number in the flyer.)
- If possible, put an attractive sign in your window or yard. Be sure your house numbers are clearly visible so visiting parents have no difficulty locating your house.
- If you offer schoolage child care, get to know the principals and secretaries at your neighborhood public and private schools. Ask them to make your flyers available to parents looking for child care.



- If you care for infants, the smaller the group you care for, the more likely your program will be full. Infant care is the most expensive type of care and many parents will pay more for smaller group size.
 - Be sure to let parents know about your education, training and experience in the field of child development. If you have taken classes, participated in workshops at BANANAS or somewhere else or worked with children for a very long time, speak up and be proud! Special expertise or training not only makes you a better child care provider, it is also very attractive to parents.
 - Be professional when answering your telephone and teach your family members to do the same. Answering with “Huh,” “Yeah” or “What” can turn a prospective client away. Answering with a friendly phrase like “Hello, Mrs. Smith’s Infant Care. May I help you?” makes you sound like the business that you are.
 - If you have trouble projecting yourself over the telephone, it may help to write a short “script” (a description of what you have to offer) to keep by the phone. If it’s too hectic to talk when a parent calls, find out when you can return the call. Always follow through and call back when you say you will.
 - Try to get a commitment to a visit from the parent on your first contact (remember, it may be your *only* contact). Be sure you get the telephone number of every parent who makes an appointment to visit. Some parents simply don’t show, but sometimes they’ve lost your address and/or telephone number. If you make a habit of always getting a phone number, you will be able to follow up if parents don’t keep their appointments.
 - Invest in an answering machine for those times when you can’t be reached. Use your message to advertise your program and let parents know what age groups you have openings for. Promptly call back any parents who leave a message on your machine. (And, remember, the message on your machine is also your “sales pitch” – don’t use weird, funny, incomplete or long messages.)
 - If you don’t mind “drop-in’s” when you are trying to build your enrollment, select a certain morning or afternoon of the week as “Open House” time when parents are welcome to drop in. Announce this on your flyers and on your answering machine. Parents who want to drop in can call you to get your address and more information about your program.
 - Schedule visits at times when you can show your program at its best. Let parents know they can watch as long as they want, but that you will need to devote your time to the children. You might want to ask parents to write down their questions for later discussion. Set a time in the evening or on the weekend to explain more about your services. Develop a brochure which sells your program to give to parents who are interested.
 - Certain things seem to really turn parents off when they visit. The most common items are untidy (dirty) homes or yards, the T.V. being on all the time, child care being provided in the darkest room in the house, or providers who come to the door in bathrobes and curlers. . .If the shoe fits, change it!
 - Have a friend “role play” a parent visit with you and ask for honest feedback. Perhaps you can get some valuable insight into what changes you can make in your approach. Coming on too strong...coming on too timid – either attitude can turn parents away. Also try reversing roles – put yourself in the parent’s place. Suppose **you** were looking for infant (or preschool or schoolage) child care, what would **you** want to see when visiting a child care setting? Does your own program feature what **you** would want to see in a program?
 - Talk to other providers who have fewer vacancies and see if they have suggestions for you. Arrange to visit other providers’ programs to get some ideas for ways you can make your program more attractive. You can also ask other providers to refer prospective parents to your program when their programs are full.
 - Recruit your existing parents to help you in your search for other families. Ask them to distribute flyers at work and to friends and to be available as your references. A personal recommendation from a family currently using your care can lead to a new family enrolling a child. Be sure to show appreciation for such recommendations.
- While it’s wonderful for parents in some areas to have more child care choices, a “buyer’s market” means providers have to sharpen their business skills. We hope these ideas will be useful to you and we welcome any additional marketing tips you may want to share with us.