

# BANANAS HANDOUT

## Choosing Infant and Toddler Care

Finding child care for your infant or toddler may feel like one of the most difficult and scary responsibilities you have ever shouldered. If you are a first-time parent, you may be even more anxious about the process. Just remember that you are not alone in this task. As our society and economy change, more and more parents face child care decisions earlier in their children's lives. You can find good child care for your child. But be prepared to spend time and energy.

The first step is to look at the options for infant and toddler care in your community. While not all options are available in every neighborhood, this next section provides an overview of the types of infant and toddler care used by other parents. All of these types of care are available in the referral files at the BANANAS office.

### OPTIONS FOR INFANT AND TODDLER CARE

**Family Child Care** – These programs operate in the caregiver's own home and are regulated by the state. Popular with many parents, family child care can be less expensive than other forms of care. Some family child care providers include your child as part of their extended family with their own natural flow of moving through the day; others have programs that are more structured with a particular curriculum and/or planned schedule of activities. Although many providers choose to get training in child development, there are no educational requirements for obtaining a family child care license.

However, all licensed providers are required to take a 15-hour child care health and safety course that includes CPR and first aid as well as other state requirements and background checks. As part of the check, everyone 18 and older who lives in the home is fingerprinted for referencing in a criminal and child abuse index.

Family child care programs come in a variety of sizes and age configurations. What follows is a brief review of the number of children allowed in family child care homes. That number includes a provider's own children under ten years of age when they are on the premises. (For more details, see our Handout "How Many Children Can Be Cared For in Licensed Family Child Care Homes?")

- A "small" family child care program can be licensed to care for six or eight children; this is the most common type of care. If licensed for six, only **three** can be under two years of age. If licensed for eight, **two** can be under two and at least **two** have to be school age.
- A "large" family child care program is licensed to care for 12 or 14 children. In these cases, an assistant is required. If licensed for 12 children, four can be under two years of age. If licensed for 14, three can be under two years of age and at least two have to be school age.
- A family child care provider who cares only for children under two years of age is licensed for four children. This type of care is not very common.
- A family child care provider who cares for children from just one family is not required to have a license. This might be a

mother who wants companionship for her own young child or someone who just wants to care for one or two children. The group size with this type of care is determined by the number of children the family has. As soon as the provider decides to care for children from another family at the same time, s/he must get a family child care license.

**Child Care Centers** – These programs are licensed by the state to operate in facilities outside of the provider's home. Very few centers care for infants and/or toddlers and those that do frequently have long waiting lists. The licensing regulations require that infant centers have one child care worker for every four children under the age of two. The director and head teachers are required to have at least 12 units of early childhood education and there must always be someone on site who has 15 hours of health and safety training. All workers must be fingerprinted for the background check. Infant centers tend to be more expensive than family child care homes.

### State Licensing Regulations:

Both family child care and child care centers are licensed by the State of California's Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division. This is a health and safety check of the facility and the staff, not of the content of the curriculum or programming. A license does not ensure the quality of care, however, and relies greatly on the parent-consumers of child care to monitor the care that they use every day. The licensing office is the appropriate channel for complaints: call **1-844-538-8766** to make a complaint. You can use that same number to check for past complaints or reports on periodic licensing inspections for any licensed program. BANANAS welcomes information – good and bad – from all parents and we hope you will call us with your concerns. However, we have no authority to monitor, investigate or revoke licenses. Parents can also make an appointment to visit the licensing office at 1515 Clay Street, Suite 1102, Oakland, 94612, to file a complaint or to check a program's licensing history.

**In-Home Caregivers** (commonly referred to as "babysitters" or "nannies") – In-home caregivers come into your home to care for your child. In-home care is the most expensive form of care. (Some caregivers or nannies and au-pairs are willing to live in the family's home and generally work for room and board plus a salary. Currently, there are few people looking for this type of job.) Many of the caregivers looking for this type of work are immigrants. Some caregivers speak fluent English; others are learning. Many are excellent caregivers. If you are planning to use this type of care, include as many in-home providers as possible in your initial interviews. It is generally best to interview them in person rather than over the phone. (See BANANAS Handout *Employing A Limited English Speaking Caregiver* for further information.)

There is no official authority governing this type of care. The responsibility for screening, calling references and selecting a caregiver rests with the parent-employer.

To help screen potential caregivers, parents can ask whether the provider is registered with TrustLine, a statewide program that provides criminal background checks for in-home caregivers. Call (800) 822-8490 to find out if a provider is listed. Currently TrustLine charges \$135 to screen providers for criminal convictions or any history of substantiated abuse. If a potential provider is not yet listed, parents can offer to cover or split the cost. There are also CPR/First Aid classes available to caregivers at a cost. Many parents find that paying for this course is a good investment.

See our other Handouts with tips on using in-home care:

- *Where and How to Look for a Caregiver to Work in Your Home*
- *Financial Facts About Caregivers Who Work in Your Home*
- *Your Rights and Responsibilities as an Employer of an In-Home Caregiver*
- *Sample Agreement for Parents and In-Home Caregivers*

**Shared Caregiver Arrangements** (commonly called “shares”) – Two or more families jointly hire a caregiver to work in their homes. Share arrangements are more expensive than family child care, but usually less expensive than if one family hires an in-home caregiver. Shared caregiver arrangements are controlled by the participating parents. There is no license for this type of care.

### CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES

Some local, state and federal monies are available for families who need help paying for child care. The State Department of Education funds a few subsidized infant child care centers in our area. There are also subsidized alternative payment programs that don’t provide the care, but pay for the care a family chooses. Families must qualify for a child care subsidy based on income. If a parent is enrolled in one of these programs, they will pay for child care on a sliding scale.

In order to access these subsidies, parents must get on Eligibility Lists. You can call BANANAS to find out what lists to get on in your area. You can also download our Handout *Subsidized Child Care in Alameda County*, found on our website at bananasbunch.org for more information.

### FINDING QUALITY CARE

Once you’ve decided which child care options best meet your family’s needs, you are ready to start interviewing providers and visiting actual programs. Begin your search as early as possible, giving yourself plenty of time to screen, interview and reach a final decision. Your first stop should be BANANAS: visit our website to download the Handouts mentioned above, order them by mail or pick them up at our office. Next, visit our office or call our referral line, 510-658-0381, to find out about the types of care available in your desired area. Our files list family child care providers, centers and parents seeking shares. You can also post your in-home caregiver or share job on our website or in our office for the many people who come to BANANAS in search of child care work. (Carefully check out applicants who respond to your job notice; they haven’t necessarily been through any screening process.)

If you’re considering family child care or center-based care, ask the BANANAS staff for referrals and the following Handouts: *Choosing Family Child Care*, *A Closer Look at Large Family Child Care Homes*, and *Choosing A Child Care Center*. Call providers or centers and ask some basic questions, such as whether there are openings for your

child’s age and for the schedule you need. You can then make appointments to visit the programs that sound best to you.

Keep in mind that center staff and family child care providers are often too busy to talk for very long over the telephone. Also, remember that it is natural for programs to want to impress you with their services when you call. A scheduled visit is really the only way to make a child care decision. After you visit by yourself, bring your child for a visit as well. You will gain important information about how well your child will fit into the program and how the caregiver/s will interact with him or her.

Since infants and toddlers cannot actually tell you about their day, it is very important that you look at the child care carefully. If at all possible, spend at least a morning or afternoon observing. Try to be there at times when parents are dropping off or picking up their children and also when no other parents are around.

Once you narrow your choices, speak with the provider or center director when no children are in care, so s/he can concentrate and answer your specific questions. When choosing a program, remember that all children need warmth, love, appropriate activities for their age and a secure emotional environment. You’ll know you’ve found the right setting for your child if you respect the caregiver/s and feel confident that your child will feel safe and loved.

Listed here, in areas of interest and concern, are questions that may help you in assessing the child care programs you visit. The questions are written with parents seeking family child care or center-based care in mind, but many of them are appropriate, with some variations, for parents who want to use in-home caregivers or shares.

### You and the Caregivers as a Team

- Do you, as a parent, feel welcomed and respected by the child care staff or the family child care provider?
- Is the caregiver interested in your child?
- Is the caregiver willing to take the time to write notes or tell you about your child day by day?
- Do you get the impression that you and child care staff or the provider will be able to discuss and resolve differences of opinion?

### Nurturing

- How many different people will care for your child during the course of the day (or week)? Have you met all of them?
- Do caregivers seem to be enjoying themselves or do they act like the work is drudgery?
- How many children are in the group? Do the children get individualized attention when they need it?
- How many children are under the care of one adult? Is the program meeting the adult-to-child ratios required by its license?
- If the family child care provider or child care center also cares for school age children, how do children get to and from school? Are there car seats or seat belts for all the children?
- How does the caregiver respond to the children’s needs when they are tired, hungry, overstimulated, etc.?

### Daily Living

- Is there a regular routine to the day for the children?
- Do the caregivers take time to talk with children during diapering, feeding, etc.? Are the caregiving tasks used as an opportunity to learn? (Infants and toddlers don’t learn through

“formal” lessons, they learn from everyday activities – eating, playing, having diapers or clothes changed, being put down to nap...)

- How busy and noisy is it? Is there quiet, private space? (Many children sharing one space can make it chaotic, even when there are plenty of adults.)
- Does eating time seem social and pleasant? Are you satisfied with the quality and variety of the menu? Are children allowed to choose what and how much to eat?
- How are the children put down to nap? Does nap time seem cozy and peaceful? Particularly for infants: are nap times determined by the child’s needs as opposed to some fixed schedule?
- Are the diaper changing and food preparation areas separated and are they kept clean and safe? Do caregivers wash their hands after every diaper change and before preparing food? (The health of children and child care staff depends on the cleanliness of these areas and regular hand washing habits.)
- Is there a special place for your child’s possessions? What are the rules about what a child can and can’t bring to child care?

### **Play**

- Is there a safe and attractive space for infants and toddlers? (The world looks very different from a small child’s point of view. Even though it might make you feel ridiculous, try sitting on the floor and taking a look around you.)
- Are infants and toddlers outside regularly? (Contrary to common opinion, most colds are caught from other children in dry, overheated rooms with poor ventilation; being outside is not the culprit.)
- Can infants move around to the limit of their abilities, or are they kept confined in cribs, infant seats, etc. for most of the day? (Infants learn by moving, touching and trying.)
- If there is a mixed-age group, what happens with the infants and toddlers when older children are around?
- Are the infants and toddlers given a chance to play with each other? Are they given a chance to try and solve their own problems when they can? Is the caregiver watching and ready to intervene when the children need help?

### **Arrangements**

- Who provides the diapers, food, bedding, extra clothes, etc.? Does the provider require that a clean change of clothes be on hand at all times? (Many do.)
- What happens when your child is ill? (Remember, you can expect 8-10 colds per year whether your infant is in child care or not.)
- What happens when caregivers are ill?
- What are the arrangements for paying fees, paying for vacations, holidays, etc.? Does the center or family child care program close for vacation and if so, when?
- Does the program have plans for handling emergencies like fires or earthquakes? (This is required as a part of the licensing process. Ask for a copy of the program’s disaster plan to take home and read.)
- Is there a written contract or agreement? It’s best to have one. (Be sure, at a minimum, to obtain the Employer Identification Number or Social Security number of the caregiver you select so you can take advantage of the state and/or federal child care tax credits.)

### **OTHER ISSUES**

The search for quality child care is complex – especially when the care is for an infant or toddler. Explore your concerns further at one of our monthly Choosing Infant Care workshops; see our Newsletter, our website, or call us for upcoming dates. BANANAS has a companion Handout, “Child Care Issues For New & Expectant Parents” that looks at the “feeling” side of this issue.

We offer many other free Handouts on little ones:

- *Living with Ones & Twos* to help you deal with being the parent of an under-three year old;
- *Separating From Infants and Toddlers* to plan for leaving your young child in child care;
- *Breastfeeding & Working* to assist you in planning a schedule that will work;
- *Baby Briefs* to give you a developmental look at the first two years;
- *What Babies Need in Child Care* and the companion-
- *What Toddlers Need in Child Care* examine the developmental needs of children and help parents decide what kind of setting would best suit their child.

BANANAS Handouts are available at our office, by mail or from our website, [www.bananasbunch.org](http://www.bananasbunch.org).

### **AND THE SEARCH GOES ON...**

Feel free to call BANANAS for more referrals if you are unsatisfied with what you are finding. Take a deep breath, talk to other parents who have been through this search and/or drop by our office for additional advice or support. Don’t give up – you can find good child care, and quality care has been shown to add to the growth and development of any child.