

# BANANAS 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 schoolaged children more problematic (e.g., summer vacations, year-round schools, spring breaks, shorter hours for kindergartners, school holidays when parents must work etc.). Parents also need to plan for those times when a child is ill. It may take some juggling and lots of planning, but do not lose heart; by beginning your search early, you can find a solution 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 types of care listed below may be available at or near your child's school.

**Family Child Care Homes:** These licensed programs that 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. Serving two extra schoolage children can increase a family child care home's capacity to either 8 or 14. Family child care offers a small group setting (often with flexible hours) where a child can unwind at the end of a busy school day. These programs 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 close to a school allow older children to walk back and forth in a group.

Some providers 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 (noncontagious) children to come to child care when they are too ill to attend school. Child care providers who care for the children from only one family (in addition to their own) are exempt from licensing requirements.

**Child Care Centers:** These are licensed facilities that operate in non-home settings. Many local groups (such as school districts, YMCA's, Jewish Community Centers, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, etc.) offer 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 that 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 pick up the child.

**Complaints** – Both center-based care and family child care homes are licensed by Community Care Licensing of the California Department of Social Services. This is primarily a health and safety check of the facility and does not ensure the quality of care. Only parents can do that by careful evaluation. The licensing office investigates complaints against centers. To log a complaint call licensing at **1-844-538-8766**. Parents also have the right to obtain licensing reports or substantiated complaint investigations against centers from the center directly or from licensing at **1-844-538-8766**. BANANAS welcomes feedback 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. 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. Most teenagers charge \$5.00 or more per hour while adult rates begin at \$10-12 per hour. Looking for college students or teenagers with flexible schedules is a good way to start if this type of care appeals to you. You may also post a nanny job announcement with BANANAS at [www.bananansbunch.org](http://www.bananansbunch.org). 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. See our "Where And How To Look For a Caregiver to Work in Your Own Home" Handout for further tips on how to find an in-home caregiver.

**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 cheaper than each family individually hiring a caregiver.

In-home caregivers and shared caregivers 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, California's background check for in-home child care providers. Providers submit their fingerprints to the Department of Justice, which checks for criminal convictions or a substantiated child abuse history. Providers with no criminal background are listed in the TrustLine Registry.

For more information, call (800)822-8490 or visit [www.trustline.org](http://www.trustline.org).

**Recreation Programs or Classes:** 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. Costs vary, but 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. Some also provide the opportunity to participate in organized sports. Check with your child's school and the local recreation department to find out what programs or classes are available. Remember, you may still need alternative plans for rainy days, school holidays and for those times when your child is ill.

**Care By Siblings:** Older, responsible teenagers can provide safe care for younger siblings, but there are some issues to consider before making this choice. For one, will this arrangement still allow the teen to spend time with friends or participate in 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 Kids:** Some families let older children come home from school alone either because no affordable child care programs are available 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 need support in making it work. Ignoring or condemning parents of "latchkey" kids will not make the practice go away. The last page of this Handout 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 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.

If you can choose among different types of care, 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 a crowded classroom? You may want to consider family child care, an in-home caregiver or a share. Or, perhaps your child would enjoy ending the day with many of the same friends from school? If so, a center may have real appeal for both of you. (See our Handout *What Schoolage Children Need in Child Care* for a more in-depth look at how to pick the best care for your child.) Following are issues to keep in mind when investigating schoolage child care:

• **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 activities are offered?** 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 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? (probably yes)

• **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 school breaks?

• **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 for a provider to find another child who just needs care when a schoolage child is 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. (Call BANANAS for more information on subsidized

programs in your area or search for subsidized care on our website, [www.bananasbunch.org](http://www.bananasbunch.org).)

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

Here are some suggestions for parents whose child's school offers 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.

- **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.

- **Call BANANAS** to ask whether we have any providers on file who pick up kids at other schools and would be willing to add your child's school to their pickup route.

- **Approach Nearby Private/Parochial Schools:** Some of these schools offer child care for their own students. It's a long shot, but 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 which were initiated by parent groups.

### **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 times when a child is too sick or contagious for care. Is there a neighbor, friend or relative who might be able to provide a day or two of sick child care now and then? (This may be more attractive if you offer to reciprocate in some way on the weekends.) Is your regular weekend caregiver available during the school day? If you do not have a regular caregiver, call BANANAS' free referral service, 658-0381. Find several caregivers who are available during the week and use them occasionally for weekend or nighttime child care so your child can get to know them. Using in-home caregivers for sick child care is also an option, but expensive. Plan on paying from \$10 to \$12 per hour – more if you use a for-profit placement agency. If possible, make these arrangements before you need them.

**Paid Sick Leave** – If your employer provides paid sick leave to employees, California's Labor Code requires the employer to allow parents to use half of the accrued sick time to attend to an ill child. As of July 2004, California workers who contribute to the state disability insurance program are eligible for up to six weeks of paid family leave to care for a seriously ill child. For more information, contact the Employment Development Department, [www.edd.ca.gov](http://www.edd.ca.gov).

It's hard to work well if you are worried about your child. Many parents feel best if they stay home with a sick child. In two-parent families, some parents take turns caring for a sick child so the burden doesn't fall on one parent.

### **Latchkey Children – 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 affordable alternatives or has an older child who is balking at attending child care. Here are things to consider when evaluating whether to use this option:

- How does the child feel about 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, a book or homework?

- 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 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**

- 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 rules for television use. For instance, no TV until all homework is done.

- Make use of a tape recorder or a central message board for leaving last-minute instructions that 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.

In addition, there are a number of books which offer ideas for preparing children who are staying home alone. 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, 658-7353 to view the materials. BANANAS also has videos on latchkey kids, *Alone After School – A Self-Care Guide for Latchkey Children and Their Parents* and *In Charge At Home*, which can be checked out to view at home.

#### **Latchkey Resource Books**

*Alone After School* by Helen Swan and Victoria Houston. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1987.

*Latchkey Kids – Unlocking Doors for Children and Their Families* by Bryan Robinson, Bobbie Rowland, Mick Coleman. Lexington Books, 1986.

*The Latchkey Kids* by Susan Terris. An 11-year-old tries to cope with being in charge of her younger brother after school. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986.

*School's Out!* by Joan M. Bergstrom. Ten Speed Press, 1990.

#### **Books on First Aid**

*A Sigh of Relief: The First-Aid Handbook for Childhood Emergencies* by Martin I. Green, editor. Bantam Books, 1994.

*First Aid and CPR for Infants and Children* by the National Safety Council, 1998.

#### **Finding Solutions That Will Work For Your Child**

Remember, like so many other things, what works for one child in a family may not be the solution for a brother or sister. Parents 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 claim it's easy, but we at BANANAS are parents too, and are glad to support you in your search.