

# SHARING CARE



Share care is a non-traditional child care arrangement in which two families share the services of one in-home provider. Share care is a legally license-exempt form of child care. In-home caregivers and the parents who hire them are not required to be licensed.

## **Preliminary Considerations**

### Schedule

Share care works best when the families' schedules match closely or are complementary. If you only need part-time care in the afternoons, you may want to look for a family who needs care for the same afternoons or could complement your schedule by using the caregiver in the morning.

### Cost

When you interview a prospective share family and/or caregiver, be honest and forthright about how much you can afford to pay. Remember that a fair, living wage is necessary to secure and retain a good child care worker. Also, expect to pay a caregiver a higher salary when a larger number of children require care. Offering a slightly higher wage, benefits, and the potential for wage increases may help you find a more committed caregiver.

You are responsible for paying taxes on your domestic employee. In your budget, remember to include the amount you will have to pay and withhold for Social Security, State Disability Insurance, and State Unemployment Insurance. Contact the IRS for updated information regarding specific forms, withholding amounts, and payment guidelines. Workers' Compensation may also be necessary if it is not already covered in your homeowner's or renter's insurance policy. Your final budget should include taxes, insurance, and the cost of food and supplies.

You may also choose to contribute extra money to a fund that can be used for unexpected or emergency costs such as an alternate caregiver when your primary provider is sick or on vacation, unexpected repairs or replacements of toys or household items, or a birthday/holiday gift for your provider. Monthly contributions to this savings fund can help avoid unexpected financial strains.

### Age Range

Consider your child's need for attention and/or socialization when determining the age range of the other children in care. Also consider the needs and abilities of your caregiver when deciding this aspect of your arrangement. Some caregivers prefer to look after children who are close in age. Others may not be comfortable caring for two children in the same age range, and prefer having one infant and one preschool or toddler-age child.

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### Location

Determine the child care location based on your own needs and those of the other family involved. How far apart are your homes located? Who is able to travel? Whose home can best accommodate care for multiple children? Is it possible to rotate location?

### Beliefs, Values, and Philosophy

Other parents' ideas about child rearing and child care may differ from yours. When selecting a family to share care with, it is important to discuss basic issues such as discipline, meals, napping, and health/safety. Please do not expect a provider to incorporate two differing sets of beliefs/practices into one child care setting. To avoid future problems, discuss the caregiver's values and beliefs during the interview process.

### **Making Connections**

Once you've determined your family's needs and desires you can begin to look for a suitable "match" with another family and with a caregiver. Consider advertising for a family and/or caregiver in the following places:

- Childbirth/parenting classes
- Classified ads in local newspapers and parent publications such as *Parents' Press*, *Bay Area Parent*, and *Peninsula Parent*
- Bulletin boards at children's retail stores, hospitals, grocery stores, laundromats, libraries, churches, and parenting resource centers
- Your local resource and referral agency, which may offer advertising or matching services
- Playgroups such as Tiny Tots or Gymboree
- Word-of-mouth (A powerful tool among neighbors and co-workers!)

### **Communication**

Communication is essential for a long-lasting partnership between families and caregivers. Parents must keep each other and the caregiver informed of their expectations and feelings. The caregiver must also be able to keep parents informed of day-to-day occurrences, the children's activities, discipline problems, or his/her personal feelings regarding the caregiving arrangement.

Supply an up-to-date **emergency information card** for each child in care that includes:

- Name, address, and home/work phone numbers of each parent
- Name and number of the person(s) to contact when the parent(s) cannot be reached
- Name of person(s) who have permission to pick up the child
- Name and phone number of the child's physician and hospital/medical office
- Health plan number, medical insurance information, or necessary consent forms
- Food or medicine allergies

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Use **daily notes** in a journal or on a bulletin or dry erase board to leave the caregiver messages or instructions. Similarly, provide the caregiver with a place to write notes in answer to your questions about the child's day: How long did your child nap? What did the children eat for lunch? What activities were offered? When were diapers changed or children toileted?

Hold regular **meetings** during which parents can discuss the share arrangement in an environment away from the caregiver. It is not appropriate to make decisions during pick-up and drop-off times. Meeting on an evening or weekend will provide a relaxed setting for discussing contractual issues, planning a budget, creating or revising policies, and reviewing the overall success of the arrangement.

**Evaluate your caregiver** on a regular basis. The logical time for a first review is at the end of the probationary period. Subsequent performance reviews should be arranged monthly (or at other appropriate intervals). The provider's review is an opportunity for exchange and dialogue between parents and caregiver and is not the time for criticism.

Never criticize your caregiver in front of the child(ren) because it will immediately compromise his/her authority.

### **Contractual Issues**

After you've found a family to share with and a caregiver that you wish to hire, it is crucial to enter into a *written agreement*. Address the following issues:

#### Time Commitment

How long is the family/caregiver expected to commit to employment?

#### Job Description

What duties are expected of the caregiver? What method of discipline has been agreed upon? Is there a daily schedule for napping, meals, outdoor play, story-time? Is the provider expected to perform additional household duties such as laundry or house-keeping? It is important to be very specific about things you find undesirable or unacceptable (i.e. junk food, watching T.V., personal phone calls, traveling without a seatbelt or car seat, physical punishment, etc.).

#### Salary

How much will your caregiver be paid? Will she/he receive payment on an hourly basis for only the time used by the parents, or will she/he receive a set amount regardless of hours worked? Will she/he be paid on a daily, weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly basis? Will payment be in cash or by check? Will the caregiver be paid when she/he is sick?

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### Benefits

Does the caregiver receive benefits such as health insurance, transportation reimbursement, or paid vacation in addition to his/her salary? (Other “perks” might include permission to use a family’s car or washer/dryer during working hours.)

### Vacation

Is the caregiver paid during periods of time when the families are on vacation? Is the caregiver offered paid vacation time? Will the caregiver be paid for legal holidays when the parents do not have to work?

### Health Considerations

When will the child(ren) be considered too ill to be in the group care setting? When the caregiver is ill, will a substitute caregiver be hired, or will the parents rotate taking time off work to care for the children? Will parents pay for time not used when their child is ill? Will the caregiver be paid for some or all of the days s/he is ill?

### Maintenance & Supplies

Who is responsible for cleaning up at the end of the day: the parents, children, or caregiver? If only one home is being used for care, who pays the cost of depleted or broken household items? Remember that the cost of toilet paper, tissue, and hand soap adds up over time! Will parents bring food, diapers, toys, etc. for their child(ren), or will money be budgeted as a group for the purchase of these items?

### Probationary Period

How long is the trial period during which, for any reason, the families or caregiver may choose to leave the arrangement? Will the caregiver receive additional wages after successful completion of this trial period?

### Termination

Under what conditions might the caregiver be terminated? Under what circumstances can the share care partnership between parents be terminated? Under what conditions may the caregiver leave the arrangement? Would s/he lose salary for early termination of the contract? How much advance notice must be given to terminate the arrangement?

Have fun and be creative with this type of child care arrangement, but remember to take your time when choosing a caregiver and family to share with. This arrangement can be a great money-saving way for your child to get individualized care, but only if your needs closely match those of the other parties involved. As with all other types of child care, it is also important to ensure that your caregiver is safe and competent. Background checks to consider include Trustline, DMV and credit check, and/or speaking to references.

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