

Types of Child Care

Whatever your budget or needs, Children's Council is here to help you understand your child care options. Click below for details on what you can expect from various child care settings.

✓ Family Child Care Homes

Family Child Care (FCC) programs are licensed by the state of California to provide child care services in the program owner's home. These programs must meet health and safety standards set by the state. State licenses are issued for small (6 or 8 children) and large (12 or 14 children) capacities.

Most FCC programs provide child care services for mixed-age groups which may include a combination of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children. Hours and days of operation vary, with some programs offering evening and weekend hours.

Each FCC program's policies and curriculum/activities are determined by the individual program owner. Each program is unique and can vary from free play activities to structured curriculum.

Although not required by state licensing, many FCC educators have child development degrees and/or participate in ongoing professional development.

Many San Francisco FCC programs participate in quality improvement projects such as the [California Quality Rating and Improvement System](#) (QRIS) to ensure high quality programming for young children.

Because FCC programs operate in the provider's home, they reflect the wonderful diversity of San Francisco's many cultures and communities.

✓ Child Care Centers

Description: These programs are commonly called day care, nursery school or preschool. They often emphasize school readiness with a focus on social and self-help skills.

Teacher training, education, and qualifications: 12-24 Early Childhood Education (ECE) units required for directors and lead teachers. Completion of 15-hour CPR, first aid, and health and safety training required of at least one teacher on site. Fingerprint and TB test clearance required for all teachers.

Availability: Privately funded and subsidized programs serve infants, preschoolers and school-age children. Only a small number of centers in San Francisco accept children less than two years of age. Families who meet low-income guidelines may be eligible for subsidized or sliding scale programs. Infant and subsidized child care usually have a wait list.

Schedule: Each program usually has fixed hours of operation with rare flexibility, for example Monday to Friday 7:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. Most do not accommodate temporary, drop-in, evening, or weekend care.

Capacity: Total number of children is based upon physical size of the facility; 35 square-feet of usable indoor space per child is required.

Ratios: Privately funded programs have a maximum teacher-to-infant ratio of 1:4 and teacher-to-preschooler ratio of 1:12. Subsidized programs have a maximum teacher-to-infant ratio of 1:3 and teacher-to-preschooler ratio of 1:8.

✓ In-Home Care

Some parents may find that their needs are best met by in-home child care provided by a nanny or babysitter, or by other alternative child care means. See below for a description of these arrangements, as well as recommendations for screening in-home care providers.

Please note that Children's Council only provides referrals to licensed child care

providers. We do not provide referrals to nannies, babysitters, share-care arrangements, or playgroups at this time.

If you plan to hire an in-home caregiver, you can request a [TrustLine application](#) to begin screening candidates. TrustLine is a background check that runs fingerprints through the California Child Abuse Index and California Criminal History System.

Description: Also called nannies, babysitters, and au pairs. Legally license-exempt child care provided by an individual in the child's home. Provider may live in or out of the home.

Provider Training and Education: No formal training, education, or CPR/first aid certification is required of individuals hired privately, although you may choose to include these among the desired qualifications of your caregiver. Providers placed through agencies may be required to have CPR/first aid certification, nanny training, an early childhood background, and/or previous child care experience. Agencies and parents can also pay to check the TrustLine registry.

Availability: Locate caregivers through agencies, online ads, parenting resource centers, local colleges, and personal networking. Higher fees may be charged for additional services such as transportation, cooking, and housekeeping. Employers must pay taxes and obtain employment eligibility documentation (I-9 form). You are more likely to secure and retain a quality in-home caregiver by offering health benefits and vacation.

Schedule: Varies depending upon needs of the family and availability of provider. In-home caregivers can often accommodate non-traditional evening and weekend hours.

Capacity: Typically child(ren) of one family only, unless sharing care (see below).

Ratio: Low caregiver-to child ratio. Small group (usually 1-3 children) with one caregiver.

Share Care

Share care is a non-traditional child care arrangement in which multiple families share the services of one in-home provider. Sharing 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. This type of child care is especially attractive to parents with infants or parents who want the group size limited to two or three children.

Because multiple families are sharing costs, this type of job often offers better wages and working conditions to an in-home caregiver. The resulting job stability benefits everyone—the caregiver, the parents, and the children involved. For more information, please see our [Share Care](#) handout.

Au Pairs

An au pair is a domestic assistant from a foreign country working for, and living as part of, a host family. Au pairs typically take on a share of the family's child care as well as some housework, and receive a small monetary allowance for personal use.

We suggest that you begin the au pair placement process approximately 6-12 months in advance. Matching and placement involves an application that may include a family essay, interview, and/or a home visit. In addition to a weekly stipend, au pair program costs also include a yearly educational stipend and the cost of U.S. domestic travel to the host family's community. A standard placement lasts one year. For more information, see [In Home and Au Pair Agencies](#).

Alternative Care

Parent-created child care is an option to consider when traditional choices don't work for your family. The advantage of parent-created care is that the parents involved can determine what works best for them. To learn more, please see our [Alternative Child Care](#) handout.

The locations, hours, and other details of parent-created care can vary according to the desires of the parents involved. Care may take place on a regular schedule or on an as-needed basis. No matter what model of child care you choose, it is important that you feel confident that you are placing your child in a safe and healthy environment.

Parents are encouraged to check a potential caregiver's TrustLine registration status or request an [application for TrustLine registration](#).

Child Care Cooperatives

In a child care co-op, parents provide care for one another's children, and can take advantage of those services when needed. The group will keep track of hours worked, and families can get child care based on how many hours they have worked. For example, a family can earn one credit per child per hour worked, and then "cash in" those credits when they need care. This can work well for families seeking care on an as-needed basis as well as families looking for a more regular schedule. There are many different models to cooperative child care, and developing the best model depends on the needs of those involved. For more information, please refer to our [Cooperative Child Care](#) handout or see our [Co-op Care Directory](#) which includes a list of San Francisco co-ops that offer evening care.

Playgroups

Playgroups allow parents to get to know other families and schedule free time by pooling child care with other parents. A group of families organizes a child care rotation based on parent schedules. The schedule can be permanent or more flexible, depending on parents' needs. Usually the location rotates from home to home.

In most playgroups, the parents take turns caring for the children so that other parents can have some time off. However, in some playgroups, parents choose to stay and socialize during the playgroup hours.

The standard playgroup works best for parents with flexible schedules. But as parents' circumstances change, many playgroups evolve to meet new needs. If necessary, these playgroups can hire a teacher to supplement the parent caregivers. We call this type of child care "paid playgroups." As with other kinds of parent-created child care, a playgroup can be whatever you need it to be.

Exchanges

Exchanges are like playgroups, but they involve fewer families. The most common exchange is between two families who trade child care once or twice a week. This type of child care requires no money and very little organization. Exchanges are less complicated than playgroups or babysitting co-ops, and some continue for years.