Alternative Child Care

Parent-created child care is an option to consider when traditional choices like licensed family child homes or child care centers don’t work for your family. The advantage of parent-created care is that the parents make all the rules. There is no right or wrong way—whatever works is right!

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 by calling 1-800-822-8490. TrustLine is a database of in-home child care providers that have cleared a background screening through the California Department of Justice, the FBI, and the Child Abuse Index. For more information, visit www.trustline.org.

Sharing Care

Share care is a non-traditional child care arrangement in which two 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 usually 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 refer to the Children’s Council “Sharing Care” handout.

Babysitting 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 the Children’s Council “Child Care Cooperative” handout.
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 much needed 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 and a fair amount of free time. But, as parents’ circumstances change, many playgroups evolve to meet new needs. If necessary, these playgroups can hire a teacher to supplement the parent work force. 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 coops, and some continue for years.

Sources:
www.babycenter.com/0_babysitting-co-ops_51.bc#articlesection1
www.bananasinc.org
www.circleofmoms.com