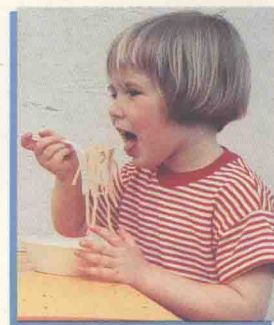
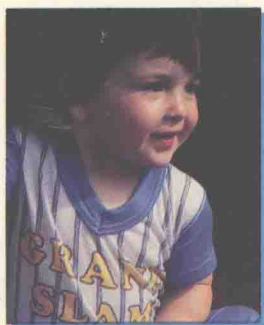
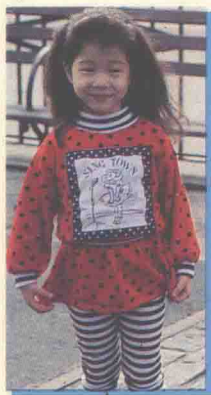


# THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL AGENCIES

IN COOPERATION WITH CHILD CARE, INC.



## THE COMPLETE GUIDE<sup>TO</sup> CHOOSING CHILD CARE

JUDITH BEREZIN

- CHECKLISTS FOR MAKING A CHOICE ■ QUESTIONS TO ASK CAREGIVERS
- SAFETY FACTORS ■ IN-HOME CARE, FAMILY DAY CARE, DAY CARE CENTERS
- AFTER SCHOOL CARE ■ WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE SUMMER
- LOCAL DIRECTORIES TO RESOURCE AND REFERRAL AGENCIES
- LOCAL DIRECTORIES TO AU PAIR GROUPS ■ AND MORE!

The National Association of Child Care Resource and  
Referral Agencies in cooperation with Child Care, Inc.

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**THE  
COMPLETE  
GUIDE  
TO  
CHOOSING  
CHILD CARE**

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Judith Berezin



RANDOM HOUSE

NEW YORK

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*We thank the following children for contributing art to this book:*

***The Purple Circle Day Care Center***

Sam Dewind ▪ Samuel Rudman ▪ Jesse Krulwich ▪ Benjamin Jacoff ▪  
Michael Morales ▪ Rachel Greene ▪ Sasha Mikelewicz ▪ Emily Rosen-King ▪  
Ethan Stanislawski ▪ Benjamin Messinger Barnes ▪ Cody Colon-Berezin ▪  
Nina Hurwitz ▪ Joya Colon-Berezin

***Child Care Dallas—Landauer Child Care Center***

Francisco Puebla ▪ Melisa Lopez ▪ Rudy Robledo ▪ Brian Jones ▪ Lauren Higgins  
▪ John Phillips ▪ Yassin Ahmed ▪ Gina Avila ▪ Ana Iris Mares ▪  
Brannnden Poppenberg ▪ Jose Nerio ▪ Kevin Davenport ▪ Ruben Chevez ▪  
Jonathan Woodards ▪ Yennys Palomeque ▪ Myrna Garcia ▪ Kenneth Jennings ▪  
Jacobie Lacy ▪ Mayra Meza ▪ Jamar Cochran ▪ Gabriela Colunga ▪ Michelle Bason  
▪ Mario Martinez ▪ Adrianna Benavides ▪ AshleyAnderson ▪ Edwin Jordan ▪  
Demon Smith

***Civic League Day Nursery***

Jana Larson Keiler ▪ Luke Wrubel ▪ Anne Graner ▪ Jennifer Tran ▪ Jill Thomas

***Children's Home Society***

Sambath Pech ▪ Jennifer Olson

***Other Children***

Natahlie Weil ▪ Jonathon Weil ▪ Aaron Neugebauer ▪ Adam Neugebauer ▪  
Alex Benepe ▪ Will Maloney

## NACCRRRA

The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies is a national membership organization which promotes the development, maintenance and expansion of quality child care resource and referral services through regional conferences, technical support services and a quarterly newsletter. NACCRRRA also provides a national voice for child care resource and referral on issues affecting the quality, accessibility and affordability of child care for all families regardless of income or where they live.

NACCRRRA's more than 260 voting members represent child care resource and referral agencies located throughout the country. These agencies offer consultation and information to thousands of parents each month who are seeking assistance in finding the best possible child care for their children. They are available to answer your questions and assist you in your child care search. The names of these agencies can be found in the Appendix of this book.

## CHILD CARE, INC.

Child Care, Inc., is the largest child care resource and referral agency serving New York City. Child Care, Inc., provides consultation and information to parents on the full range of child care options, offers training and technical assistance to all types of child care programs, consults with employers and with unions, carries out research, serves as an information resource to policymakers and the media, and organizes advocacy on public child care policies.

Child Care, Inc., like other child care resource and referral agencies, maintains comprehensive information on all legal child care services in New York City including infant/toddler programs, family day care, part- and full-day preschool programs including day care centers, nursery schools and Head Start, school-based pre-kindergarten programs and after-school programs and summer day camps.

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Our editor, Charlotte Mayerson, with insight, care, and humor guided us and our dedicated author, Judith Berezin, through the process of translating what we wanted to say into a book that we hope will be a valuable guide for parents as they search for the best possible child care for their children.

Nancy Kolben  
Child Care, Inc.  
Vice President, NACCRRA

Naomi Sherlock  
President, NACCRRA

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# **THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO CHOOSING CHILD CARE**



# Introduction



**T**his book is about child care: how to decide what you need, locate it, judge its quality, and make a selection.

We hope to function as your informed companion in a search for child care that can be like a journey through a thorny maze. Parents look for clues to guide them along the way—a  $3 \times 5$  card on a bulletin board with the name of someone who takes care of children; a telephone number in a want ad; a sign on the lawn of a neighborhood house; a day care center listed in the yellow pages. These may be the leads the parent starts with, only to find that the follow-up phone calls yield a long waiting list or a program that is too expensive or else unacceptable in some other way.

The irony is that at the other end of the maze, there are many dedicated and qualified caregivers and teachers as well as excellent child care programs. Helping you make your way to them is the task of this book.

The major changes in our work force over the past several years have been documented in countless articles and books. The figures are startling: Over 56 percent of all women with children under age six are in the work force, as compared with just over 20 percent in 1970. More than half of all mothers now return to work before their child's first birthday. Women of all ages are entering the work force and remaining in it as permanent workers. Economists project that women will account for two thirds of the net increase in the labor force by the turn of the century and their participation will be critical to meeting the economic needs of the next century.

It was fathers who went out to work and mothers who stayed home with the children in the traditional middle-class American family. The situation has almost completely changed, but unfortunately, child care services have not kept pace with the changes. As a result, parents must make do with situations that do not provide the quality developmental care that every child deserves; with hours that do not coincide with their workday; with decisions that factor cost over quality. They must often settle for patchwork arrangements that are confusing for children and disruptive of the lives of working parents.

As a nation, we profess to cherish family values, but we have allocated far too few resources, either economic or intellectual, to deal with the needs of our families. Obviously, parents need help and it is on their daily struggles that current discussion often focuses. It is, however, our children who are at the center of America's future, and taking care of them properly and lovingly should be among the first priorities of government policy. Because we have not given appropriate economic or professional recognition to those who care for children, many dedicated and qualified people are leaving the field at the very time when we need to expand services.

We are now seeing an increasing awareness of the crucial need for a good child-care-service delivery system. The lack of easily accessible and affordable child care has created a national crisis. Polls indicate that Americans view child care as a primary public policy issue and one that the business community should address as well. Both major national political parties have a child care plank in their platforms, and many child care bills are being debated at the federal and state level.

Child care resource and referral agencies started in the early seventies to bridge the gap between parents seeking child care and those who provide it. These agencies have developed into a core component of the

child-care-service delivery system. Their counselors speak with more than 350,000 parents each year about what their child care options are and how best to choose among them. These specially trained people have information about all legally operated child care services in the community. They know what is available, what it costs, and what specific problems parents in their localities may face.

These organizations are also working every day to increase the supply and quality of child care. They recruit and train child care providers and offer technical assistance to family day care providers and local day care centers, as well as providing leadership in efforts to influence public policy.

This book has been prepared under the auspices of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), with the cooperation of Child Care, Inc., a leading CRR agency located in New York City. It was written by an early childhood specialist experienced in working with parents and children. Representatives from around the country who serve on the NACCRRA national board and who themselves are child care experts have reviewed the book's contents and provided anecdotes about child care from people in their communities (and drawings from their children).

NACCRRA represents these more than 260 local resource and referral agencies and provides them with technical support and public policy leadership. It conducts national and regional forums on child care programs and policy.

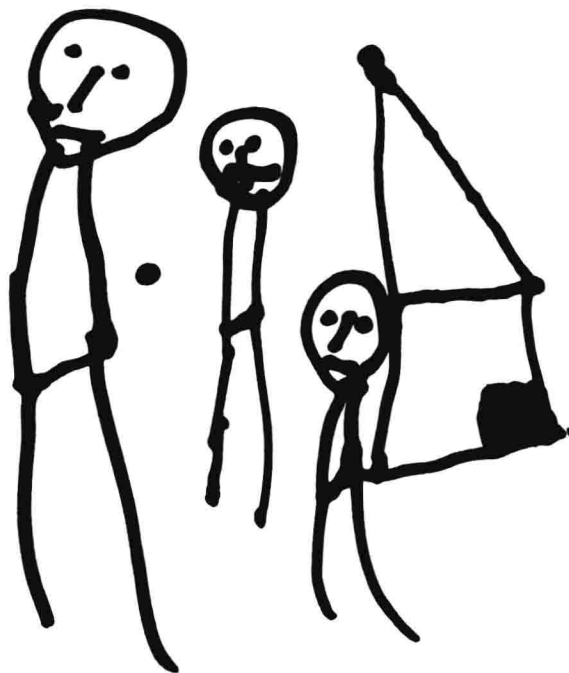
## **How to Use This Book**

With this book we hope to provide you with a step-by-step guide to locating, evaluating, and selecting child care. The first step is to identify your family's practical needs (Chapter 1). Next, the question is: What are your options? (Chapter 2). Then you will want to figure out what your child needs at this stage of her life (Chapter 3). Next, the book considers, one by one and in close detail, each type of child care and what parents should consider in evaluating it. Suggestions are given for helping your child make a smooth adjustment, and there are also guidelines for maintaining a good relationship with the caregivers and teachers you have chosen. For specific information about child care resource and referral agencies in your area, see pages 203–247. They are listed

by state, and the geographic areas they cover are indicated. Call these agencies for help in your own child care search.

If you have a child with special needs, this book may give you some help in your search for child care. It does not, however, deal with the special services that your child might need. You should ask your local child care resource and referral agency for information about such services in your community.

We hope that the information in this book will help make you an informed consumer. You may find that you will have to settle for less than your ideal, but you will have the tools you need to make a good child care choice.



# 1



## Getting Started

*I*t is difficult to leave your child in someone else's care. The first time you do it may be the hardest, but each time you make a child care decision, you may find yourself wondering: Will it go well? How will my child feel? Have I made the right choice?

The parents we've quoted here express some of their concerns as well as the pleasant surprises they experienced when they went off to work:

I had a lot of anxiety about whether my infant would suffer because nobody could take care of the baby at six weeks or six months as well as I could.

The provider I had really helped me because I don't have any family here, no one to ask when I don't know what to do. My mother is far away, and my mother-in-law, too. The provider was sort of the grandmotherly type. She was good for Eileen, but she also helped me a lot as a parent.

I feel real comfortable with the woman I take my daughter to, and Mariah, she went right for it. Even with my aunt, she cried and cried and didn't want to be left, but with this other person, she just took right to it. Right now I say, "Mariah, I'll be going," and she's fine. But the truth is, I don't really like it because she calls *her* Mom and she calls *her* husband Dad.

I had a lot of misgivings about leaving my son when he was an infant, but I didn't have any choice. My husband and I split up shortly after the baby was born and I had to earn a living. So I just kind of steeled myself and said this is it, this is what you have to do. And he's adjusted well. I can't say I really have major regrets about going back to work. In fact I think maybe it was better, considering everything else that was going on in my life at the time, because my work environment was very supportive—and I think that probably made my time with my son better.

It is natural to feel some ambivalence even if you are eager to return to work. When you have no choice about going, it can be even harder to deal with the necessary separation. You may be leaving a very young infant. Perhaps you've been at home for your child's first few years but now need care for a preschooler. In some instances, your first experience with child care may not come until your child is already in elementary school and you need coverage for the early mornings and late afternoons.

It is easier to go about finding child care if you have support from those around you. If members of your family or your friends question what you are doing, you may feel pressure to justify your decision.

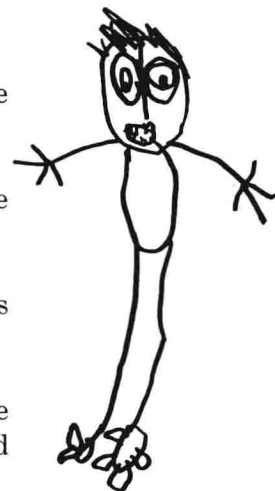
Whatever your child's age, finding the child care situation that will best meet your family's needs can be a challenge. If you go about it carefully and in an organized way, you are more likely to make a good choice. How should you begin?

The first thing to do is figure out your family's practical needs. If you have access to a child care resource and referral agency (see page 203), the counselors there will explain to you what your options are. With their help or on your own, it's best to begin with the nuts-and-bolts issues.

The following questions will help you think about your basic needs:

- When must you begin the arrangement?
- How old will your child be?

- What hours of care do you need, including time to get to work and back? Are the hours fixed or varied? Do you ever have need for over-night child care?
- What days of the week must you cover?
- How much can you afford to pay?
- Are you looking for an arrangement that would be appropriate for one year or the next two to three years?
- Do you need care year-round? Ten months? Eleven months?
- Do you have access to transportation, or would it be better to have someone at home or care within walking distance?
- Would you consider care near your workplace?
- Do you have more than one child? Are their needs and schedules different? Will your older child have to be picked up from school?



Now, go through your list again, looking at your requirements more specifically. Try to figure out which of these factors are absolutes and which might have some flexibility.

For instance, you might have decided that you need care from 7:30 A.M. to 6:30 P.M. in order to get back and forth from work on time. Is there a chance that either you or your spouse can change your work hours slightly if you cannot find care that fits that schedule?

Think about the amount you have decided you can pay. Is it fixed, or could you pay a little more in order to find the care that meets your needs?

If you have decided that you need care for all twelve months of the year, is there a chance you could make a different arrangement in the summer if year-round care is not available?

Once you've decided what the absolute necessities are, you won't waste time pursuing arrangements that clearly couldn't meet your basic needs.

You will learn very soon in your search that good child care services are expensive. Plan to take advantage of the federal child and dependent care tax credit, which is available to all working families whose child care meets certain IRS requirements. You claim the tax credit when you file your income tax returns.

Parents can claim up to \$2,400 in child care expenses for one child and \$4,800 for two or more children. The credit represents a percentage of these expenses and it declines as your income increases. For a full explanation of the child and dependent care tax credit and regulations govern-