

# Child Care Arrangements

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## Most preschoolers receive care in a home environment.

The choice of child care arrangements for preschool-age children is one of the most important daily decisions parents make. It is an age when children are most dependent on a care provider's supervisory skills and often marks the time when children make their first prolonged social contacts with persons outside the immediate family. In 1991, there were 9.9 million children under the age of 5 who were in need of care while their mothers were at work.

About two-thirds of preschool-age children were cared for in either their own home (36 percent) or another home (31 percent) for the majority of time their mothers were away at work. Most of the children taken care of in their own homes were cared for by their fathers. In comparison, among those taken care of outside of the home, most were cared for by family day care providers — nonrelatives

in the provider's home. Nearly one quarter (23 percent) received care in an organized facility, such as a nursery school or a day care center. Virtually all the remaining kids (9 percent) were cared for by their mothers while they worked; most of these moms worked at home.

Grandparents and fathers often play a significant role in preschooler care. Sixteen percent of preschool children were cared for by their grandparents during their mothers' working hours and about 20 percent were cared for by their fathers. Relatives other than grandparents and fathers played a smaller role in providing child care services, amounting to about 8 percent of all arrangements for preschoolers.

## Preschoolers' child care arrangements have changed dramatically over the past few years.

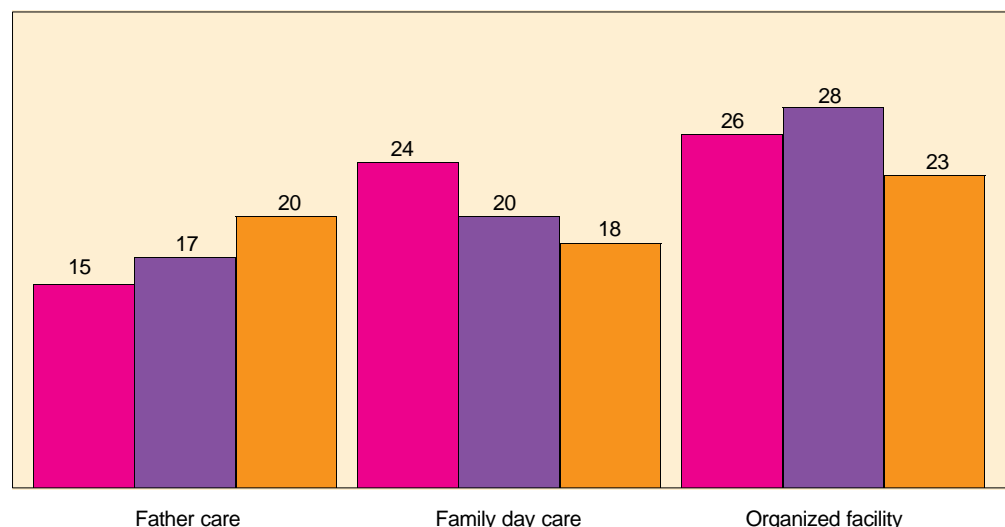
A noteworthy change in the type of child care

arrangements used by preschoolers between 1988 and 1991 was in the proportion of children cared for by family day care providers. The proportion of children cared for by these providers sharply fell from 24 percent in 1988 to 18 percent in 1991. This marked the first substantial decline in the use of family day care providers since the mid-1980's. Between 1988 and 1991 the proportion of preschoolers who were cared for in organized child care facilities also declined from 26 to 23 percent. Recent declines in these services may reflect the desires of parents to cut down on child care costs and move to more parental supervision of their children whenever possible, or they may indicate more difficulties in securing licensed family day care providers.

In contrast to declines in the usage of family day care providers and organized child care facilities, father care, while remaining at about

## Recent Changes in Selected Child Care Arrangements: 1988 to 1991

(Percent of preschoolers whose mothers work using arrangement)



the 15 percent level between 1977 and 1988, sharply increased to 20 percent by fall 1991. In the 1988-91 period, father-provided child care increased for children whose fathers worked at full-time jobs, even if their fathers worked day shifts. Father care, however, was greatest among children whose fathers experienced long-term joblessness: 56 percent of preschoolers whose fathers were out of work for 4 or more months in 1991 were cared for by dad while mom was at work.

**Mothers working evening or night shifts have an easier time arranging for in-home care.**

The type of shift that a mother works makes a big difference in the kind of primary care arrangements she uses. Children whose mothers work day shifts are more likely to be cared for away from home than children whose mothers work nonday shifts. For

example, among preschoolers whose mothers worked a day shift at their principal job, 34 percent were cared for in another home, compared with 27 percent of children whose mothers worked a nonday shift. Use of organized child care facilities was also more prevalent for children of women working day shifts, accounting for 30 percent of all child care arrangements. Children of women working nonday shifts used these facilities less frequently, amounting to 14 percent of all child care arrangements.

Working nonday rather than day shifts may offer more opportunities for women with preschoolers to secure care for their children at home, especially by the children's fathers. Overall, 47 percent of the preschool-age children of women working nonday shifts were cared for in their own home, compared with 27 percent of the children of women working day shifts. In-home child care of preschoolers by

fathers accounted for 31 percent of all arrangements used by women working nonday shifts compared with only 12 percent used by women working day shifts.

**Mothers working part-time have an easier time arranging for in-home care.**

Patterns by the number of hours worked are similar — preschool children of mothers employed full-time were less likely to be cared for in the child's home (30 percent) than were children of mothers employed part-time (44 percent). On the other hand, full-time working mothers relied more heavily on child care in either someone else's home or in organized child care facilities (64 percent) than did part-time working mothers (41 percent).

Preschool children of part-time working mothers were more likely to be cared for by their mothers while at work (15 percent), than were children of mothers who worked full-time

(4 percent). In addition, child care provided by the father was also more frequent when the mother worked part-time (27 percent) than full-time (15 percent). More preschoolers with mothers who worked part-time had mothers who worked nonday schedules (66 percent) than did children with mothers who worked full-time (27 percent). This potentially enabled fathers who worked on a "9 to 5" schedule the opportunity to look after their children.

**For many families, child care is a costly expense.**

In 1991, half as many poor families paid for child care as did nonpoor families (32 percent versus 64 percent). Poor families with only preschoolers paid less for child care than their nonpoor counterparts: \$52 compared with \$70 per week. However, poor families spent a larger percentage of their family income on child care (20 percent) than similar nonpoor families (8 percent).

**For Further Information**

See: Current Population Reports, Series P70-36, *Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Fall 1991*.

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**Percent of Monthly Family Income Families With Employed Mothers Spent on Child Care, by Income Level and Poverty Status: 1991**

