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# Out-of-Home Care for Young Children

Combining grandparenting with full-time or part-time work outside the home can be challenging. Who will take care of your grandchildren while you're at work? How do you find someone who will help your grandchildren learn and grow so they are ready for kindergarten?

Choosing an out-of-home caregiver for your grandchildren is an important decision. It's crucial that you feel comfortable with the person (or people) who teach and care for your grandchildren when you're not there. So how do you choose good out-of-home care, and how do you help your grandchildren make a smooth transition to another caregiver?

## Types of Out-of-Home Care

If you're looking for someone to care for your grandchildren, you have many different options. The different types of group care for young children are often referred to as early care and education (ECE) programs. Here are the most common types of ECE for children ages 5 and younger.

### Child Care Learning Centers

In Georgia, child care learning centers care for seven or more children. Some centers are quite large, caring for hundreds of children, while others are smaller. Centers usually have different groups or classes for children of different ages. Some centers are for-profit businesses or franchises. Others are run by not-for-profit organizations. Some centers care for children from infancy through elementary school. Others are limited to only certain age groups. Most centers are open only during typical workday hours on weekdays, although some centers are beginning to offer weekend and evening care. Child care learning centers are licensed by the state.

### Family Child Care Learning Homes

Family child care learning homes usually are run by one adult who cares for up to six children in his or her own home. Family child care providers usually try to set up a home-like environment for the children. Family child care providers are licensed by the state and are required to get regular training.

### Informal Care

Many parents and grandparents choose to have friends, neighbors, or relatives care for their children. These people are known as "informal caregivers" because they usually do not have to go through a licensing process. Babysitters and nannies also are considered informal caregivers. Informal care may happen in the caregiver's home or in the child's home. In many communities, informal caregivers are the only option available for adults who work evening or overnight hours.

### Preschools

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Preschools generally are half-day educational programs for toddlers and preschoolers. Preschools may be run by for-profit or not-for-profit groups. Some preschools are affiliated with faith organizations.

## Quality Matters!

Some adults worry that putting their children in ECE will harm their development, or believe that certain types of ECE are better. Researchers have discovered that *where* a child receives care is less important than the *quality* of that care. High-quality ECE programs can help your grandchildren develop language, thinking, and social skills. Children who are in low-quality programs are more likely to be aggressive than children in high-quality ones.

How do you recognize high-quality ECE programs? Look for things like low adult-to-child ratios; well-trained, sensitive, and responsive adults; and a setting that provides stimulation and teaches children how to solve problems. You also need to find a program or caregiver that's a good "fit" with your grandchild. The following are some tips to help.

## Find out What's Available in Your Community

Large cities have a wide variety of ECE programs available. Smaller communities may have fewer options. If you're looking for ECE programs in Georgia, call 877-ALL-GA-KIDS or go to the Quality Rated website (<http://www.qualityrated.org/>), run by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. This service is free to all parents and grandparents.

## Visit and Observe

Be sure to visit several ECE programs or providers before you choose one. Count the number of children and adults. Children receive better-quality care in smaller groups with enough adults. Are there enough adults to provide good supervision and attention? Watch how the adults interact with other children. Do they get down at eye level? Are they warm and caring? Do they talk, laugh, sing, and smile with children? Is the space safe and inviting for children? Are there enough age-appropriate toys and activities? Are toys safe and clean? Are children's needs met? A visit may help you get a feel for how your grandchildren would fit into the program.



## **Ask Questions**

Talk with the people who will be responsible for your grandchildren. Find out what they know about how children develop. Talk about how they would handle an emergency or a sick child. Ask what they would do if your grandchild cried when you dropped him off. Ask how they discipline children who misbehave. Find out whether they encourage you to visit the program and how they will keep you updated on your grandchildren's progress. Make sure you feel comfortable with the ECE teachers. If possible, look for someone whose child-rearing ideas are similar to yours.

## **Pay Attention to Logistics**

Find out how much the program costs. Some programs have scholarships or sliding fee scales for families who can't afford the whole cost. Ask whether the caregiver's hours of operation match your schedule. What time can you bring the children, and when do you need to pick them up? What happens if you are late? Try to avoid ECE programs located a long distance from your home or work, or those that would make you rush from work to pick up your grandchild. Ask whether the caregiver has a parent handbook that describes the program's policies and rules.

## **Find Out What You Need to Bring**

Different ECE programs have different expectations. Most programs will expect you to supply

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diapers, wipes, a change of clothing, and any medications your grandchildren need. Some programs provide lunch; others expect you to send a lunch with your grandchild.

## **Be Consistent**

It's important for your grandchildren to form strong, secure attachments with their regular caregivers. Check out ECE programs carefully and try to keep your grandchildren with the same caregivers for as long as possible.

You won't be happy about the ECE program you choose until you are sure your grandchildren are in a safe, healthy, and nurturing place. Take the extra time to find the highest quality care that meets your needs. For more information on choosing quality programs, including important questions to ask, visit the Child Care Quality Matters website (<https://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/ccqm/>).

## **ECE Programs Require Immunizations**

If you are planning to enroll your grandchildren in an ECE program, their immunizations must be up to date. Most programs require a copy of each grandchild's immunization record that lists the dates of each immunization. An original, up-to-date certificate must be maintained on file at the ECE program.

If you're not sure whether your grandchild has had all the necessary immunizations, talk to your pediatrician or the local health center. They can help you figure out how to get your grandchildren's immunization records and how to decide which immunizations are needed. Take the time to be sure all of your grandchildren are immunized—it's an important step to protect their health.

## **Making the Transition Into an ECE Program**

Going to an ECE program for the first time may be stressful for all of you. Your grandchildren will face new adults, new children, new places, new things, new routines, and new limits. They may be scared about being alone and upset with you for leaving them. You may worry that they will embarrass you by crying or misbehaving. These feelings are normal responses to the transition into something new. With careful planning and preparation, you can help reduce these first-week jitters.

Talk with your grandchildren about their new ECE program. Tell them where they are going, and discuss some of the things they might do. Even if they do not understand everything you say, your grandchildren certainly will pick up on your feelings of confidence. If possible, visit the program with your grandchildren before their first full day. Let them watch and explore with your encouragement and protection. Be sure they have a chance to meet their new caregivers when they visit.

Talk with the caregivers about your grandchildren before they begin the program. Explain their eating and sleeping schedules, any health concerns (such as allergies), and any situations at home that may affect their behavior. Tell them about what upsets your grandchildren and how they can be comforted. If your grandchildren are taking prescription medicine, you will need to

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complete a permission form for them to be given the medication in your absence. If possible, fill out and return all of the forms and paperwork the program needs before your grandchildren's first day.

On the day your grandchildren start in the ECE program, be sure you bring all the clothes, equipment, and food the caregivers request. Bring one of your grandchildren's favorite comfort items, such as a stuffed animal or a blanket, if the program permits it. Arrive a few minutes early so you can greet the teachers, put away your grandchildren's things, and help them find an activity. Plan to spend a little extra time sitting with them and helping them get used to the new setting. Consider a half day for their first day or two in the program, or at least pick them up a little early. A full day in ECE is a big adjustment for a young child who's used to being at home all day.

Some children may cry, scream, kick, or cling to you when you try to leave. When it's time to go, say goodbye calmly, and tell them when you will return. Don't sneak out without saying goodbye; this just makes their adjustment harder. Once you leave, don't go back to check on your grandchildren. Even though it's hard, keep walking. Remember that you trust the caregivers to take good care of them. It may help you feel better to call about an hour after you drop them off to ask how your grandchildren are doing.

When you pick up your grandchildren, greet them with hugs and words that show you're glad to see them. Ask them if they had a good day, and tell them you're proud of them for staying at the ECE program all day. Don't be surprised if they are both glad to see you and mad that you left. Spend a little extra one-on-one time with them that evening, and give some extra hugs and cuddles if needed.

Starting a new ECE program may be stressful for your grandchildren. Some children tend to cling to you more, change their eating and sleeping patterns, or go back to behaviors like thumb-sucking as they make the transition. Don't be surprised if your grandchildren are well-behaved in ECE (where they want to please these new adults) and misbehave more than usual at home (because they feel safe and home is where they can blow off steam). Just be patient—these behaviors will change as your grandchildren make the adjustment into their new program.

## In Summary

Choosing an ECE program for your grandchildren is an important decision. Look for a high-quality program that meets your family's needs, fits your schedule, and provides a warm and nurturing environment for your grandchildren. Making the transition into a new ECE program is challenging for some children. Talk to them about what to expect, help caregivers learn how to comfort your grandchildren, and spend some extra time with children while they are adjusting. Above all, be patient—you and your caregiver can help your grandchildren learn to enjoy their ECE experiences!

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