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Choosing Child Care

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When you need child care, you want to find a child care arrangement that will work well for your family, and one in which you are confident your child will receive love and good care. To those seeking child care, the Boston area presents an array of child care options with professional standards that are among the highest in the country, however choosing child care can be challenging. Each option presents practical advantages and disadvantages, and requires different search strategies. Costs are high, and wait lists not uncommon. In addition, for many parents, the task of choosing child care arouses anxiety and sadness. Given these complexities, it is helpful to plan your search before you set out. This packet provides information related to each of the following steps:

Steps in choosing child care

- 1. Assess your needs and those of your child.** Consider your priorities: identify bottom-line requirements as well as areas where you can afford to be flexible.
- 2. Become familiar with the various child care options.** Determine which options could work for you, knowing that the quality of care varies within each, and that it may be to your advantage to search among several options to locate the best arrangement.
- 3. Become well-acquainted with the correlates of quality in child care.** Know what to look for and what to avoid.
- 4. Develop a search strategy and stick to it.** Give yourself the opportunity to compare and choose among several carefully-observed arrangements so that you can be confident in your final selection.

The Center for Work, Family & Personal Life offers help at any step in your search, including through:

- **child care briefings**, bimonthly sessions held at the Center
- **individual consultations**, available via telephone, email, or office visit
- specialized **information packets** on in-home care; temporary child care; and summer camps
- **program and provider listings**, including family child care providers, child care centers, after-school programs, in-home referral agencies, and an MIT Student Baby-sitter List
- a Boston-area **summer camp database**

Steps in Choosing Child Care

1. Assess Your Needs

- Consider, for example, how each of the following might figure into your search:

Schedule and duration: How soon do you need care to begin? Do you need full-time or part-time care? Are your work hours “standard” or “non-standard”? Do your hours change, requiring flexibility in your child care schedule? What are your feelings about continuity of care -- how long would this arrangement last, ideally?

Cost: What can you afford to pay? Do you plan to use the federal tax credit or MIT’s Dependent Care Reimbursement Program or another dependent care assistance plan? These programs that reduce your cost but also include certain restrictions.

Location: How do you presently commute to work, and at what times? Would you prefer child care close to home or to work, or to your partner’s work? Do you need child care near public transportation? Do you work at home occasionally or frequently? Who will be picking up and dropping off, having contact with the caregiver each day? Do you imagine yourself dropping in during the day to visit, nurse, or have lunch with your child? Where is your pediatrician located?

Preferences: What are you more comfortable with: a small, informal group, or larger, planned program? One consistent caregiver or several caregivers offering one another support and/or supervision? One-to-one care, or peer interactions? How concerned are you about colds, flu’s or ear infections?

Values: It is important to find a caregiver whose approach is consistent with your values. Think about what personal qualities, routines, and environmental characteristics would suggest a good match.

- Develop a picture of your child's needs, considering such factors as age, developmental stage, temperament, health, and personal history. The following age-related guidelines may help:

<p>Infants need a calm, relaxed environment; consistency in caregivers and routines; caregivers who are physically and emotionally available to hold, respond, and interact; a maximum child:caregiver ratio of 3:1; appropriate objects offering visual interest, comfortable textures, and response to touch; safe opportunities for mobility and exploration. Young infants need to follow their own sleeping and eating schedules.</p>	<p>Toddlers need close supervision and personal attention; a maximum child:caregiver ratio of 4:1; consistent and positive limit setting; opportunities for language development through playful exchanges; encouragement to do things for themselves; space to move about; a great deal of schedule flexibility and not much regimentation; and appropriate materials for play, exploration and discovery.</p>	<p>Preschoolers need consistent and supportive responses from adults; opportunities for choice; accessible materials and appropriate activities that provide challenge and novelty; opportunities to increase skills including language, motor, and problem-solving; opportunities to develop their understanding of the world; and help learning to interact and negotiate with peers.</p>
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2. Become Familiar with the Options

There are three types of child care arrangement to choose from, described below; these are **child care centers** (including nursery schools and preschools), **family child care** (care in the provider's licensed home), and **in-home care** (care in the child's own home).

▪ Child Care Centers

Child care centers offer care in group settings with planned activities. Center staff are trained and supervised, and several staff will generally be involved in the care of each child during the day. Centers are open all weekdays except in severe weather or pre-announced closings for holidays or vacation weeks. Many centers offer enrollment options including full-day or part-day, and full-week or part-week; parents select a schedule and pay for a specific time slot. Centers generally can offer less flexibility in schedules, and do not provide care for mildly-ill children.

Centers are licensed by the **Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC)** to provide care for specific age groups that may include infants (children under 15 months), and/or toddlers (15 months to 2 years 8 months), and/or preschoolers (2 years 9 months to 6 years). Children may be grouped by age or in mixed-age groupings. Massachusetts regulations require that centers meet or exceed the following levels for staff: child ratio and group size:

Mandated <u>staff:child ratios</u> and <u>group size</u> for child care centers in Massachusetts		
INFANTS (0 - 14 mos)	Ratio: 1 staff/3 infants, or 2 staff/7 infants	Group Size: no more than 7
TODDLERS (15 mos - 2.8 yrs)	Ratio: 1 staff/4 toddlers, or 2 staff/9 toddlers	Group Size: no more than 9
PRESCHOOLERS (2.9 - 7 yrs, full day)	Ratio: 1 staff/10 preschoolers	Group Size: no more than 20
PRESCHOOLERS (2.9 - 7 yrs, half day)	Ratio: 1 staff/12 preschoolers	Group Size: no more than 24
KINDERGARTEN (4.9 - 7 yrs)	Ratio: 1 staff/15 kindergartners	Group Size: no more than 30

Center brochures may use similar words to describe their programs, but in actuality do vary a great deal with respect to philosophy, program activities and structure, staff:child ratio (beyond the minimum), staff qualifications and turnover, degree of parent participation, size, schedule flexibility allowed, etc. Some centers have received accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); these accreditation standards go beyond those established by the EEC. Although centers that apply for and receive accreditation are generally committed to high quality practice and go through a highly useful period of self-study, accredited programs are not necessarily better than those that have not yet applied for accreditation.

Program costs are high, particularly in Cambridge, but vary, with tuition for full-time care in Cambridge generally ranging from \$1,300 to \$2,100 per month for infants; \$1,100 to \$1,700 for toddlers; and from \$900 to \$1,400 for pre-schoolers. Higher prices are associated with the younger age groups due to the higher staff:child ratios. Generally speaking, center tuitions are set at a level that will just cover center costs, with staff salaries and benefits typically accounting for 70% to 80% of center budgets. Even at such high tuitions, centers struggle to maintain adequate compensation levels to recruit and retain high quality, trained staff. Sources of financial assistance for child care are limited, and are described in a separate handout in this packet, *"Saving Money on Child Care Expenses."*

Some preschool programs are not required to be licensed by EEC as they are regulated by other agencies. These include Head Start programs, which are federally-sponsored preschools offering free and low-cost programs to low-income families, and preschool classrooms operated by public schools, often serving children with diagnosed special needs in integrated settings together with typical (non-

special needs) students. Some private and parochial schools also operate preschool programs that are not regulated by EEC. The Center for Work, Family & Personal Life can provide you with listings of these centers, which do not appear on the EEC web site.

Centers are more likely to have openings to enroll new children during the summer months or in the beginning of September. As waiting lists can be long, especially for infant and toddler groups, an early search is strongly advised. If possible, schedule visits in the fall a year ahead of your child's enrollment, or before mid-spring; it is usually possible to apply a year or more in advance. Application fees for individual centers tend to be modest (\$20 to \$25), while fees for child care systems (companies or organizations managing multiple centers) tend to be more significant (\$100 or more). Application fees serve to hold your place on the wait list without either guaranteeing you a space or committing you to enrolling your child when a space becomes available. For those entering the process later in the academic year, some openings generally do exist into the spring and summer, particularly for preschoolers.

There are many centers in the Boston area, including several that are close to MIT. The Center for Work, Family & Personal Life can provide you with lists of centers in any community in Massachusetts. **Technology Children's Centers (TCC)**, located on the MIT campus, offer full-time and part-time programs for children aged 2 months to 5 years; for information and application forms, call the TCC Administrator at 617-253-1720, email tccinfo@mit.edu, or visit the website at <http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/mitchildcare>. A second MIT child care center, Lincoln Laboratory Children's Center, located in Lexington, also offers full-time and part-time programs for children aged 2 months to 5 years; for information and application forms, call the center at 781-861-3850, or visit the website at <http://www.ll.mit.edu/careers/lincc.html>.

- **Family Child Care**

A family child care provider cares for children in her home, often together with her own child or children. Family child care providers tend to offer a good deal of flexibility in enrollment policies, often allowing customized schedules and sometimes offering care at hours that begin earlier and/or go later than "standard" work hours. Most frequently, the family child care provider is the sole caregiver for the children in her home, although some providers employ an assistant either part-time or full-time. When a provider becomes ill, has a family emergency or takes vacation, parents generally need to find alternative care unless a suitable "back-up" arrangement is offered by the provider.

The **Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care** also regulates family child care, allowing providers working alone to care for up to six children, as long as no more than three of the children are under two years of age and at least one of the three can walk unassisted. A provider who works with an assistant may care for up to six children of any age. Providers with three years' experience and 30 hours or more of training may apply for a Large Family Child Care license, allowing the provider and one assistant to care for up to ten children, including six under age two. Many of the EEC regulations address home safety issues and emergency procedures, including a requirement that providers be certified in first aid and infant/child CPR; for details, visit the website at <http://www.eec.state.ma.us/>. As a rule, homes are visited before licenses are issued, as well as when a complaint is received. Information regarding complaint histories is available to parents by calling EEC at 617-988-6600 and asking for the office and phone number of the regional office responsible for the town in which the provider lives.

Family child care programs vary in terms of the provider's level of training and experience with children, as well as in the nature of the activities, physical environment, materials and equipment, and adult: child ratio offered. Policies also vary, and a written contract is highly useful in spelling out the policies that will apply to schedules, meals, illness, vacations, and rates. The cost of family child care in Cambridge is again higher than in surrounding towns, and generally ranges from about \$7.00 to \$9.00 per hour per child or from \$1,300 to \$1,700 per month. Providers are considered self-employed, and are responsible for their own taxes, social security payments, etc. However, it is important to note that parents taking advantage of the federal child care tax credit or their employer's Dependent Care Assistance Plan (including MIT's Dependent Care Reimbursement Account Plan) are required to use licensed providers and to ask for the provider's social security number.

Parents should allow at least six to eight weeks to search for a family child care provider, if possible; providers seem generally unwilling to contract for care much more than eight weeks in advance, or before the birth of a child.

There are hundreds of licensed family child care providers in the Boston area; listings of licensed providers in Massachusetts are available on the web at <http://www.eec.state.ma.us/>. Additional information on screening and selection is available from the Center, including family child care screening forms that can be downloaded from the Center's web site. The Center can also put you in touch with local referral agencies that, for a modest fee, provide information on current openings, hours, costs, and provider and program characteristics.

- **In-Home Care**

In-home care can be provided by a live-in nanny or au pair, or by a caregiver who comes to your home each day. In-home care can offer highly flexible hours and, if necessary, longer hours of care than center-based or family child care. In-home caregivers may also be willing to do minor household chores, pick up children at school, and/or do some cooking. Child care can continue uninterrupted if your child is sick, although in the event that the in-home caregiver becomes sick, has a family emergency or is on vacation, you will need to find alternative care. In-home care is often one-on-one, which has advantages, including limiting your child's exposure to germs, but also makes this arrangement the least supervised of the child care options. It is also more challenging to do the initial assessment, since in-home caregivers are usually hired on the basis of interviews and references alone, without much first-hand observation; a trial period is therefore highly recommended.

In-home care is not regulated by the Department of Early Education and Care or other state agency. Since the child is in his/her own home, the parent is considered the employer, fully responsible for screening the caregiver and also responsible for paying workman's compensation, unemployment insurance, and social security. Salaries for in-home caregivers in the metropolitan-Boston area generally run between \$10.00 and \$16.00 per hour. The cost of live-in care tends to be somewhat less, as salaries are offset by the provision of living space (generally involving, at minimum, a private bedroom and bath), but some professionally trained nannies earn \$500-\$600 per week salary, with benefits at additional cost, on top of room and board. In-home care is most economical when more than one child is involved, as the cost tends not to vary significantly with the number of children in care. Some families reduce costs by sharing a caregiver with another family, although attention should be paid to liability (a family child care license might be obtained), and co-employer issues.

Depending on the time of year and search method used, you will want to allow at least six to eight weeks to hire a live-in or live-out caregiver. Parents can consider using a child care placement agency that will provide a number of pre-screened candidates for consideration, for a fee roughly equivalent to the caregiver's monthly salary. Alternatively, parents can choose to search on their own, either relying on their own networks (advertising through friends, relatives, neighbors, religious and community organizations, and at MIT), and/or by placing an ad in community newspapers; this approach is much more time-consuming but obviously less costly.

If you are searching for in-home care, the Center for Work, Family & Personal Life can provide you with a handout, also available on the Center's web site, titled "Choosing In-Home Child Care" that offers suggestions on how to screen agencies; how to conduct an independent search (including where to advertise for caregivers within the MIT community); handling interviews and reference checks; and on employer issues such as supervision, contracts, and employer obligations. A second document, "Advertising Child Care Positions", available in hard copy and on the web, details recruitment opportunities within the MIT community and in the greater Boston area. The Center can also provide a listing of employment agencies, titled "In-Home Child Care Nanny Agency List", and a list of MIT-affiliated babysitters, titled "MIT Babysitter List": each is available in hard copy only by request from the Center.

Comparing Child Care Options

Listed below are some of the general characteristics of the different child care options. It is hoped that these descriptions will be helpful in determining which might work for you, but parents should expect to see significant variation among the policies and practices of individual providers. It may be to your advantage to search among several options in order to locate the best arrangement for your child, as the quality of care can vary greatly within each option, and at any given time, there will be a limited number of openings available.

CHILD CARE CENTERS

Potential Advantages

- ✧ Staff has experience and education in early childhood/group care.
- ✧ A sufficient number of adults are available for supervision and individual attention.
- ✧ Child care centers are usually open year round and the availability of care is not impacted by teacher vacations and illnesses.
- ✧ Your child will be with others the same age and will have activities selected to be appropriate for that age group.
- ✧ Centers are usually in spaces specifically adapted or designed for child care.
- ✧ Parents have access to a community of other parents, and to professional advice.

Potential Disadvantages

- ✧ Centers usually cannot accommodate parents' needs for early, late, or flexible schedules.
- ✧ Most centers cannot accommodate sick children.
- ✧ Some children, especially if under three years, are not ready to be with a larger group of children.
- ✧ Nursery schools usually do not operate for a full day, and they tend to follow the school year, closing for school vacations, holidays, and the summer months.
- ✧ Availability may be limited at certain times of the year, or for particular ages.
- ✧ Costs, especially for infants, are generally high.

FAMILY CHILD CARE

Potential Advantages

- ✧ Family child care for infants and toddlers typically costs somewhat less than other types of care.
- ✧ Providers are often more flexible in scheduling the hours of care.
- ✧ Family child care openings are more often available in the middle of the year, and on shorter notice, than center openings.
- ✧ Licensed providers are easily located using EEC listings.
- ✧ Providers are often more flexible in handling mildly ill children in their care.
- ✧ Family child care is easier to evaluate than in-home child care, where parents generally must rely on interviews and recommendations alone.
- ✧ The same caregiver cares for the children all day and can share complete information with the parent.
- ✧ The parent-provider relationship is often more like family, individualized and close.
- ✧ A licensed provider is required to have current certification in infant and child first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Potential Disadvantages

- ◇ Family child care providers generally have less formal training than child care center staff and thus may have less understanding of how to support learning and development.
- ◇ Although some do, family child care providers generally do not work with assistants, and may therefore be alone with children for some or all of the day. However, some do have full or part time assistants.
- ◇ It can be difficult to monitor the activities that go on in the family child care home.
- ◇ The social network for parents is smaller in family child care, and there are generally few parent programs and events.
- ◇ Because the parent-provider relationship is often close and more like family, conflicts can sometimes feel harder to resolve.
- ◇ If the provider is ill, has an emergency, or suddenly goes out of business, parents may need to quickly find alternative child care unless the provider has an assistant or other backup.

IN HOME CHILD CARE

Potential Advantages

- ◇ You can find caregivers to work extended or non-standards hours that might be difficult to cover using other forms of care.
- ◇ All of the children in your family can be cared for in the same place at the same time.
- ◇ There is no need to transport your child.
- ◇ It can minimize your child's exposure to colds, viruses, and other illnesses.
- ◇ Your child's surroundings will be familiar.
- ◇ If you have several children, in-home care may be a more economical choice.
- ◇ The parent, as the employer, has the opportunity to determine much of the routine.

Potential Disadvantages

- ◇ In-home providers are unlicensed. There is no single state agency to which you can appeal for confirmation of a caregiver's claims or reputation.
- ◇ A caregiver and child can feel isolated being home all day with only each other. You may need to help the caregiver make arrangements to be with other children and caregivers occasionally.
- ◇ Screening candidates can be challenging; the applicant pool is often extremely mixed, interview impressions may be misleading, and background data may be hard to verify.
- ◇ Once found, a provider may suddenly become ill or move away, forcing you to begin again the search for care.
- ◇ Live-in care may involve some restrictions on your space and privacy.
- ◇ It can be difficult to monitor the activities that go on in your home in your absence.
- ◇ In-home care can be the most costly, live-in or live-out, with the exception of au pair services that are designed as supplemental, not primary, child care programs.
- ◇ Being an employer generally involves additional responsibilities and costs, including the provision of some benefits and the effort involved in making your provider comfortable in your home.

3. Know the Correlates of Quality

Research and early childhood professional opinion have consistently identified the following as key correlates of quality in child care settings:

Research On Quality

Group Size

Group size has been related to the most consistent effects on teacher and child behavior in centers and family day care homes and to children's development in child care (*Ruopp et al, 1979; Howes, 1983*). Professional standards recommend (*National Research Council, 1990*):

Infants to 1 year of age	6 – 8 per group
Toddlers, 1 – 2 years old	6 – 12 per group
3-year-olds	14 – 20 per group
4 – 5-year-olds	16 – 20 per group

Staff: child ratios

Staff: child ratios also correlate with quality care giving behaviors (*Ruopp, 1978; Howes, 1989*): lower ratios are identified with more positive emotional climate, higher levels of talk and play behavior, and for infants and toddlers, more secure attachment to caregivers. Professional standards recommend (*National Research Council, 1990*):

Age Group	Recommended Minimum Adult: Child Ratio	Massachusetts EEC Ratio Requirements for Child Care Centers
Birth - 2 years	1:4 or less	Under 15 months: 1:3 or 2:7
2-year-olds	1:3 to 1:6	15 - 33 months: 1:4 or 2:9
3-year-olds	1:5 to 1:10	2.9 - 5 years: 1:10
4- and 5-year-olds	1:7 to 1:10	

Staff Wages and Working Conditions

In child care centers staff wages are strongly linked with quality of care (*Report of the National Child Care Staffing Study, 1989*). Centers paying the lowest wages also lose the most teachers. In family day care settings caregiver isolation appears to negatively impact quality (*Rosenthal, 1988*).

Caregiver Stability and Continuity

Opportunity for children to form relationships with individual caregivers, and the stability of caregivers over time, have been found to influence children's security and attachment, the complexity of their play, and their later school adjustment (*Vaughn et al, 1980; Howes and Stuart, 1987*).

Staff Qualifications

In both centers and family day care homes, caregiver training in child development appears to be key to higher quality (*Ruopp et al., 1979, Fosburg, 1981*). Overall educational level has also been linked with more positive caregiver behaviors, including richer, more positive verbal interactions. There is little indication that greater caregiver experience, on its own, produces higher quality caregiving.

Structure and Content of Daily Activities

Programs which foster children's social and cognitive development provide adequate amounts of time for free, open-ended play in addition to providing organized group and learning activities (*McCartney, 1984; Schweinhart, 1986*). In family day care homes the inclusion of "child-designed" space (space designed for children rather than adults) has been associated with higher quality care (*Howes, 1983*).

Other Program Features

Parents frequently stress the importance of adequate health and safety measures. Other important features to look for include multicultural curriculum, parental involvement, and a good "match" of program features to a child's needs.

4. Structure Your Search

Having decided which options are of most interest and obtained program or provider listings, you might begin by networking with friends, relatives, neighbors and professionals, including the Center, for suggestions about who to contact. While these suggestions may put you in touch with strong candidates and help you begin your search, it is important to keep in mind that even good friends make recommendations that do not turn out to be good matches for you. Consider recommendations, but move ahead to conduct a thorough search.

The next step is to visit as many programs as you can. By visiting different programs and providers and asking lots of questions, you can get a “feel” for the unique style -- values, opportunities and challenges -- of each setting. While your first visit is likely to feel confusing, after visiting several settings your observations will gradually help define what you are looking for by what feels best to you. Visits should be scheduled for times when children are present and active. It is probably useful to make your initial visit to a program without your child, so that you are freer to make observations and to conduct interviews. In setting up your visit to a child care center, arrange to meet with the director to get information about program philosophy, parent involvement, and staff qualifications, and to get a feel for the person who is in charge of hiring, supervision and parent relations. Make sure to visit the classroom in which your child would be placed, and walk through each of the other classrooms. Visits to centers and family child care homes should include physical inspection of all indoor and outdoor facilities. (Detailed suggestions for visits and interviews are included elsewhere in this packet.) Follow-up questions can be handled over the phone or during your second visit, with your child. Expand your search and keep visiting until you have found a good match.

Initial Screening Questions for Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Homes

Questions for your first call to the center or family child care provider:

1. Do you have a place for a (give your child's age)? Is there a waiting list; how long?
2. What do you charge? (Ask about sliding fee scales, scholarships, subsidies, etc.)
3. What are your hours? Do you offer part-day or part-week schedules?
4. When are your holiday or vacation closings?
5. How many children are you licensed for?
6. How long has this program been in operation?
7. When can I visit?

...also for family child care providers:

8. How many children are you caring for now and how old are they?
9. How long have the children who are now in your care been with you?
10. Do you have an assistant working with you?

...also for child care centers:

11. How are children grouped, and how many children are in each age group?
12. How many teachers and additional staff are assigned to each age group?
13. Who are the administrative staff, and what are their responsibilities?

Questions for your first visit to the center or family child care home:

1. Describe your (program's) philosophy and goals.
2. What are the qualifications and experience of the caregivers?
3. Can you describe a typical day? How will you foster my child's development?
4. How much physical activity will my child have?
5. What happens if my child gets sick or has an accident while in care?
6. How do you help new children adjust to the unfamiliar setting?
7. What is expected from me as a parent? How do you communicate with parents?
8. What is included in the fee and what are parents expected to supply? (Diapers, formula, meals, snacks?)
9. How are limits set?
10. What measures do you take to reduce the spread of colds and other infections?
11. Will the children be out in a car for any reason or leave the property to go on trips?
12. What commitments does the tuition agreement/parent contract form require from parents and from the program/caregiver?
13. May I contact a parent or two who has used this program recently?

... also for family child care providers:

14. Do you have a backup-care arrangement if you're sick or on vacation?
15. What is your policy about television watching?
16. Do you have any helpers or other adults in the home? Who are they?
17. Do you or does anyone else in your home smoke or have pets?
18. Will you provide me with a social security number so that I can use the child care tax credit or my employer's dependent care spending account?
19. Do you belong to a family child care network? (Consider networking a plus - she may have access to such things as training or a toy lending library.)

... also for child care centers:

14. Are you accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children?
15. Do you help train student teachers from area early childhood programs?
16. How do your teachers' salaries compare to those at other centers in this area?
17. Describe your staff turnover last year and in a typical year.
18. How is the center governed -- is it solely owned, or a for-profit or a not-for-profit corporation?
19. How is curriculum developed, and how will my child's development be tracked?

Once you have decided on the best arrangement for your child, you will need to work out a plan to ease into the new child care arrangement. It will also take time and effort to establish a good relationship and open communication with your child's caregiver(s). Begin with a clear agreement about what is expected on both sides: written agreements or contracts are important in helping avoid misunderstandings that have the potential to cloud relationships or disrupt care down the road.

Once you are settled into a child care arrangement, stay in touch, and continue to monitor quality by talking regularly with the caregiver, in person and on the phone, about how things are going and by sharing observations with any other parents whose children are in the same setting. Remain alert to your own feelings of concern; give voice to your unease with family and friends; and be prepared to raise questions and share feelings with your child's caregiver. If you are unsure how to do this, talk with others and get suggestions and support.

Remember that conditions can and do change over time -- your child's needs change, the provider's personal circumstances may change, and group composition may change; at some point you may need to consider changing your child care arrangement, even when you feel your caregiver has provided excellent care for many months or years. If after you've collected information and spoken to your caregiver, you're still unsure what to do, a consultation with the MIT Center for Work, Family & Personal Life staff may help.

Concluding Thoughts

Child care has been described as "the new extended family": like good family ties, good child care expands a child's world of loving relationships and learning opportunities.

Choosing quality child care is part of every working parent's and student parent's responsibility. This packet is intended to help you through the selection process by discussing many of the factors involved in finding and evaluating options, but only parents can know their situation and child well enough to make the best child care decisions. Finding a child care arrangement that truly meets your needs often takes time and planning; we encourage you to make use of Center resources, including consultations, to assist you in this process.