



## Grandparents as Parents: Child Care Concerns

Are you struggling with caring for your grandchild and needing time for yourself? Are you working full- or part-time and concerned about leaving your grandchild with someone else? Many of us face the same tough questions. Finding a competent caregiver who can provide short-term care while you run an errand or take time to pamper yourself is important for your family's well being. Feeling comfortable with working outside the home and leaving a child with a caregiver is an individual decision and also important to the emotional health of your family.

Do children who are cared for in day care centers or day care homes develop more poorly than those who are cared for at home? The question concerns many. Dr. Joanne Curry O'Connell of Northern Arizona University studied the research on this question. She said that no consistent, negative effect of out-of-home child care has been found by more than a dozen child development investigators.

In other words, as far as we can tell, children who are given quality care outside the home generally do as well as those cared for at home. Some children develop better in out-of-home child care; some do better with in-home care.

What is best for your grandchild? That depends on your grandchild, the way you care for your grandchild at home, and the quality of out-of-home child care available to you.

### Types of Child Care

Find out what child care is offered in your community or county. Decide what you can afford and what you believe is best for your grandchild and you.

Avoid, if possible, child care arrangements where you have to travel a long distance or rush from work to pick up your grandchild.

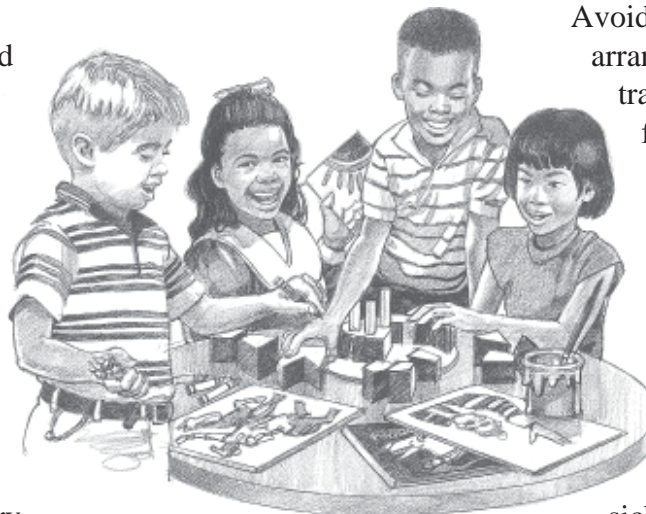
Don't be afraid to ask questions to put your mind at ease, including, "What would you do in an emergency?" "What will you do if my grandchild cries a lot?" "What do I do if my grandchild is

sick?" and "Do I have to make

other arrangements on those days?" Make sure you feel comfortable with the child care center or the sitter you choose.

Suggestions for finding child care include:

- Privately funded/for-profit child care programs. These programs offer full-time care. You can find them in the yellow pages of the phone book listed under child care.
- Family day care homes. Contact your local Texas Department of Family and Protective Services office



for a list of registered family day care homes in your area, or visit the website ([www.dfps.state.tx.us](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us)) to obtain this information.

### Choosing Quality Child Care

As a grandparent raising your grandchild in this busy society, one of the questions that often arises is, “How do I choose a caregiver when I have to be away?” There are two important questions to ask yourself before you decide on a caregiver. First, is the caregiver fond of your grandchild or children in general? Children need lots of loving attention. Second, will the caregiver be there during your hours of need in the months to come? Children need to form close bonds with people and can suffer if they have too many caregivers.

Children do best when you are happy and when they have a caring, sensitive caregiver at home and in day care.

You may worry about leaving your grandchild in someone else’s care. The more you trust your caregiver, the more secure you will feel. Here are some general questions to ask yourself as you choose a caregiver. Does the caregiver:

- have child-rearing attitudes similar to yours? If not, are they willing to adopt your philosophy in working with your grandchild? Is there a written policy on file or in a parent handbook?
- understand what children can and want to do at different stages of growth?
- spend time holding, playing with, and talking to your grandchild?
- have enough time to look after all the children

### *For inspiration . . .*

You should carefully observe the way toward which your heart draws you, then choose this way with all your strength.

*Martin Buber*

in his or her care?

- welcome visits from you?

Does the home or center have:

- a clean and comfortable look?
- equipment that is safe and in good repair?
- nutritious meals and snacks, if provided by the caregiver?

Are there opportunities for children to:

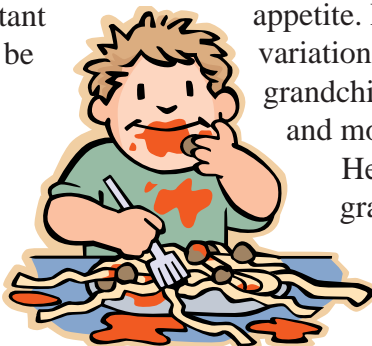
- be held, cuddled, rocked, smiled at, talked to?
- relax and rest when they need to do so?
- walk and explore safely?
- play with things that develop their senses of touch, sight, and hearing?
- learn language? Does the caregiver talk to the child, name things, describe what he or she is doing, respond to the child’s action?

Other considerations:

- Do they have appropriate state child care licensing? Is the certificate posted?
- How many children is the center/home licensed to care for at one time? Are they licensed for infants as well as toddlers, other preschoolers, and school-age children?

### Quality, Not Quantity, in Food Choices

When feeding toddlers and preschoolers, quality is more important than quantity. Your grandchild will be healthier eating small quantities of foods that are high in nutrients than eating large amounts of foods that are low in nutrients. The amount of food children eat depends on their development. Active children naturally eat more. Size, age, sex, previous nutrition, and health



history also influence your grandchild’s appetite. However, there will be much variation in the quantity of food your grandchild desires, both from day to day and month to month.

Heredity may set the limits your grandchild can reach, but the eating patterns established in early childhood will determine whether the limits of growth and development are reached.

## Choosing a Preschool

Preschools may differ since they often do not offer infant or school-age care but instead focus on the preschool-age child. Here are a few questions to consider if you are choosing a preschool:

- Are you invited to observe in the classroom? If so, on what basis—scheduled or drop-in? Do they have an open-door policy for visiting? Spending one to two hours in a class will show you what the school has to offer.
- Are the caregivers willing to answer your questions? Will they talk to you on a regular basis about your grandchild’s progress? Once your grandchild has enrolled, will you be welcome to visit and observe at any time? You and the caregivers need to work together as a team to help your grandchild grow.
- Do teachers seem to enjoy and respect the children? Is there hugging and holding and warmth between the teachers and children? Do teachers talk and listen to the children? Are there enough adults to provide good supervision and attention? Children’s relationships with caregivers are important.
- Do the children seem happily involved in activities? Are there enough age-appropriate play materials for all children?

You will not be happy about your grandchild’s preschool unless you believe your grandchild is in a safe, healthy, nurturing place. The extra time it takes to find the right care will payoff in your own peace of mind and in your grandchild’s development.

## Child Care Centers and Immunizations

If you are considering enrolling your grandchild in a child care center, the child’s immunizations must be up-to-date. You will need to present an immunization record that lists the types, dates, and place of each immunization.

State law requires child care centers to make sure all children enrolled in the center are immunized. They must maintain current and accurate records of each child’s immunizations, which are reviewed by licensing authorities.

State immunization law allows parents or guardians to request their children be exempt from immunizations based on religious and/or

conscientious beliefs by filing an official and notarized “Exemption from Immunizations for Reasons of Conscience” affidavit that was developed and issued by the Texas Department of State Health Service (TDSHS). Parents or guardians can request the official affidavit from TDSHS for each child. The official and notarized affidavit must be presented to child care staff and/or school personnel to have the child exempt from immunizations. However, private schools and private child care centers may refuse to accept the form and not enroll children who are not immunized.

Immunizations required by child care centers are the same throughout Texas for every child, based upon their age. However, certain target counties are now required to have children vaccinated against Hepatitis A infections.

For additional information on immunizations, visit the TDSHS website ([www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize)), or call 1-800-252-9152.

## Getting Off to a Good Start

Leaving your grandchildren in day care or preschool for the first time may be hard for each 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 angry with you for leaving them. You may worry that they will embarrass you by crying or misbehaving. These feelings are normal responses to beginning something new. Some planning may reduce these feelings.

You have taken the first step by carefully selecting child care that you think is right for your grandchild. You found child care workers you like and can begin to trust. Now you should talk with your grandchild about what is going to happen. He or she may not understand everything you say, but the child certainly will pick up your feelings of confidence. If possible, visit the program with your grandchild before the first full day of care. Let the child watch and explore with your help and protection.

Talk with the caregiver about your grandchild before beginning the program. Tell the caregiver about your grandchild’s eating and sleeping schedules, any health concerns (such as allergies), and any situations at home that may affect the child’s behavior. If your grandchild is

taking prescription medicine, discuss this with the caregiver; complete the caregiver's paperwork giving permission for your grandchild to be given the medication in your absence. You will also want to talk about what upsets your grandchild and how the child can be comforted.

On the day your grandchild starts in the program, be sure you bring all the forms, clothes, equipment, and food the caregiver requests. Bring one of your grandchild's favorite things, such as a stuffed animal, a blanket, or a toy car, if permitted. Arrive a few minutes early so you can talk with the caregiver, put away your grandchild's things, and sit with your grandchild to see how he or she is adjusting to the new setting. With a calm face and hugs and kisses, say, "Good-bye" when it is time to leave. Tell your grandchild when you will return.

Of course, your grandchild may cry, scream, kick, or retreat to a corner, sucking his thumb. He may like this child care center, but he may want you with him and needs to say so. Although it is very hard, keep walking. Remember, you trust the caregiver and trust your grandchild. It may help you to call the caregiver in an hour to learn how your grandchild is doing.

When you pick up your grandchild, greet him with warmth and words that show you know it was hard on him. Tell him that you are proud that he made it through the day. Don't be surprised if he is both glad to see you and mad that you left.

Learning how to say good-bye to people we love is difficult. Most of us struggle with this all of our lives. This may be your grandchild's first experience in saying goodbye to you on a daily basis, and it will take time for both of you to learn how to do this easily.

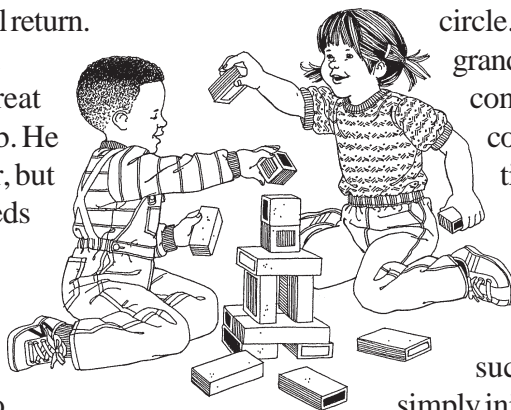
Long after your grandchild can say good-bye without tears or anger, he may show signs of stress when he is with you. Children often are angels at school (where they want to please these new adults) and are terrors at home (because you are safe, and home is where they can blow off steam). After starting child care, some children change their eating and sleeping patterns. Some

need more time curled up in their grandparent's lap and may suck their thumb. These behaviors will change as your grandchild becomes more comfortable in the child care program.

You can help most by trusting the caregiver's ability to teach, care for, and comfort your grandchild. Trust your grandchild's ability to learn these new and difficult skills. Trust yourself and the decisions you have made about the caregiver. Remember, you are helping your grandchild learn how to adjust to changes that may be frightening. We all need to learn to do this.

### Grandparent Circle

Another alternative for having child care easily available is to begin a grandparent circle. Share child care time with other grandparents in your community. This concept is practiced in many communities by parents who earn time by keeping others' children in their circle and then letting someone else in the group care for their children. There may be other grandparents wanting to begin such a system and need someone to simply initiate it. Reach out to others in this way. Grandchildren benefit from playing with others, and grandparents benefit from the free time.



**See the Texas AgriLife Extension Service  
Grandparents Raising Grandkids website  
for more information:**

<http://grandparentsraisinggrandkids.tamu.edu>

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