

## **Child Care for the Summer Months**

Women's Edition Magazine

Peak Performance - May 1997

By Diana L. Criser

I don't know about you, but Spring is my favorite time of the year. The weather is beginning to improve and the birds are returning. That unique fragrance of Spring permeates the air. The trees are blooming and the grass is once again turning green. It's not too hot yet, but Summer is right around the corner, along with vacations and lots of other outdoor activities. School will be out soon, and the kids will be getting a break from the humdrum classroom life.

Wait a minute - did I say *school* will be out soon? Have you started to plan for Summertime child care? Which child care facility will best meet the needs of both you and your children? Where do you start?

When my mother and father were children, both of my grandmothers were always at home with their children outside of school hours. "Child care" to my grandmothers usually meant a friend or family member watching the children for a few hours, allowing for quality time out with my grandfathers. Today's society is filled with many single working parents or households with two working parents. Consequently, year round child care is ultimately a much larger concern than when my grandmothers were raising their families. But parents today have many questions about day care. Let's try to find some answers.

*Why should I consider a day care facility?* Child care can take the form of a day care provider coming into the home, or the children can be taken to a child care facility. One of the greatest attributes of child care centers is the interaction among children of the same age. Even children with siblings should routinely interact with children outside the family, even when school is not in session. The benefit is that children learn from each other. The disadvantage is that children learn from each other! Children learn to share, compromise and communicate with others, skills that will then come more naturally to them as an adult. Additionally, your child will have lots more toys to play with than most families have at home.

*How will I know which center is best for my children?* One of the most important tasks is finding a suitable match for your child's age and abilities. Each teacher usually works routinely with the same age group, providing consistency between activities and the abilities of the children. The curriculum at some facilities is more education-based and they also offer crafts, trips to local amusement centers and lots of outdoor activities.

*How much supervision will my children have?* The teacher-to-child ratio is set by the state as a license requirement. The requirements of your state can be obtained at your

local library or by contacting a licensed child care provider. Generally, the number of children allowed per caregiver increases by age group. Hence, infants are required to have more supervision than a group of 12 year olds.

*Where should I start my search?* Finding a child care provider located close to your home or office is usually more convenient than traveling out of the way to drop off and pick up your child. Check with your neighborhood association for referrals on the best child care centers in your area. Many workplaces offer a child care referral or locator service. Some day care providers even have arrangements with area businesses to provide employee discounts.

*How much will it cost?* The cost of Summertime care varies by facility and usually decreases with the age of the children. Some centers offer both hourly and flat weekly rates; however, hourly customers are usually charged more than flat rate customers for the same amount of time. Some providers have partial day charges or part time rates, but some charge the same fee even if your children are not in attendance. Be sure to ask questions regarding additional fees. Some activities are free of charge; others are worked into the weekly charge or are billed separately. Find a facility that is flexible enough to meet the changing schedule of your family without breaking your budget.

*Should I stop by the facility in person?* It is important to visit each location you are considering. You may also want to drop in unannounced to check the accuracy of the information you have been given. Ensure the appropriate number of staff members is present, lunch and snacks are provided at proper intervals, and the children are clean, safe and treated well.

*How soon must I register my children for Summertime care?* Some facilities are set up for drop-in care and do not require registration. Other centers take a limited number of children and tend to fill up quickly. Registration deadlines vary per center. Be sure to obtain this information from each location you are considering. Starting early will afford you the greatest number of options.

Finding the best Summertime care for your children requires a bit of research and perseverance. But don't get discouraged! Start early and ask lots of questions. Use this information to develop a game plan for finding the right child care situation for your children. Above all else, look for a place where the kids will have *fun and enjoy the Summer!*