

balance sheets

A series of information sheets for employers interested in helping employees balance their work, family, and personal responsibilities

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Xsheets™

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The Center for
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CARROLL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

One Small Step 

MIDWESTERN
WORK-FAMILY
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"The increase of women in the work force, coupled with the baby boom, has resulted in a growing demand for child care services. Quality, dependable child care is of vital importance to working parents, and child care failures or disruptions are extremely distressing to them."

Kathryn Oliver

*"Child Care in Law Firms:
The Time is Now."*

*The San Francisco Attorney,
April/May 1991*

"Years ago, before back up centers, I quit a job after discovering my sitter was secretly stuffing my baby into a broken car seat and driving him around in a friend's car. Had I a back up center as a bridge to finding new care after I fired her, I might have hung in."

Sue Shellenbarger

Work & Family

*The Wall Street Journal
June 28, 1995*

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BACK-UP CHILD CARE

Definition: Back-up child care refers to child care arrangements provided on a short-term basis when regular arrangements are disrupted or become temporarily unavailable. This type of care is commonly referred to as emergency or drop-in care.

Even the most carefully planned child care arrangement can fall through from time to time. Without back-up child care, parents may be forced to stay home from work or bring their child to work with them. By arranging back-up child care option, employers can help prevent lost work time, reduce anxiety among their employees, and save money in the process.

BACK-UP CHILD CARE IS NEEDED WHEN:

- Child is ill
- Regular caregiver is ill, on vacation, or unexpectedly unavailable
- Regular child care arrangements fall apart and time is needed to search for a new arrangement
- Child's school or center is closed for a holiday, vacation, inclement weather or unexpected circumstances
- Parent is unavailable due to unusual or unexpected circumstances (work travel, overtime, emergency)

A PERVASIVE PROBLEM

- It is estimated that U.S. businesses lose \$3 billion a year because of child care related absences. *Source: Child care Action Campaign, 1991*
- Twenty-six percent (26%) of employed parents surveyed for the National Study of the Changing Workforce has experienced a lapse in child care coverage in the preceding three months. *Source: Family and Work Institute, 1993*
- On average employees with children miss eight days of work per year due to disruptions in child care. Employees reports that they use company provided backup child care when their nanny leaves unexpectedly, (50%), when school or day care is closed for holidays, inclement weather or teacher professional days (35%), and when the regular child care provider is ill or on vacation (15%). *Source Kwasha Lipton, 1995.*

- More families rely on child care outside the home, as fewer parents can afford to stay home full time with their children. According to the 1990 US Census, the percentage of working mothers with children under 6 has reached almost 60%, and 30% of American families are headed by a single parents. *Source: Who We Are, by Sam Roberts, 1993*
- Nowadays, working parents who need child care are less able to rely on extended family or neighbors for back-up child care. Often relatives do not live nearby, and their neighbors are working as well.

BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

Growing numbers of employers are implementing cost-effective solutions to back-up child care needs. Options range from establishing or supporting on- or near site centers, to offering employees financial support, to providing information about back-up care service available in the community. While some options are geared toward helping employees manage unexpected situations, employers are also implementing programs for back-up care needs that are foreseeable. Some have created day- or week-long programs to coincide with school holidays or vacations. Others provide extra coverage during peak business seasons.

Back-up Child Care Centers

- *Orrick, Herrington, & Sutcliffe* opened the first law firm sponsored back-up child care center on the West Coast in 1990. Located on-site in downtown San Francisco, the center is visited by up to ten children, from age 6 months to 6 years, each day.
- In 1993, seven neighboring companies in Cambridge, MA, including *Stride Rite Corp.*, *Lotus Development Corp.*, *COM/Energy (Gas & Elec. Ops.)* and *Genzyme Corp.*, joined together to form the Kendall Square Collaborative, an 8-week summer program for school-age children of employees.
- Several employers in downtown Boston, including *Coopers & Lybrand* and *Scudder, Stevens & Clark* offer back-up child care programs operated by a child care vendor. These centers may offer spaces on a regular or as-available basis.

In-Home Care Services

- Eight Bay Area Businesses, including *Scitor Corporation*, *KPMG Peat Marwick, LLP*, *Morrison & Forrester*, and *Farella, Braun & Martel*, formed a consortium which began offering in-home emergency child care and elder care services for their employees in February 1995. The service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in six Bay Area Counties.
- In 1989, *Little, Brown & Co.* became the first corporation to contract with a Boston area in-home emergency back-up service. The company covers registration fee and purchase of a block of hours. Parents are only responsible for the provider's salary.

Short-Term Programs

- *Boston University* offers summer, snow-day, and school vacation programs for school age children. These programs take advantage of the University's extensive recreational facilities.
- *Genentech, Inc.* in South San Francisco set up a program with two local summer camp operators in 1994 that provided employees with discounted rates and convenient transportation for children to and from the worksite.
- Other Boston area employers offer vacation programs including *New England Medical Center*, *John Hancock Financial Services*, and *Putman Investments*.

Financial Assistance

- *Alameda County*, one of the largest counties in the Bay Area, established an Alternative Child Care Assistance Program in 1990, which reimburses employee up to \$350/year for emergency or sick child care expenses.
- *Wells Fargo Bank* provides, with manager discretion, reimbursement for child care costs incurred while employees are traveling or attending meetings or functions during non-regularly scheduled hours.

Information

- *Cellular One* in South San Francisco set up a Family Resource Room for its employees in 1993. Among the materials available to parents are lists of in-home child care providers and near-by centers that offer drop-in and non-traditional hours of care.

- Employers can notify their employees facing emergency child care situations of applicable time-off policies, such as personal days or family sick leave.
- Some resources and referral vendors offer emergency child care services.

CONSIDERATIONS

- **Scope.** Given the variety of circumstances in which back-up childcare may be needed, it is important to determine early which specific needs your program will address. Some programs care for mildly ill children and well children. Some programs offer year-round services, while others are seasonal or temporary.
- **In-home vs. At Work.** In-home care requires few overhead costs and can be flexible, convenient and comfortable for parents and children. On the other hand, in-home care can be very expensive, and requires employees to trust a stranger in their home while they are away. Back-up care at the work site can be convenient, generate positive publicity and add a human touch to the workplace. However, transportation can be an added worry; and children with mild illnesses may be contagious and uncomfortable in a setting outside their home.
- **Subsidy.** With in-home care services, in particular, program usage is often directly related to the amount of subsidy provided by employers.
- **Center Planing.** Back-up child care centers must meet many of the same requirements as regular child care centers. Fluctuations in usage of back-up child care center are an important consideration, given the unpredictable nature of most back-p child care situations.
- **Working Together.** Working with other companies can provide negotiating power, shared administrative costs, shared development efforts and risks, lower cost of program services, increased control over program quality, and stable demand for services. On the other hand, consortium efforts may take longer to develop given the complexities of having multiple decision-makers, each with unique concerns and interests.