

If a relative cares for your children while you work, you may have an ideal child care solution. Who can offer better care than a trusted family member? Like other parents, you may have selected relative care for one or more of the following reasons:

- **Trust:** Parents and children often feel most secure when their children are cared for by a family member.
- **Flexibility:** A relative may be more flexible about schedules, especially when the parent works non-traditional hours.
- **Affordability:** While some parents pay relatives the usual child care fees, many relatives charge lower rates.
- **Easier Transitions:** Whether your relative provides care in your home or theirs, it may seem easier for you and your children to adapt to child care and share details about family life with a family member.

Keys to Making Relative Care Work:

Most parents and relatives begin care arrangements with high hopes and warm feelings all around; however, relative care can also be complex. It can affect your relationship in unexpected ways. You are no longer just mother and daughter, or sisters-in-law, but also parent and caregiver.

Develop an agreement: Whether you are planning for care now or have already begun care, use this list to create a successful child care relationship. Write down your agreement and provide a copy to your relative caregiver.

1. Amount you will pay, and when
2. Drop off and pick up times
3. Snacks and meals (What will your child eat and who provides it?)
4. Daily schedule (Plan for indoor and outdoor play, nap times, special activities and use of television or videos, and computer access)
5. Behavior and discipline
6. Health and safety (Your local Resource and Referral agency can provide a safety checklist for a child care home. If it is awkward to ask a relative to let you check her house for hazards, ask her to help you "childproof" both your home and hers)



7. Emergency information: name, address and phone number for you and your spouse at work, other emergency contacts and your child's doctor
8. Information on your child's special health issues, allergies, and/or medication
9. Written consent for emergency medical treatment if you cannot be reached

Communicate: It is a good idea to talk with the caregiver every day about how the day went. Try to have a weekly discussion to make sure things are going smoothly, and to express your appreciation for the love and care your children receive.

Be clear about how important this type of child care is to you and your child. You want to be sure that your relative takes the child care role seriously. You should be clear about what you want: Is it okay to run errands with your child along? How much time does the relative spend cleaning house, cooking or on the computer while your child is there? Talk about these concerns, before they become problems.

At the same time, let your relative know how much you value her role in your child's life. Pay your relative a fair amount for caring for your child. If you cannot afford to pay for care, discuss what you can offer in exchange. Can you help with transportation, errands, housework or other chores that show how much you value your relative's help with child care?

Help your relative get information and support: Taking care of children is hard work. People caring for children can feel isolated and may not have all the resources they need. Your relative may feel more confident if she has taken an Infant-Child First Aid and CPR class. Offer to help pay the fees or take it together. Encourage her to sign up for training or support groups for in-home caregivers. You can search the internet for activities for young children. Some parents help connect family members to other relatives caring for children, or find out where parents, grandparents, other relatives and children gather for fun and companionship. If your relative cares for other children as well as yours, you might suggest that she get a child care license. Although it takes time and effort to do this, she may find it valuable. Licensed family child care providers often charge higher fees, have more opportunities for professional support and training, and may be eligible for food and nutrition programs to help pay for the children's meals.

Contact **Child Care Links** at **925.417.8733** or **www.childcarelinks.org** to find out more about licensing, food programs, training and support groups.

Telling your relative how to care for children: You may share values on many things and not agree with everything your relatives do. This can be tricky when you want to make suggestions about the care your child receives. How do you get the care your child needs without causing problems?

- **Choose your battles.** Decide what is really important, and be flexible about other things. For instance, a parent who feels her mother is impatient about toilet training and too strict, might decide to talk first with her mother about how and when she plans to begin toilet training. Wait a week before discussing rules and children's behavior.
- **Focus on your child.** Describe your concerns from the child's viewpoint. Instead of saying, "I don't like what you're doing," say: "Dell is so active; I think he needs to play outside more often." Or, "At her checkup, Marcia's doctor suggested that we get her together with other children." Sometimes it helps to remind your relative that you only raise the issue because you want the best care for your child and a close relationship with your relative.

- **Find a good time to talk.** It is important for children to know that you like and trust the relative who cares for them, so discuss problems when the children are not around. Find a time when you are both relaxed. You might call your relative at night, or invite her out for breakfast on a weekend to talk about your concerns.
- **Express your affection and approval, even when you disagree.** Bringing up a problem is often much harder with a relative than with a non-relative. But, it can also be easier because you have a shared history, and shared love for your children. Call on earlier good times or memories to help you solve the problem.

Remember, your wishes about your children's care should be followed, even if your relative does not agree with you. If you have talked it over, and he or she continues to ignore or resist your suggestions, you might need to find other child care.

Time for a change:

For many families, relative child care feels right and works fine. For others; potential problems. You may not like feeling obligated to a family member. Maybe you get unwanted advice every day when you pick up your children. Sometimes family issues spill over into the child care situation and become a source of stress rather than support. Children grow and their needs change. What was once "perfect" for your infant child may seem less appropriate for an older child. You may find that your parents can no longer keep up with active young children, or sometimes the birth of another baby overwhelms even the most devoted grandparents. In some cases, you just can't resolve conflicts about the child care schedule, fees, or other important issues. When this happens, it can be hard to end the child care arrangement without leaving hurt feelings in the family. If you decide that your relative child care no longer works, look into other options. Perhaps a friend or colleague would share the expense of in-home child care for both families' children. Call your local child care Resource and Referral agency to find information on child care options and if you are eligible for a child care subsidy. Be sensitive when you talk to your relative about ending the child care relationship. Doing this without blame will help maintain a good relationship with your relative, no longer as a caregiver, but as a beloved family member.