
Child Care Workers

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Significant Points

- About 35 percent of child care workers are self-employed, most of whom provided child care in their homes.
- Training requirements range from a high school diploma to a college degree, although a high school diploma and a little experience are adequate for many jobs.
- Many workers leave these jobs every year, creating good job opportunities.

Nature of the Work

Child care workers nurture and care for children who have not yet entered formal schooling. They also supervise older children before and after school. These workers play an important role in children's development by caring for them when parents are at work or away for other reasons. In addition to attending to children's basic needs, child care workers organize activities and implement curricula that stimulate children's physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth. They help children explore individual interests, develop talents and independence, build self-esteem, and learn how to get along with others.

Child care workers generally are classified into three different groups based on where they work: private household workers, who care for children at the children's home; family child care providers, who care for children in the provider's own home; and child care workers who work at separate child care centers.

Private household workers who are employed on an hourly basis usually are called *babysitters*. These child care workers bathe, dress, and feed children; supervise their play; wash their clothes; and clean their rooms. Babysitters also may put children to bed and wake them, read to them, involve them in educational games, take them for doctors' visits, and discipline them. Those who are in charge of infants, sometimes called *infant nurses*, also prepare bottles and change diapers. *Nannies* work for a single family. They generally take care of children from birth to age 12, tending to the child's early education, nutrition, health, and other needs. They also may perform the duties of a housekeeper, including cleaning and laundry.

Family child care providers often work alone with a small group of children, though some work in larger settings with multiple adults. Child care centers generally have more than one adult per group of children; in groups of older children, a child care worker may assist a more experienced preschool teacher.

Most child care workers perform a combination of basic care and teaching duties, but the majority of their time is spent on care giving activities. Workers whose primary responsibility is teaching are classified as preschool teachers. (Teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary are covered elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) However, many basic care activities also are opportunities for children to learn. For exam-

ple, a worker who shows a child how to tie a shoelace teaches the child while also providing for that child's basic needs.

Child care workers spend most of their day working with children. However, they do maintain contact with parents or guardians through informal meetings or scheduled conferences to discuss each child's progress and needs. Many child care workers keep records of each child's progress and suggest ways in which parents can stimulate their child's learning and development at home. Some child care centers and before- and after-school programs actively recruit parent volunteers to work with the children and participate in administrative decisions and program planning.

Young children learn mainly through play. Child care workers recognize this and capitalize on children's play to further language development (storytelling and acting games), improve social skills (working together to build a neighborhood in a sandbox), and introduce scientific and mathematical concepts (balancing and counting blocks when building a bridge or mixing colors when painting). Often a less structured approach is used to teach young children, including small-group lessons; one-on-one instruction; and creative activities such as art, dance, and music. Child care workers play a vital role in preparing children to build the skills they will need in school.

Child care workers in child care centers or family child care homes greet young children as they arrive, help them with their jackets, and select an activity of interest. When caring for infants, they feed and change them. To ensure a well-balanced program, child care workers prepare daily and long-term schedules of activities. Each day's activities balance individual and group play, as well as quiet and active time. Children are given some freedom to participate in activities in which they are interested. As children age, child care workers may provide more guided learning opportunities, particularly in the areas of math and reading.

Concern over school-aged children being home alone before and after school has spurred many parents to seek alternative ways for their children to constructively spend their time. The purpose of before- and after-school programs is to watch over school-aged children during the gap between school hours and the end of their parents' daily work hours. These programs also may operate during the summer and on weekends. Workers in before- and after-school programs may help students with their homework or engage them in other extracurricular activities. These activities may include field trips, sports, or learning about computers, painting, photography, or other fun subjects.



Child care workers nurture and care for young children.

Some child care workers are responsible for taking children to school in the morning and picking them up from school in the afternoon. Before- and after-school programs may be operated by public school systems, local community centers, or other private organizations.

Helping to keep children healthy is another important part of the job. Child care workers serve nutritious meals and snacks and teach good eating habits and personal hygiene. They ensure that children have proper rest periods. They identify children who may not feel well and, in some cases, may help parents locate programs that will provide basic health services. Child care workers also watch for children who show signs of emotional or developmental problems and discuss these matters with their supervisor and the child's parents. Early identification of children with special needs—such as those with behavioral, emotional, physical, or learning disabilities—is important to improve their future learning ability. Special education teachers often work with preschool children to provide the individual attention they need. (Special education teachers are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Work environment. Helping children grow, learn, and gain new skills can be very rewarding. The work is sometimes routine but new activities and challenges mark each day. Child care can be physically and emotionally taxing, as workers constantly stand, walk, bend, stoop, and lift to attend to each child's interests and problems.

States regulate child care facilities, the number of children per child care worker, staff qualifications, and the health and safety of the children. State regulations in all of these areas vary. To ensure that children in child care centers receive proper supervision, State or local regulations may require a certain ratio of workers to children. The ratio varies with the age of the children. Child development experts generally recommend that a single caregiver be responsible for no more than 3 or 4 infants (less than 1 year old) and toddler's (1 to 2 years old) or 6 or 7 preschool-aged children (between 2 and 5 years old). In before- and after-school programs, workers may be responsible for many school-aged children at a time.

Family child care providers work out of their own homes. While this arrangement provides convenience, it also requires that their homes be accommodating to young children. Private household workers usually work in the homes or apartments of their employers. Most live in their own homes and travel to work, though some live in the home of their employer and generally are provided with their own room and bath. They often come to feel like part of their employer's family.

The work hours of child care workers vary widely. Child care centers usually are open year round, with long hours so that parents can drop off and pick up their children before and after work. Some centers employ full-time and part-time staff with staggered shifts to cover the entire day. Some workers are unable to take regular breaks during the day due to limited staffing. Public and many private preschool programs operate during the typical 9- or 10-month school year, employing both full-time and part-time workers. Family child care providers have flexible hours and daily routines, but they may work long or unusual hours to fit parents' work schedules. Live-in nannies usually work longer hours than do those who have their

own homes. However, although nannies may work evenings or weekends, they usually get other time off.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Licensure and training requirements vary greatly by State, but many jobs require little more than a high school diploma.

Education and training. The training and qualifications required of child care workers vary widely. Each State has its own licensing requirements that regulate caregiver training. These requirements range from a high school diploma, a national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential to community college courses or a college degree in child development or early childhood education. State requirements are generally higher for workers at child care centers than for family child care providers. Child care workers in private settings who care for only a few children often are not regulated by States at all. Child care workers generally can obtain some form of employment with a high school diploma and little or no experience, but certain private firms and publicly funded programs have more demanding training and education requirements. Some employers may prefer workers who have taken secondary or postsecondary courses in child development and early childhood education or who have work experience in a child care setting. Other employers require their own specialized training. An increasing number of employers require an associate degree in early childhood education.

Licensure. Many States require child care centers, including those in private homes, to be licensed if they care for more than a few children. In order to obtain their license, child care centers may require child care workers to pass a background check and get immunizations. Furthermore, child care workers may need to be trained in first aid and CPR and receive continuous training on topics of health and safety.

Other qualifications. Child care workers must anticipate and prevent problems, deal with disruptive children, provide fair but firm discipline, and be enthusiastic and constantly alert. They must communicate effectively with the children and their parents, as well as with teachers and other child care workers. Workers should be mature, patient, understanding, and articulate and have energy and physical stamina. Skills in music, art, drama, and storytelling also are important. Self-employed child care workers must have business sense and management abilities.

Certification and advancement. Some employers prefer to hire child care workers who have earned a nationally recognized Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or the Certified Childcare Professional (CCP) designation from the Council for Professional Recognition and the National Child Care Association, respectively. Requirements include child care experience and coursework, such as college courses or employer-provided seminars.

Opportunities for advancement are limited. However, as child care workers gain experience, some may advance to supervisory or administrative positions in large child care centers or preschools. Often, these positions require additional training, such as a bachelor's or master's degree. Other workers move on to work in resource and referral agencies, consulting with parents on available child services. A few workers become

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Child care workers	39-9011	1,388,000	1,636,000	248,000	18

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

involved in policy or advocacy work related to child care and early childhood education. With a bachelor's degree, workers may become preschool teachers or become certified to teach in public or private schools. Some workers set up their own child care businesses.

Employment

Child care workers held about 1.4 million jobs in 2006. Many worked part time. About 35 percent of child care workers were self-employed; most of these were family child care providers.

Child day care services employed about 18 percent of all child care workers and about 20 percent work for private households. The remainder worked primarily in educational services; nursing and residential care facilities; religious organizations; amusement and recreation industries; civic and social organizations; individual and family services; and local government, excluding education and hospitals. Some child care programs are for-profit centers, which may be affiliated with a local or national company. Religious institutions, community agencies, school systems, and State and local governments operate non-profit programs. A very small percentage of private industry establishments operate onsite child care centers for the children of their employees.

Job Outlook

Child care workers are expected to experience job growth that is faster than the average for all occupations. Job prospects will be excellent because of the many workers who leave and need to be replaced.

Employment change. Employment of child care workers is projected to increase by 18 percent between 2006 and 2016, which is faster than the average for all occupations. Child care workers will have a very large number of new jobs arise, almost 248,000 over the projections decade. The proportion of children being cared for exclusively by parents or other relatives is likely to continue to decline, spurring demand for additional child care workers. Concern about the safety and supervision of school-aged children during nonschool hours also should increase demand for before- and after-school programs and the child care workers who staff them.

The growth in demand for child care workers will be moderated, however, by an increasing emphasis on early childhood education programs, which hire mostly preschool workers instead of child care workers. While only a few States currently provide targeted or universal preschool programs, many more are considering or starting such programs. A rise in enrollment in private preschools is likely as the value of formal education before kindergarten becomes more widely accepted. Since the majority of workers in these programs are classified as pre-

school teachers, this growth in preschool enrollment will mean less growth among child care workers.

Job prospects. High replacement needs should create good job opportunities for child care workers. Qualified persons who are interested in this work should have little trouble finding and keeping a job. Many child care workers must be replaced each year as they leave the occupation to fulfill family responsibilities, to study, or for other reasons. Others leave because they are interested in pursuing other occupations or because of low wages.

Earnings

Pay depends on the educational attainment of the worker and the type of establishment. Although the pay generally is very low, more education usually means higher earnings. Median annual earnings of wage-and-salary child care workers were \$17,630 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$14,790 and \$21,930. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$12,910, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$27,050. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of child care workers in 2006 were as follows:

Other residential care facilities	\$20,770
Elementary and secondary schools	20,220
Civic and social organizations	16,460
Child day care services	16,320
Other amusement and recreation industries	16,300

Earnings of self-employed child care workers vary depending on the number of hours worked, the number and ages of the children, and the location.

Benefits vary but are minimal for most child care workers. Many employers offer free or discounted child care to employees. Some offer a full benefits package, including health insurance and paid vacations, but others offer no benefits at all. Some employers offer seminars and workshops to help workers learn new skills. A few are willing to cover the cost of courses taken at community colleges or technical schools. Live-in nannies receive free room and board.

Related Occupations

Child care work requires patience; creativity; an ability to nurture, motivate, teach, and influence children; and leadership, organizational, and administrative skills. Others who work with children and need these qualities and skills include teacher assistants; teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary; and teachers—special education.

Sources of Additional Information

For an electronic question-and-answer service on child care, information on becoming a child care provider, and other resources, contact:

➤ National Child Care Information Center, 243 Church St. NW., 2nd floor, Vienna, VA 22180.

Internet: **<http://www.nccic.org>**

For eligibility requirements and a description of the Child Development Associate credential, contact:

➤ Council for Professional Recognition, 2460 16th St., NW., Washington, DC 20009-3575.

Internet: **<http://www.cdacouncil.org>**

For eligibility requirements and a description of the Certified Childcare Professional designation, contact:

➤ National Child Care Association, 1325 G Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005. Internet: **<http://www.nccanet.org>**

For information about a career as a nanny, contact:

➤ International Nanny Association, 191 Clarksville Rd., Princeton Junction, NJ 08550-3111. Telephone (tollfree): 888-878-1477. Internet: **<http://www.nanny.org>**

State departments of human services or social services can supply State regulations and training requirements for child care workers.