Back-up/Emergency child care

No matter how carefully you have planned your child care arrangements or how reliable your caregiver is, there will be times when you are suddenly forced to use alternative child care.



Your regular child care provider may be on vacation or sick and unable to work. Your child may be ill and unable to attend his or her regular daycare centre. Your child care provider may close for holidays that you are unable to take yourself.

Accepting that emergencies will happen is half the battle. If you prepare for these times in advance, you will have alternative options readily available and will greatly reduce the stress for yourself and your child.

Tips on back-up emergency child care

Review your workplace policy. Some organizations allow employees to use sick days or vacation days when their children are sick or when child care arrangements fall through. Both you and your spouse should check this out in advance of problems arising.

Talk to extended family members. If you have family or close friends who are at home during the day, ask whether they might be available to come to your home on an emergency back-up basis.

Build a neighbourhood support network. Get to know other parents with young children who live close by. If they are at home during the day or have in-home caregivers, ask whether they could help out in an emergency. Offer reciprocal help in some way.

Ask your regular child care provider for suggestions:

- Your in-home child care provider may have friends who work in the same field. Check whether their employers might allow them to care for your child along with their own in emergencies. Offer to provide a similar back-up arrangement for their child or children.

- Daycare centres are familiar with the problems that parents face when children are sick. They may be able to recommend an independent caregiver who can come into your home in an emergency.

Check with your evening babysitter. If they are available during the day, perhaps they could come into your home until you resume regular day arrangements.

Back-up child care centres. Major cities may have centres that offer drop-in child care for children whose regular caregivers are temporarily unavailable.

Private care agencies. These may be expensive but can usually provide temporary help on an emergency basis.

Try to check out these options before the need arises. If possible, meet with potential caregivers and check references. Check out agencies and ask about the qualifications and training that their caregivers are required to have.

You should try to draw up a list of several back-up caregivers, so that you have other options if one choice falls through. This is particularly important if you are hoping to rely on informal help from family, friends or neighbours.

Remember, no one can prepare for all eventualities. However, the more options you have at hand, the easier it will be to respond quickly when things go awry.