

The importance of preschool and child care for working mothers

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What choices do working parents have?

Most families currently have three options for securing child care. First, parents can stay at home and care for their children themselves. But this is increasingly difficult, as most families now rely on two breadwinners to stay above water. Moreover, mothers are more likely than fathers to take time away from paid work to care for a child, which can exacerbate mothers' lifetime earnings gap. Second, parents can pay for child care out of pocket. But this approach is very costly for families, eating up 35.9 percent of a low-income family's monthly budget. The third option for families is to use federal- or state-funded child care, but access to any publicly funded program, let alone a high-quality program, is very limited. Nationwide, nearly three in four children are not enrolled in a federal or state-funded pre-K program.

Understanding the drawbacks, risks, and shortcomings of each of these options and especially how these limited choices negatively impact families and working mothers makes clear the need for increased investment in high-quality pre-K and child care. We explore each option in detail.

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