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Questions to Ask About Military Child Care Waiting Lists and Costs

Content Provided by [Military OneSource](#)

Overview

What to ask when you are trying to find out about waiting lists and costs for child care.

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The Department of Defense (DoD) has the largest employer-sponsored child care system in the U.S., and it's still growing. Even so, the demand for care may exceed the supply on your installation, so you may find that when you apply for care, you are placed on a waiting list. The length of time you spend on a waiting list varies considerably from place to place.

The cost of child care also varies, but must stay within the fee ranges set by DoD, which are based on a sliding scale according to your family's total income. In areas where the cost of living is higher, care usually costs more. The type of care you choose adds another variable. To keep the care affordable, the government subsidizes all its child development centers, its school-age and youth programs, and many in-home, or family, care providers.

As you assess the care on your installation or the installation you are moving to, you'll need to find out about the availability and cost of care. Here is a list of questions that will help you get the answers you need to make a decision.

Getting started: applying for care

The office on an installation that can tell you about child care and youth programs is sometimes referred to as Resource and Referral, or R&R, but the name varies from one installation to another. The installation's child development center (CDC) is the best place to start your search for all types of care. If you want to telephone the CDC, you can find the phone numbers, listed by state or country, on the Military Family Resource Center Web site at www.mfrc-dodqol.org/progDir/.

To apply for care, you will need to fill out DD Form 2606 (the Department of Defense Child Development Program Request for Care Record).

Eligibility and priority for military child care

If you are an active duty member, a DoD civilian employee, a reservist on active duty, or a DoD contractor, you may be eligible for military child care. If you are put on a waiting list, your position on the list depends on your status when you apply and on the date you apply, and that place will change if your status changes.

Each installation commander decides which factors will determine placement on the list, and these vary widely among the branches and from one installation to another, depending on the mission of the installation. Deployment, single parenthood, and spouse's employment are among the many factors that go into prioritizing the list.

When you go to or call the CDC, you can get answers to some key questions:

Speaking with the right person

Who is the right person for me to speak with about finding a child care space at this installation (or at the installation where I will be moving)?

May I speak with that person now? May I have that person's telephone number or e-mail address, or would you suggest the best way to get in touch?

Filling out the application

May I apply for care during pregnancy or must I apply after my child is born?

Are there different waiting lists for different types of child care? What if my child needs, for example, only after-school care?

If my child wants to participate in youth programs only, do I apply in the same way that I apply for child care? If not, how do I apply for youth programs?

Where can I get a copy of the application for care, DD Form 2606?

Are there any other forms that I need in order to apply for care at this installation? Are there other documents I need to send along with my application, such as immunization records?

To whom do I send the forms? May I e-mail or fax them?

As soon as you know you will need care at a new installation, you should fill out and send the application.

Being wait-listed

If there is not a space available for your child in one of the child development programs at the installation where you are applying, you will be offered a place on a waiting list. It's important to know what is required of you once you are on the list. You *must* keep your information up to date, and you'll need to find out how to do that on your installation.

Some installations have an active and an inactive list. For example, the active list may be for parents who are ready to accept a slot with two weeks' notice. The inactive list may be for someone who needs care in more than two weeks but less than one year.

Ask the CDC or the R&R:

Is there a charge for being on the waiting list? Is the fee applied to my first tuition payment?

What are the priorities for placement on the list at this installation?

I have more than one child. What is your policy on placing siblings?

May I be on more than one waiting list at a time, say, here and at a nearby installation?

Will my status on the list at this installation be maintained if I move to another installation, or will I start at the bottom of that installation's list?

Do you have an active and an inactive list? If I am on the inactive list and suddenly need care sooner, where will I be placed on the active list?

How frequently may I check my status on the list?

What process do you use for keeping my data up to date? Will you get in touch with me, or will I be responsible for periodically updating you?

Considering odds and alternatives

What is my child's place on the waiting list?

What is the range of time that I might have to wait for a space to open up in my child's age group?

Is there another military installation nearby, and if so, are the two lists centralized?

Will I have the same priority on a wait list at a different service branch's installation that I have at my own branch's installation?

What kinds of services do you offer to people who are new to the installation and on the waiting list?

I will need care in the interim. Will you help me find it?

I have an older child. What is the installation's home-alone policy?

When a space opens up

Say a space opens up, but it is at a CDC, and you are looking for in-home care that is closer to your house. Many installations have what is called a *preferred care list*. If you are offered a child care space, but you decide to wait for an opening in another type of child care, then you have been offered what the military calls a *viable care option*, and your name moves to a preferred care list. This list is usually addressed only after the main waiting list has been cleared.

I would like to visit the facility you are offering before I make my decision. How long do I have to make my decision?

What happens if I am not interested in the slot I am offered?

If I am placed on a preferred care list, where will I be placed on the list?

What is the range of time that I might have to wait on that list?

Paying for child care and youth programs

In general, the cost of military child care is lower than equivalent civilian care because the military subsidizes the program. The subsidies go directly to the program or to the in-home care provider, and usually pay about half the cost of care. Your fees pay the other half. Subsidies vary by military branch and by facility. In-home care providers may receive direct cash subsidies, or they may be indirect subsidies such as equipment loans, free training, or low-cost insurance.

You may find nonmilitary care off the installation that costs less than military care, even though it is not subsidized. This may be because the local standards for care are lower than the military standards, requiring fewer adults per child. Or, if you are in an area where the cost of living is low, you may find less expensive care that is of high quality. Overseas, you may find that care by someone who comes to your home is not only affordable, but the norm.

Based on my income, what will I pay for care at a CDC? For in-home care? School-age programs? Youth programs?

Can care off the installation be subsidized?

This installation is in an area with a high cost of living. Will my cost for care reflect those high costs?

If I must find nonmilitary care while I am on a waiting list, will I receive any help with referrals and with the cost?

The military is working to increase its supply of child care spaces by building new facilities; training more providers; encouraging more military spouses to train for work as in-home providers; and by forming partnerships with schools and other organizations that can expand the choices of activities, especially for school-age and youth programs.