

Child Care for Children with Disabilities

DeVore, S. & Bowers, B. (2007). Childcare for children with disabilities. *Infants & Young Children, 19*(3), 203-212.

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Working parents often face difficult choices about how to take care of their children when they are at work. They often search for the “right” childcare provider, someone who will meet their child’s needs, and someone they can afford, at a convenient location.

What about the difficulties that working parents of children with disabilities face? Finding childcare can be especially challenging for these families, because they need a provider that can accommodate their child’s special needs, in addition to being affordable and of good quality.

According to DeVore and Bowers (2006) in their recent study published in *Infants and Young Children*, “about 60% of mothers of children with disabilities are employed and need...childcare” (p. 203). In this exploratory study with a small sample of parents of children with disabilities and childcare providers, researchers looked closely at how families of children with disabilities find, choose, and maintain the childcare they need.

Methods

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 18 parents and 4 childcare providers who cared for children with disabilities. They located the sample through two resource and referral agencies and 2 early intervention programs. With grounded theory to guide the study, the researchers asked unstructured open-ended questions and then revised these questions based on what they were learning from the research. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Line by line dimensional analysis of the interviews brought out themes and enable comparisons. Summaries of results were mailed to participants and were clarified during follow-up interviews. A panel of researchers also coded and reviewed the transcripts and analyses to verify the results.

Results

All families selected for the study had at least one child age 6 or younger, with developmental delays and/or special healthcare needs such as such as autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, and speech delay. All families used from 20-45 hours of non-parental care per week in one or a combination of the following: center based childcare,



family childcare in the child care provider's home, care in a relative's home, a preschool program at a school, in-home therapeutic services, or a nanny in the family's home (p. 205). Most families lived in metropolitan areas in the county where the study was conducted

Like other working parents, these families first created a pool of providers based on professional and personal recommendations. When narrowing down their pool, they looked at practical factors such as cost, and group size. Then parents screened providers, usually over the phone, and followed up with a visit to childcare facilities they liked.

Parents were, as could be expected, looking for a provider "who could meet their child's special developmental needs" (p. 208). Yet, while most families cycled through several different childcare arrangements, trying to find childcare that worked for them, a few found successful childcare situations the first time (p. 208). What made the difference? In lasting childcare arrangements, parents weren't just looking for specialized care, but for a cooperative relationship with the childcare provider. Those parents and providers quickly built a *partnership* and worked together to solve problems. These partnering parents and providers were lucky in other ways, too—the parents had flexible work schedules, a supportive adult living with them, and a second income so they could take the time to find the right provider and resolve issues that might arise. Families that were less successful "were often under time pressures to find care," had financial limitations, and "felt somewhat isolated" (p. 210).

Conclusions

The study found that partnerships between parents and childcare providers were an important factor in successful childcare arrangements for children with disabilities. They also point out that families need specific resources to manage their searches including "time, adults support, and economic stability" (p. 210). Having access to these resources enabled families to take the time to find successful childcare. The researchers recommend that families contact childcare information and referral services for individualized help in locating the kind of care the family needs and other resources in the community that can help.

Implications for Extension

Extension can work with childcare resource and referral agencies, early intervention specialists, and providers to offer training on improving parent-provider communication and developing partnerships for caring for children with disabilities. In parent education programs, Extension faculty can encourage parents of children with disabilities to develop a system for identifying potential childcare providers; and for finding a provider the family can talk with openly, and who is willing to work with parents to solve problems. Extension can work with childcare resource and referral agencies, children's coalitions, and policy makers, to bring to light the childcare needs of children with disabilities.