

Nontraditional Hours and Child Care:

An Exploratory Study on the Needs of Families and Child Care Providers in California



There are many parents in California who work outside of the traditional Monday through Friday nine to five schedule. Finding child care can be hard for many families, but during these hours it's particularly difficult - especially since many of these jobs are also low wage, making finding affordable care even less likely. This study explores the experiences of both parents working nontraditional hours, as well as the child care providers who care for their children. Online surveys, in-person focus groups, and phone interviews were all employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from parents and providers throughout California. Parents expressed: a lack of predictability and flexibility in their workplace, with financial and professional consequences when they didn't have child care (many parents also had to quit jobs due to child care issues); an overall preference for licensed care during nontraditional hours, as it's seen as more reliable; concern about transportation, especially when it disrupts the child's sleep; and a lot of gratitude and satisfaction for those with a family child care provider, as they offer flexible schedules. Providers expressed: disincentives to accept children with a subsidy, as the payment is lower and less predictable; an obligation to extend their hours to accommodate all the families' schedules, often resulting in working up to 24 hours a day; and little family or personal time, leading to exhaustion, burnout, and negative health consequences.

Recommendations

1. Providers who accept subsidy payments should be paid in alignment with private pay families.
2. License-exempt providers should be able to provide care in the child's home.
3. Licensed providers should be able to care for a child the entire night if agreed upon by the parents and provider.
4. Providers need paid vacation and sick/safe time.
5. Support a shared services model to support the business practices and operation of providers so they can focus more attention on providing quality care.
6. Commute time should be accounted for.
7. Higher reimbursement rates for nontraditional hours.
8. Put procedures in place that ensure clear communication and understanding between Alternative Payment (AP) programs, parents and providers.
9. Family-friendly work policies.

Provider Insights

"Working nontraditional hours takes a toll on one's well-being and family life, and when the reimbursement comes from a subsidized source it is not worth it most of the time. It can be fulfilling when one sees their child care families thrive and accomplish their goals."

"I think it was rewarding for me because I was helping the community, helping the kids, everyone who went through the program is still in my community...the challenge is being there for the families because they were working and I felt like if I wasn't going to do it, where would they go? It would have made it easier if I had help and just did certain hours and not so many weekends. I felt guilty because they'd come to me and say they have to work, can you please watch them, and I felt bad so I was like ok I'm here for them, so I just did it, not knowing the toll it was taking on me and my family too. It was so consuming for my time and my life."



Parent Insights

"Always piecing together who would watch my kids. No one in my family wanted or deserved to have to watch my kids all night every night I worked. Lots of flaky sitters and no backup plan causing me to almost lose my job. No daycare centers open overnight or early in the morning left me with very little options."

"The grant was great but a lot of people didn't accept it because they don't get paid right away, so that transition with payment. If I wanted to use the grant I'd have to pay an upfront fee to cover costs so it was on the books when they didn't get paid. I respect the grants but it makes it hard to find a location that's willing to work with it. I don't even have it because where I want my son to be they won't accept it. Ideally it would be nice if more places were willing to take the grants, whether it's home day cares or facilities."