

# Questions to Ask About Military Child Care Waiting Lists and Costs

## Overview

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

- Getting started
- Applying for care
- The waiting list
- When a space opens up
- Paying for child care
- Other resources

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. You may find that when you apply for child care, you're 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 care affordable, the military subsidizes its child development centers, school-age programs, and many of its certified family child 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. This article will help you ask the right questions to get the answers you need to make a decision.

## Getting started

The installation office that can tell you about child care is sometimes referred to as Resource and Referral, or R&R, but the name may vary somewhat from one installation to another. You can find contact information for R&R at your installation by going to the Military HOMEFRONT website at [www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil](http://www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil). If you can't contact an R&R office directly, a call or visit to the installation child development center (CDC) is the best way to start your search for child care.

## Eligibility and priority for military child care

If you're 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're placed on a waiting list, your position on the list will depend on your status when you apply and the date you apply. Your position may change if your status changes.

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

### Speaking with the right person

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

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)?

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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?

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### Applying for care

To apply for care, you will need to fill out DD Form 2606 (the Department of Defense Child Development Program Request for Care Record). Here are some questions to ask before you complete the application:

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

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

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If I need before and after school care only, do I apply in the same way that I apply for child care? If not, how do I apply for the school-age programs?

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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?

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

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

#### **The waiting list**

If there is not a space available for your child in one of the child development programs at the installation where you're applying, you will be offered a place on a waiting list. It's important to know what's required of you once you're 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 R&R or the CDC:

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

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

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

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

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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 the new installation's list?

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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?

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How frequently may I check my status on the list?

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

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**Considering odds and alternatives**

These questions can help guide your decision-making if it becomes clear that you'll need to consider other options:

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

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

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

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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?

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

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

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

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**When a space opens up**

Say a space opens up, but it is at a CDC, and you are looking for a family child care home 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. These questions will help you assess your options:

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

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

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

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How long can I expect to be on the list?

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**Paying for child care**

In general, the cost of military child care is lower than equivalent civilian care because the military subsidizes child care. The subsidies go directly to the program or to the family child care provider. Subsidies pay about half the total cost of care, and your fees pay the other half. Family child care providers may receive direct cash subsidies or indirect subsidies in the form of 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's 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're in an area where the cost of living is low, you may find less expensive high-quality care. Overseas, you may find that care by someone who comes to your home is not only affordable, but the norm.

Here are some questions to help you better understand child care costs:

Based on my income, what will I pay for care at a CDC? For family child care? For school-age programs?

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Can care off the installation be subsidized?

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

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

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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 to provide child care in their homes; and by forming partnerships with schools and other organizations that can expand the choices of activities, especially for school-age and youth programs.

### **Other resources**

#### **Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN)**

*[www.naccrra.org/militaryprograms/mcciyn.php](http://www.naccrra.org/militaryprograms/mcciyn.php)*

This program supports military families by helping locate high-quality child care in local communities and subsidizing the cost for eligible families.

#### **Your military support services**

Each service branch sponsors information and support programs for service members and their families. You can call or visit any installation Army Community Service Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Fleet and Family Support Center, or Airman and Family Readiness Center regardless of your branch affiliation.

If you aren't near an installation, National Guard Family Assistance Centers are available in every state. The Local Community Resource Finder on the National Guard Family Program at *[www.jointservicessupport.org](http://www.jointservicessupport.org)* will identify your closest center.

#### **Military OneSource**

This free 24-hour service is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals

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on a wide range of issues, including parenting and child care concerns. Free face-to-face counseling sessions (and their equivalent by phone or online) are also available. Call 1-800-342-9647 or go to *www.MilitaryOneSource.com*. Provided by the Department of Defense.

This article was written with the help of Karen Morgan, OSD Office of Family Policy/Children and Youth.

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