

# What Child Care Arrangements Do Parents Want during Nontraditional Hours?

*Insights from Parents in the District of Columbia*

Gina Adams, Diane Schilder, and Laura Wagner

## KEY FINDINGS

More than 11,000 children younger than 6 living with working parents in the District of Columbia have all parents in their household working nontraditional hours (NTH).

Across most NTH periods, most parents recommended care in the child's home by a relative or friend as their first choice.

Parents discussed the importance of children sleeping in their own beds; having a good night's sleep; eating unrushed meals in their own home; and having a sense of stability, security, and routine.

Parents described cost limitations, challenges they face without support networks, and an inadequate supply of child care options.

States can better assist parents working NTH by ensuring that child care policies and practices support the child care options parents recommend.

Understanding the child care needs of parents who work nontraditional-hour (NTH) schedules has become a growing concern for policymakers. However, very little is known about what child care arrangements parents want before 7:00 a.m. or after 6:00 p.m. on weekdays or anytime on weekends, or about the policy constraints and opportunities that may affect their ability to access the care they want.

To begin addressing these questions, Urban Institute researchers talked with 41 parents working NTH schedules, including 15 parents in the District of Columbia and parents in Connecticut and Oklahoma.

This fact sheet first contextualizes the number of children with parents working NTH in DC. It then summarizes what these parents told us about the care arrangements they would recommend for different NTH periods, the role that children's needs played in their recommendations, and other issues and constraints they faced. It concludes with a summary of key policy actions that could give these families more support for the child care they believe is best for their children.

## HOW COMMON IS IT FOR CHILDREN TO HAVE PARENTS WORKING NONTRADITIONAL HOURS IN DC?

Having a parent working NTH is fairly common for children in DC. Children in families facing greater structural inequities and barriers to employment, education, and other opportunities are even more likely to have parents working these schedules. Data from 2014–18 show the following:

- In DC, more than 11,000 (over a third of) children younger than age 6 living with working parents had all parents in their household working NTH.
- The share of children with working parents whose parents worked NTH hours was even higher for children living in neighborhoods south of the Anacostia River, children living with single parents, children in families with low incomes, and Black and Latinx children.
- Among DC children whose parents worked NTH, it was most common for their parents to work evenings (almost 60 percent). Fewer had parents working in the early mornings or on weekends (30 to 34 percent), and only 17 percent had parents working overnight. Some children had parents working in more than one of these time frames.

## WHAT NTH CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS DID PARENTS RECOMMEND?

The parents across our sites and racial and ethnic groups had somewhat similar recommendations for the best child care arrangements for children during NTH. When asked what child care they would recommend to a friend for NTH and what care they use for their own young children, the DC parents we interviewed told us the following:

- Across most NTH periods, most DC parents in our study recommended care in the child's home by a relative or friend as their first choice. For example, care in the child's residence was recommended as the first choice during the late evening and overnight, and care in someone else's home was their second choice during the overnight period.
- The child care DC parents recommended for weekends depended on what the child was doing during the week. Parents suggested that being at home would be better for children who were in licensed child care during the week and that care involving activities would be preferable for children who were at home during the week.
- Many parents we spoke with in DC told us that if young children are in a licensed family child care home or center during the day, extending the hours slightly right before the program opens or after it closes could benefit the child and family.
- When asked about the child care they used during their NTH work, most DC parents in our study reported relying primarily on family and friends for child care in their own homes or the homes of their family or friends. In contrast, when asked about the care settings they used during the day, a majority of DC parents used group care settings such as child care centers or family child care settings, though a few reported their children were cared for in their own home or the home of a friend or relative during the day.

## WHAT ROLE DID CHILDREN'S NEEDS PLAY IN SHAPING DC PARENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NTH CHILD CARE OPTIONS?

As was true in all three sites studied, the DC parents we spoke with reported that their children's needs shaped their recommendations for child care arrangements.

- Children's needs were a primary reason DC parents recommended specific child care arrangements during NTH. A majority of parents recommended care in the child's home during most periods to support developmental priorities such as children having a sense of stability, security, and routine; sleeping in their own bed; getting a good night's sleep; and having unrushed meals in their home.
- A majority of parents recommended that caregivers they did not know well have some training in CPR, first aid, and child development. However, many did not feel such training was necessary for family or friends (but could be helpful if their family and friends were interested in it). For example, one DC mom told us, "I would love that [CPR certification], but I know some people may not have it and are still qualified to watch children." However, many DC parents noted that CPR and other trainings are not easily accessible.

## DC PARENTS SPEAK OUT ABOUT NTH CHILD CARE

DC parents told us about the child care arrangements they believe are best during different time frames.

**Early morning.** When asked about the child care she would recommend early in the morning, a DC mom said, "*I would say someone that I was close to...[It is] more convenient than having to get [my child] ready, take them outside the home and commute to another location—you already have to leave the house and get going so early.*"

**Evening and overnight.** For evening and overnight care, a single mother of one child in DC recommended care in the child's home because, "*The kids may get cranky—they want to get comfortable and want to be around a familiar face so they can sleep, and eat dinner with their family.*"

**Irregular hours.** A DC mother who works an irregular NTH schedule at a call center recommended that parents with young children use a family member in the child's home, "*because day care might not be able to adjust to those hours...[I would recommend] having a dedicated babysitter who is a family or friend who might be more dependable.*"

## WHAT OTHER ISSUES AND CONSTRAINTS DID PARENTS REPORT CONCERNING NTH CHILD CARE?

Similar to parents in the other two sites, the DC parents in our study reported several other issues and constraints regarding NTH child care, including the following:

- Consistent, reliable care is essential for their ability to work.
- The cost of child care was an important issue, with the amount they reported paying for NTH child care ranging from offering family and friend caregivers gas money, groceries, or small amounts of money to some parents reporting high out-of-pocket costs for other types of care. No parents we interviewed reported using child care subsidies for NTH child care.
- Many DC parents we spoke with who relied on family and friends reflected on the challenges parents face without support systems that could provide such care.
- Parents reported using multiple arrangements. They also discussed having to patch together different child care options when their primary arrangement fell through and relying on child care that was less than ideal when their schedules changed.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Taking steps to ensure that parents who work NTH can get the child care they need is an issue of equity because families who have faced historical barriers to opportunities are more likely to have NTH schedules.

Policy actions that could support the child care options available to parents who work NTH include the following:

- **Engage with parents needing NTH child care options** to ensure that policies across all areas address their needs. Policymakers should systematically review all child care–related policies to make sure they reflect the care arrangements parents want for their children, as well as the scheduling needs of parents with complex NTH schedules and their children’s specific developmental needs.
- **Make child care assistance through the Child Care and Development Fund more available for the care arrangements parents recommend for NTH schedules.** Policymakers can do this by taking steps to expand and simplify access to subsidies for in-home care and care by relatives and friends and ensuring that subsidy payment levels and payment approaches fully support these providers. They can also ensure that methods for authorizing child care hours address the complexity of the NTH schedules these parents work and use federal flexibility to ensure that parents who need assistance for more than one provider can get that support.
- **Support the supply of NTH child care options that parents recommend** by ensuring that supply-building strategies focusing on NTH child care include efforts to support in-home care and care provided by relatives and friends.
- **Ensure that the care arrangements parents want during NTH are supported in systems that protect children’s health and safety and promote quality child care,** including care in the child’s home and care by relatives and friends. For example, policymakers could take the following actions:
  - » Work with child care and early education policymakers, leaders, practitioners, and parents to identify appropriate ways to support children’s health and safety when in the care of these relationship-based providers. They can also ensure that children’s unique needs during NTH are incorporated in systems that establish quality requirements, including requirements for licensing, quality rating and improvement systems, and subsidies.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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- » Take steps to make training in first aid, CPR, and child development accessible, affordable, and relevant for people caring for children during these hours, including relatives and friends. Such trainings should be provided at times and in ways that recognize the long hours these providers may work and the unique developmental needs of children in their care.
- **Provide parents with information about NTH child care options.** Policymakers can enhance information on the state child care websites about how to find quality NTH child care that meets families' needs. They can also provide parents with a registry of adults who have been screened and can provide NTH child care in the child's home.

## **ADDITIONAL READING**

### ***What Child Care Arrangements Do Parents Want during Nontraditional Hours? Findings from Connecticut, the District of Columbia, and Oklahoma***

Diane Schilder, Gina Adams, Laura Wagner, Cary Lou, and Peter Willenborg <https://urban.is/3hH6LoS>

### ***Executive Summary: What Child Care Arrangements Do Parents Want during Nontraditional Hours? Findings from Connecticut, the District of Columbia, and Oklahoma***

Gina Adams, Diane Schilder, Laura Wagner, Cary Lou, and Peter Willenborg <https://urban.is/3hH6EJY>

### ***Parents with Nontraditional Work Schedules in the District of Columbia: Implications for Child Care***

Gina Adams, Cary Lou, Peter Willenborg, and Diane Schilder <https://urban.is/2LSqKE5>

### ***Nontraditional-Hour Child Care in the District of Columbia: Implications for Child Care***

Heather Sandstrom, Erica Greenberg, Teresa Derrick-Mills, Cary Lou, Shirley Adelstein, Charmaine Runes, Ashley Hong, Devon Genua, Travis Reginal, and John Marotta <https://urban.is/2E2JB99>

### ***Informing Policy Decisions about Nontraditional-Hour Child Care*** <https://urban.is/3uv8xiB>