



Tips on

Coping With Economic Insecurity: Providing Childcare



Child care providers play an important role in economic recovery, so it is important to keep your child care business healthy through tough economic times. The strategies below can help:

★ Make your own toys from found objects.

- Old buttons inside a plastic water bottle makes a fine maraca (shaker).
- Empty mac & cheese boxes can be used as building blocks.
- Yogurt cups are great pails for sand boxes and water tables.
- A few touches with a permanent marker makes an old sock into a puppet.
- You can even make your own glue from flour and water.

★ Ask parents to provide everyday supplies.

- People who use electronic banking may have extra payment envelopes that come with bills.
- A parent who works in an office might be able to persuade their employer to let them make a small number of photocopies for you each month.

★ Save on food.

- Plan meals by the month instead of by the week so you can buy in bulk and buy on sale.
- Create a "fun food fund" to which families make small, regular contributions. Use the fund for a once-a-month splurge like ordering pizza.

★ Replace paid services with volunteer or bartered services.

- Host a family work day when all your families gather to help clean up the yard or start a garden or repair an old play structure.
- Contact local universities to see if it is possible for students to serve as an aide and earn credits instead of a paycheck.
- Offer families a work-exchange opportunity: On days that they serve as an aide, fees for their child are free or reduced.

★ Share resources with other child care professionals.

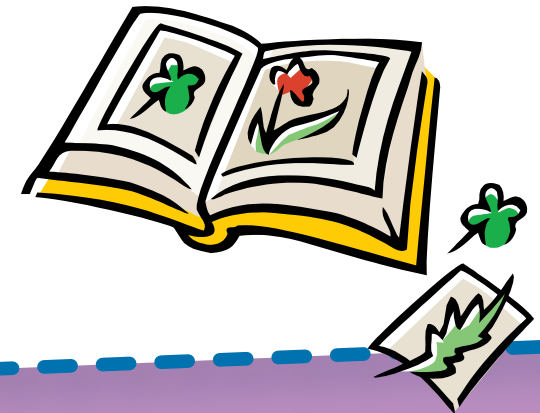
- Instead of buying new books or toys, swap with other sites.
- Share the cost of a full-time assistant by having her work mornings at one location and afternoons at another.

★ Offer families flexibility and/or extra services that don't add a lot to your costs.

- Offer a parents' date night. One time each month, offer to keep children until 10 p.m. so parents can have some alone time.
- Offer a per day fee, so that parents who can't afford a full week can still keep a child in your care part-time.
- Offer a special "looking-for-work" fee – a single day special rate for parents who are going to job interviews.
- Become a hub for the families of your children to share used clothes, toys, or baby items. Offer to pick up extra bulk food when you shop for your own needs, and then let families divide the bulk packages among themselves, so each pays a share but gets more for their money than they could on their own.

★ Take the lead on communicating with parents.

- Let families know about any anticipated changes (like asking families to send snacks with their child instead of having you provide them), and that these changes are helping you stay in business or preventing an increase in the fees that you charge.
- Some parents may be embarrassed to tell you they are short on money, so initiate a general meeting for all families to outline options like payment plans or work exchange. Then families can speak with you privately about which options they might need to use.
- Let parents know what you are already doing to save costs and brainstorm with them additional ways to keep fees down.
- Approach families as potential allies. Everyone is stronger when we work together.



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