Employee Program Offers Sick, Emergency Child Care

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When children get sick, it can be hard for busy parents to rearrange their schedules or find a last-minute babysitter, but for University of Arizona employees and students enrolled in the Sick Child/Emergency Back-Up Care Program, help is just a phone call away.

The program, available through Life & Work Connections, allows benefits-eligible UA employees and UA students to take advantage of temporary, partially University-subsidized child care in the event that a child must stay home sick from school or there is an unscheduled, unexpected interruption in regular school or child care arrangements that requires a child to return home.

"We know the lives our faculty, staff and students lead are very full and very complex," said Caryn Jung, Life & Work Connections senior coordinator.

Offering sick and emergency child care helps employees and students keep important commitments while preventing their sick children from going to school and spreading germs, Jung said.

Employees and students enrolled in the program receive in-home child care from professionals with The Choice Care Agency, the UA program's contracted vendor. Individuals must register with both the Sick Child/Emergency Back-Up Care Program and The Choice Care Agency.

Once registered, parents can request care for children from birth to 12 years old. While a cold or flu bug can often come on without warning, they are asked to make requests as far in advance as possible to ensure caregiver availability, Jung said.

The service costs parents $2 an hour for the first child and $1 an hour for each additional child. The University pays the remaining $16 of the $18 an hour rate.

Marie Chisholm-Burns, professor of pharmacy, surgery and public health, has used the program about five times. She said she tries to request care for her 5-year-old son at the first signs of a cold.

She said it has saved her and her husband, also a full-time University employee, from missing a day at work and potentially falling behind.

While Chisholm-Burns says she's selective about who stays with her only child, who has asthma, she's felt comfortable with caregivers provided through the program every time.

"It's a great service to have. It's the security of knowing that it's there," she said.

The Choice Care Agency sends a caregiver directly to the family home, an important perk of
the service, according to Jung.

"When you have a child that's ill it's important they have consistency and are able to stay at home and recuperate," she said.

Starting in the fall, the program extended its services to include UA students and employees located off of the main campus in the greater Tucson and greater Phoenix areas. That includes areas such as the UA's cooperative extension offices, the College of Medicine-Phoenix and the Eller College of Management's Phoenix-based Executive MBA program, Jung said.

Jung said the child care program is especially beneficial for the many UA employees who have relocated to Arizona from other parts of the country and left behind a support system of family members and potential babysitters.

That was the case for Chisholm-Burns, who moved to Tucson and away from family in Georgia two years ago. She said she hasn't encountered anything like the Sick Child/Emergency Back-Up Care Program in the other three universities where she's worked.

Jung said while some programs provide child care facilities to accommodate multiple sick children, the one-on-one in-home care option is unique and healthier for the child.

As head of the department of pharmacy practice and science, Chisholm-Burns she said she often uses the program as a recruitment tool for new employees moving from other parts of the country, who have young children or plan on having children.

Students and employees can register for the program at any point during the year and may use the service up to 12 times a year. With the flu season peaking this month and illnesses likely to carry over into the spring, now is a good time, Jung said.

The service is intended only for children with minor illnesses, and specific guidelines, registration forms and a list of blackout days on which care is unavailable, can be found on the Life & Work Connections [1] Web site.

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Links
[1] http://lifework.arizona.edu/cc/sick_child_and_emergency_back_up_care_program