

Childcare for Reservists – what you need to know

Finding childcare as an Air Force Reservist can be challenging, especially on Unit Training Assembly weekends. If you don't have a spouse, partner, parent or other relative to provide childcare during UTAs, it's important to know your options.

“We want to make sure Reservists know about all of their childcare options, especially the Air Force Home Community Care (HCC) Program,” said Dr. Janice Barnes, the acting Prevention and Response Branch Chief in Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command's Directorate of Manpower, Personnel and Services' Resilience and Development Division.

The HCC Program is the primary Air Force-provided and Air Force-funded childcare option available to Reservists on drill weekends. Under HCC, carefully-vetted childcare providers look after children in their homes, both on-base and off.

The program is offered at 86 Air Force installations. It is important to sign up early before each UTA because the HCC program options often fill up fast. Reservists generally don't have to pay for HCC childcare on UTA weekends or they pay considerably less than non-HCC childcare... when the care is available. At most bases, Child Development Centers, which serve children between six months and five years of age, and Youth Centers, for children ages five through 12, are not open on UTA weekends, and, in some parts of the country, the DoD struggles to find enough providers who keep children in their homes, whether on-base or off.

“It's no secret that Air Force Reservists are experiencing challenges in securing childcare where the Reservist feels confident their children are in safe, quality care and can then engage fully in the military mission work,” Barnes said. “Our senior leaders are definitely aware that there is a problem, and we are actively looking at finding solutions.” Barnes said the main issues Reservists have reported are access to care, affordability of care, and the impact of childcare difficulties on the Reservist, their family, mission accomplishment and retention.

Barnes said one of her main focuses is ensuring Reservists know about all their childcare options. “Our assessments indicate that some Reservists may not know about all of the childcare opportunities they have available to them,” she said, offering the following references for Citizen Airmen:

- Basic Air Force childcare information can be found at dafchildandyouth.com;
- Military One Source offers a national database of caregivers so Reservists can find hourly, flexible and on-demand childcare at [Expanded Hourly Childcare Options for Military | Military OneSource](#).
- The Air Force Child Care Fee Assistance Program was created to provide authorized Air Force active-duty personnel assistance in locating, selecting and offsetting the cost of civilian childcare, when installation childcare is not met. The program is available through Child Care Aware of America: <https://public.militarychildcare.csd.disa.mil/mcc-central/mcchome> or 1-800-424-2246.

Barnes said the childcare dilemma for the Reserve is made even more difficult because of the various Reserve statuses and the fact that Reservists don't just serve on UTA weekends. “We have traditional Reservists, ARTs, IMAs and AGRs and they all provide different challenges to securing childcare,”

There are numerous childcare programs for eligible Reservists in an active-duty status that range from subsidized programs to hourly care programs that are tailored to accommodate member schedules, deployments and special needs.

The attached matrix gives an overview of childcare options available.

AFRC looking for ways to improve childcare for Reservists

By Bo Joyner

For some Air Force Reservists with small children, finding the right childcare solution when performing military duty can be a challenge, particularly on Unit Training Assembly weekends. While most Reservists rely on their spouse, partner, parent or other relative to provide childcare during UTAs or other periods of military service, for some Citizen Airmen, that is not an option.

“We want to make sure Reservists know about all of their childcare options, especially the Air Force Home Community Care (HCC) Program,” said Dr. Janice Barnes, the acting Prevention and Response Branch Chief in Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command’s Directorate of Manpower, Personnel and Services’ Resilience and Development Division.

The HCC Program is the primary Air Force-provided and Air Force-funded childcare option available to Reservists on drill weekends. Under HCC, carefully-vetted childcare providers look after children in their homes, both on-base and off.

The program has been around for 13 years and is now offered at 86 Air Force installations. In fiscal 2023, the HCC program provided 97,501 hours of childcare to 882 families at a cost to the Air Force of just under \$1 million.

For many Reservists, like Capt. Sierra Campbell-Timberlake, the HCC program has been invaluable. “My son was born in 2012, and ever since he was 6 months old, I’ve used Air Force in-home childcare on UTA weekends and even during some of my annual tours,” the traditional Reservist who serves as the officer in charge of the 482nd Military Personnel Flight at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida, said during a recent interview. “I started using the HCC extended care while enlisted as a Senior Airman ammo troop and have used it throughout my Air Force career to present day working in the MPF as a captain. It’s always been free for me, and I’ve used several different providers across two states and every one of them has been professional and well-run. It’s so important for a mother to feel comfortable and confident that their child is being well cared for. And that’s always been the case for me.”

Campbell-Timberlake said the key for her is to make sure she signs up early before each UTA because the HCC program options often fill up fast.

Unfortunately, not all Citizen Airmen have had the same childcare experience as Campbell-Timberlake. In fact, it’s rare, but not unheard of for Reservists to leave the military because they can’t find an acceptable and affordable childcare arrangement.

“Childcare costs almost \$500 for two 12-hour days when not provided by the Department of Defense,” one Reservist who responded to a recent Reserve Command childcare assessment said. “That is my entire drill pay, not including the price of gas. I’m essentially working for free to be away from my baby, which is not fair to either of us.”

“We are both military, so it’s getting to a point where one of us will more than likely have to leave the military due to the financial burden of childcare,” said another. “It’s almost impossible to have kids while mil to mil or even being in the military due to the cost of childcare.”

“My spouse and I are both Reservists,” said a third. “We cannot both be present during UTA weekends because one of us has to stay home with the kids, ultimately hindering our progression in the Air Force.”

“It’s no secret that Air Force Reservists are experiencing challenges in securing childcare where the Reservist feels confident their children are in safe, quality care and can then engage fully in the military mission work,” Barnes said. “Our senior leaders are definitely aware that there is a problem, and we are actively looking at finding solutions.” Barnes said the main issues Reservists have reported are access to care, affordability of care, and the impact of childcare difficulties on the Reservist, their family, mission accomplishment and retention.

Barnes serves as the executive of AFRC’s Community Action Board, one of several entities currently looking at opportunities to improve childcare throughout the Air Force Reserve. ARC Athena and the Air Force’s Women’s Initiative Team are also currently pursuing options and solutions for the childcare problem for service members, especially Reservists.

AFRC has conducted a pair of childcare assessments in recent years, one late in 2021 and the other in early 2023. The 2023 assessment found that most Reservists (33.9%) rely on a spouse or partner to provide childcare during unit training assembly weekends. Second on the list were parents or relatives (27.6%). Commercial childcare centers were used by 10% of respondents and 5.2% used non-Department of Defense affiliated childcare in a home. DoD childcare options were used at a low rate with 5.5% using a DoD Child Development Center or Youth Center; 3.8% using DoD off-base Home Community Care and 3.6% using DoD on-base HCC childcare.

Reservists generally don’t have to pay for HCC childcare on UTA weekends or they pay considerably less than non-HCC childcare... when the care is available. At most bases, Child Development Centers, which serve children between six months and five years of age, and Youth Centers, for children ages five through 12, are not open on UTA weekends, and, in some parts of the country, the DoD struggles to find enough providers who keep children in their homes, whether on-base or off.

That leaves Reservists to find their own non-DoD affiliated childcare in many instances, and the cost can be prohibitive.

Of the 267 respondents in the 2023 survey who said they pay a fee for childcare, 67.4% said they pay \$100 or more per child per UTA for care, and 33.7% said they pay \$200 or more per child per UTA. “It’s often thought that it would be ideal if active-duty Child Development Centers and Youth Centers would be open on all UTA weekends and there were plenty of DoD-certified Home Community Care providers available so all Reservists would have free or affordable childcare while on military duty,” Barnes said. “But unfortunately, neither is likely given Child and Youth program constraints with requirements and challenges with recruiting of HCC providers.”

When asked what could be done to improve childcare for Reservists, nearly 500 of the 595 respondents of the 2023 assessment recommended having the Child Development Center open on UTA weekends. Other recommendations included providing a childcare allowance or stipend for Reservists with children, generally making childcare more affordable, having childcare available on pre-UTA Fridays and increasing the availability of childcare information.

“It’s easy for us to suggest the answer to the childcare problem is for Child Development Centers and Youth Centers to be open on UTA weekends,” Barnes said. “The problem is the centers have to have enough children participating to make it financially reasonable to be open and they have to be able to find qualified people willing to work on UTA weekends. It seems like an easy solution, but it’s not always feasible. Additionally, Reservists must pay standard fees to use the CDC or Youth Center.” Barnes said one of her main focuses is ensuring Reservists know about all their childcare options. “Our assessments indicate that some Reservists may not know about all of the childcare opportunities they have available to them,” she said, offering the following references for Citizen Airmen:

- Basic Air Force childcare information can be found at dafchildandyouth.com;
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Barnes said the childcare dilemma for the Reserve is made even more difficult because of the various Reserve statuses and the fact that Reservists don’t just serve on UTA weekends. “We have traditional Reservists, ARTs, IMAs and AGRs and they all provide different challenges to securing childcare,” she said.

She did say that there are numerous childcare programs for eligible Reservists in an active-duty status that range from subsidized programs to hourly care programs that are tailored to accommodate member schedules, deployments and special needs.

Among the potential solutions the Community Action Board, ARC Athena and the Women’s Initiative Team are looking at are partnering with organizations like the YMCA or the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and wings developing creative childcare solutions.

“Everything is on the table,” Barnes said. “Securing reasonably priced, quality, safe and accessible childcare remains an issue for the AFRC community, and we are working hand-in-hand with ARC Athena and the Women’s Initiative Team to explore all of the options.”

Childcare for Reservists FAQs

Q: What is the website I utilize to find information about and/or request childcare services?

A: There are several websites with important information about childcare that are also valuable sources for requesting childcare services, including militarychildcare.com, dafchildandyouth.com and childcareaware.org.

- Child Care Aware® of America (CCA) is a website for families that identifies types of childcare, tips for selecting quality childcare, resources for families that promote childhood development, tips for opening and operating a childcare program and Military/DoD fee assistance. This site offers information about Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) which is a DAF childcare fee assistance program that provides authorized DAF Active Duty personnel with assistance in locating, selecting and offsetting the cost of civilian child care, when installation childcare is not available.

- [Militarychildcare.com](https://militarychildcare.com) provides DoD approved childcare options that identifies program and care types that are available for military families. Users of the site are able to create an account and search for military-operated childcare services. This site also provides information on fee assistance programs such as the MCCYN and Child Care in Your Home (CCYH) which is a pilot program that helps families with non-traditional work schedules.

- DAF Child and Youth (<https://www.dafchildandyouth.com>) is an informational website that provides a comprehensive overview of Child and Youth Programs offerings that include: Child Development Centers, Family Child Care (FCC), Expanded Child Care (ECC), School Age Care (SAC), Youth Programs, and the School Liaison Program (SLO). In addition, each DAF FCC ECC program includes a summary, eligibility requirements, how to request care and fee information.

Q: Who can I contact for more information on childcare at my installation?

A: If you are a Reservist serving at a wing that is a tenant on the installation, the host wing's Family Child Care office is the place to go for information and referral sources. The FCC office is found in the base Child and Youth Programs Flight of the local Force Support Squadron. If you are a Reservist serving at a host wing, the Home Community Care point of contact is generally the Military and Family Readiness Center for information and referrals. For wings where the M&FRC is not the POC, they will be able to refer you to the correct Home Community Care POC.

Q: As a Reservist, am I eligible to utilize Department of Defense Child and Youth services like the Child Development Center, Youth Center or in-home childcare?

A: You may be eligible based upon status, orders and other considerations. To best determine eligibility, consult the [Military Family Types and DoD Priority handout](#) or contact your local Child and Youth Program experts.

Q: How are the priorities determined for childcare?

A: The Office of the Secretary of Defense determines childcare priorities and publishes them through Department of Defense Instruction 6060.02 and Department of the Air Force Instruction 34-144. For more information, check out the [Military Family Types and DoD Priority handout](#).

Q: In terms of childcare, what category am I in as a part-time or full-time Reservist?

A: Generally speaking, Monday through Friday, a Reservist on orders is in category 1. However, the local Child and Youth experts can provide the best guidance.

Q: What is the general availability of childcare on an active-duty installation?

A: At most active-duty installations, childcare spaces are at a premium. There are often waiting lists. At the time this Public Affairs Guidance was produced, the average Air Force wait was two to three months.

Q: Can I get on a childcare waiting list if I am going TDY to a school?

A: Yes, you can do so through militarychildcare.com. There's also a new app, Kinderspot, that allows military families to "sublet" their child care slots on a week-long basis and will be rolled out to all Air Force child development centers by July 2024. The Kinderspot app is available for download on Apple and Android devices. The participating centers validate all the users of the app to make sure they are eligible to offer a spot or to rent a spot. That rental fee rate is based on the family's total family income, not the total family income fee of the family who has the permanent

child care space. Read more about the Kinderspot app at <https://myairforcelife.com/new-kinderspot-app/>

Q: What are the fees for childcare?

A: Fees vary based on total family income.

Q: If I am unable to find childcare, what options do I have?

A: Reservists are encouraged to work with their supervisor, Family Child Care Office or Military and Family Readiness Office to explore all possible options, realizing that finding the right childcare is a nationwide problem not confined to the military. Military Childcare in Your Neighborhood, on the militarychildcare.com website, is one possible option.

Q: Can my child travel with me for annual tour and be eligible for childcare?

A: Yes. Airmen may travel with their child(ren) to training and duty. The child does not change your lodging priority status.

Q: Is my child able to stay with me at lodging?

A: Yes, you are eligible, depending on availability of rooms. The child does not change your priority status. IAW AFMAN 34-135, para 4.1, “dependents under the age of 18 are authorized to stay in Air Force Visiting Quarters (VQ) when accompanied by the appropriate legal guardian.”

Q: Is childcare available for drill weekend?

A: Generally, Air Force-provided childcare is provided through the Home Community Care program during UTA weekends. Air Force Child Development Centers are not subsidized and generally do not have availability during weekends.

Q: How do I request HCC childcare for UTA weekends?

A: The family should talk to the POC at the installation and must meet eligibility requirements. If eligible requirements are met, the member completes the DAF FCC ECC form with the POC at the installation.

Q: How far in advance of a UTA should I request HCC childcare?

A: Members can apply for the fiscal year when they provide their drill schedule. Approval can be given for the fiscal year.

Q: I am at a wing that does not have many providers. What is the process to request more providers?

A: Your HCC POC will reach out to the Air Force Services Center via email to the AFFCC System Box (AFFCCSystem.Admin-02@us.af.mil). The POC will include in the email the number of providers they would like to recruit as well as the zip codes where recruitment will take place. The Air Force Services Center will contact Child Care Aware of America to have them begin the recruitment process. HCC POCs can also identify individuals in their wing’s area who may be interested in becoming providers and send their information to the AFFCC System Box. Information should include first and last name, email address and contact number of interested persons.

Q: Is it possible to meet the HCC provider ahead of the UTA?

A: Yes. In fact, it is encouraged that you make contact with and meet the provider before the first day of care.

Q: If I am unable to find childcare, what options do I have?

A: If traditional options, such as internal family support and commercial childcare are not available, some other possible options include working with your M&FR to determine any additional local area childcare programs, initiating your Dependent Care Plan or working with your leadership to reschedule your orders.