Costs of Childcare: An In Class Activity

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Type: Group Work

Purpose:
To help students understand the real expense of childcare and how difficult it is to successfully balance work and family, especially for low income families.

Time:
45-50 minutes

Preparation:
Obtain names and phone numbers of several childcare centers; Obtain access to laptops; Prepare handouts with local information

This activity could also be adapted as a take home assignment.

1. As a group, we make a list of all the things that families need in order for both parents to continuously remain in the workplace and raise children the way that they want. I encourage students to think about how they want to raise their old children. That list usually includes paid maternity leave for at least one year (because most students do not want to put an infant in daycare), paternity leave for at least a week, child care reimbursement from the age of 1 until the child is in school, flextime, flexplace, sick leave, health care benefits, a child care center near the workplace, a private location to pump milk at the office (because most students recognize the benefits of breast milk over formula), and enough income to meet additional expenses.

2. I explain to students that we are going to figure out if it is possible to raise a child the way we want in the local area.

3. I divide students into groups of about four students each. I pass out assignments below to different groups (in larger sections, multiple groups will receive the same assignment).

4. I give students about 20 minutes to complete the assignment as a group. I make sure that students have cell phones available in groups that require phones. (Typically, students volunteer to use their cell phones). If possible, I arrange to have extra computers with internet access available to students in Group 1 or 2 (either by asking students who have them to bring laptops or by using University resources). For Groups 3 and 4, I provide different lists of names and phone numbers of childcare centers in the area.
5. After students have completed the assignment, we discuss the results. For each item, we start by talking about professors. Often, groups that focus on the professors have more success. Then, we discuss the lower income family. Sometimes, students will propose that the lower income family should simply go on welfare. This is a good opportunity to talk about what welfare will and will not provide.

6. After we have discussed both groups, I then ask students to think about how they would meet their needs if they were disabled, supporting elderly parents, had low education or intelligence, were mentally or physically ill, recently left an abusive spouse, trying to go back to school to get more education, had more than one or two children or had a child with a special need.

**Group 1: Benefits**

You and your spouse are both professors at the University of Arizona. You are expecting a child in September and you are trying to make plans for the birth. You would like for one of you to be home with the baby for at least the first year of life and for the second person to also be home with the baby for at least the first month. Also, you would like a child care reimbursement from the University, the option to work flexplace and flextime, the option to bring the baby to work, a private location to pump breastmilk during the day, and paid leave for you when your baby is sick.

Using the internet or the phone, research the University of Arizona’s family leave plan. How many of these options are available to you? Are you able to keep both of your jobs and care for the child the way you want to? If you are not able to both keep your jobs, how will you live on half the family income at the same time that you have an additional family member? Write two paragraphs explaining your family plans for after the child is born.

If you make any phone calls, you should identify yourself as a student doing research.

**Group 2: Benefits**

You and your spouse are both janitors at Tucson Medical Center. You are expecting a child in September and you are trying to make plans for the birth. You would like for one of you to be home with the baby for at least the first year of life and for the second person to also be home with the baby for at least the first month. Also, you would like a child care reimbursement after the first year, the option to work flexplace and flextime, the option to bring the baby to work, a private location to pump breastmilk during the day, and paid leave for you when your baby is sick.

Using the internet or the phone, research the Tucson Medical Center’s family leave plan. How many of these options are available to you? Are you able to keep both of your jobs and care for the child the way you want to? If you are not able to both keep your jobs, how will you live on half the family income at the same time that you have an additional family member? If you choose to both work, how will you afford the $500/month cost of child care? Write two paragraphs explaining your family plans for after the child is born.
If you make any phone calls, you should identify that you are a student doing research.

Group 3: Childcare

You and your spouse are both Professors at the University of Arizona. You each make $20/hour. Your take home pay (after taxes, your retirement contribution, and health care) is $15/hour. You are expecting your second child in September and you are trying to make plans for the birth. One of you is planning on taking some time off through December. Starting in January, both children will need to be in day care during the entire day. Because you both are in tenure-track positions, the children will need to be in day care at least 50 hours a week, from 8am until at least 6pm. One day a week, you both teach an evening class from 6:30-9pm. Using a cell phone, call at least three of the following local day care centers and find out:

a. Do they have full-time openings for a three month old and a twenty month old starting in January?
b. What are the weekly costs for child care?
c. Will they take a child if the child is sick?
d. Will they provide diapers and formula?
e. How many other children will the staff members care for?
f. Are they open the hours you need? Is there an additional fee if you are late?

Based on the information that you gathered, select one day care to be your children’s day care. Write two paragraphs explaining your child care plan, including how you will afford the day care, what you will do if the child is sick, and how you will meet childcare needs when the center is not open.

On the phone, please identify yourself as a student doing research.

Group 4: Childcare

You and your spouse are both janitors at Tucson Medical Center. You each make $8/hour. Your take home pay (after taxes, a retirement fund, and a health care plan) is $6/hour. You are expecting your first child in September and you are trying to make plans for the birth. One of you is planning on taking some time off through December. Starting in January, the child will need to be in day care from 5am until 2pm. Using a cell phone (costs will be reimbursed), call at least three of the following local day care centers and find out:

a. Do they have full-time openings for a three month old starting in January?
b. What are the weekly costs for child care? Do they have a sliding scale? If so, what would your cost be?
c. Will they take a child if the child is sick?
d. Will they provide diapers and formula?
e. How many other children will the staff members care for?
f. Are they open the hours you need? Is there an additional fee if you are late?

Based on the information that you gathered, select one day care to be your child’s day care. Write two paragraphs explaining your child care plan, including how you will afford the day care, what you will do if the child is sick, and what you will do if you have to work overtime.

On the phone, please identify yourself as a student doing research.

Group 5: Budget

You and your spouse are both professors at the University of Arizona. You both work 50 hours/week (8am-6pm). You both make $20/hour. After taxes, a retirement contribution, and basic health insurance, you each take home $15/hour. You do not have family in the area. Using your knowledge of the Tucson area, put together a monthly budget. You should calculate about $2.50/hour for childcare, which is the average for childcare in Tucson.

Total monthly income:________

Monthly costs:________

______ Childcare
______ Housing
______ Electricity
______ Water
______ Local phone
______ Renter’s or Homeowner’s Insurance
______ Food
______ Car payment
______ Gas  OR  ______ Bus pass
______ Insurance

______ Diapers (a 3 month old will use about 8 diapers/day. Disposal diapers cost about $.50 each)
______ Formula and bottles (formula costs about $40/week)
______ Baby clothes
______ $10 Medicine and co-pays for doctor’s appointments

______ Gifts (Christmas, birthdays)
______ Television/Cable
______ Cell phone
______ Clothes for self
Group 6: Budget

You are a single mother of a three month old. You work 40 hours/week (8am-5pm) as a secretary at a law firm. You make $9/hour. After taxes, a retirement contribution, and basic health insurance, your take home pay is $6/hour. You do not have family in the area. Using your knowledge of the Tucson area, put together a monthly budget. You should calculate about $2.50/hour for childcare, which is the average for childcare in Tucson.

Total monthly income:________

Monthly costs:________

____ Childcare
____ Housing
____ Electricity
____ Water
____ Local phone
____ Renter’s or Homeowner’s Insurance
____ Food
____ Car payment
____ Gas OR _____ Bus pass*
____ Insurance
____ Diapers (a 3 month old will use about 8 diapers/day. Disposal diapers cost about $.50 each)
____ Formula and bottles (formula costs about $40/week)
____ Baby clothes
$_10_ Medicine and co-pays for doctor’s appointments
____ Gifts (Christmas, birthdays)
____ Television/Cable
____ Cell phone
____ Clothes for self
____ Vacation
____ Entertainment (movies, books, videos, dating)
____ Birth control
Group 7: Budget

You are a single mother of a three month old and a three year old. You work 40 hours/week (8am-5pm) at McDonalds. You make $7/hour. After taxes, your take home pay is $6/hour. You do not have family in the area. Using your knowledge of the Tucson area, put together a monthly budget.

Total monthly income:________

Monthly costs:________

____ Childcare (The lowest childcare cost at a registered facility is $2.00/hour/child)
____ Housing
____ Electricity
____ Water
____ Local phone
____ Renter’s or Homeowner’s Insurance
____ Food

____ Car payment
____ Gas OR ____ Bus pass*
____ Insurance

____ Diapers (a 3 month old will use about 8 diapers/day. Disposal diapers cost about $.50 each)
____ Formula and bottles (formula costs about $40/week)
____ Baby clothes
$_10_ Medicine and co-pays for doctor’s appointments

____ Gifts (Christmas, birthdays)
____ Television/Cable
____ Cell phone
____ Clothes for self
____ Vacation
____ Entertainment (movies, books, videos, dating)
____ Birth control
____ Home furnishings, furniture, bedding, towels, etc.

*if you use a bus pass, you should add one hour a day of childcare costs, since it will take extra time to get to work after dropping the child off at daycare
If you are unable to complete the budget, how will you earn extra money (keeping in mind that children must be tended while you are working)?

If you are unable to complete the budget, how will you cut costs further?