



STORIES

**“When I let someone into my house,
you become my family.”**

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GUEST SPEAKER

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HOST

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“It all started because I was going to have a child.”

I started doing child care in 2004. I had a child in 2002, and I wanted to care for him. But I was working at a different place and I didn't know about child care until I found a person that helped me to care for my son. She was a family child care provider, and I said, oh wow, what is this? Because where I come from, I've never seen anything like this. She told me about it, and explained about how to become a family child care provider. I can do that. I started taking classes and I applied (for daycare classes) actually in 2003. I took some classes. I applied for a child care center. When I moved to the States from Argentina. I started doing family child care in 2004. I worked at a center and it all started because, I was going to have a child. This was in 2003. I mean 2002, and in 2003 I started looking for child care because I had to work. I was pregnant and we didn't know what we were going to do, or how we were going to take care of my son, because we didn't know the system. We were new in the United States. So, I have my son - my husband and I will take turns for the first year. We took turns, taking care of him. Then when I started looking for options, I found out about family child care, and I found this beautiful place with this family child care provider who took care of my son for about seven months. I thought it was amazing that she could take care of my son and they actually were like family to us. So I asked her how do you do this, what do you need? I think I can do this and take it off my son and take other children. I started taking classes. I applied to a center to gain some experience. Once I learned about family child care. I thought, oh I can do this and take it away. I used to be a teacher, so it was what I wanted it to do. So, I started taking classes, applied to a child care center to have my son with me. I worked there for three years while I was getting ready to start my own business. That's how it all began. In 2007, I got certified and accredited. I could then get licensed because I lived in a town house. Little by little, I just started thinking about new ways, looked for another space, rented a house, and became licensed; and here I am!

“I have the children with me at two weeks old, sometimes until they're five.”

I think one important thing is that the name says it, family - family child care. Each family is different. Each family child care is different. I mean the difference between family and center. For me personally, thinking about it, of what I do as my job, is more work, because I have to prepare meals, I have to do laundry, clean the house. Working at a center, you have other people taking care of that - like cleaning, the meals, the laundry. I still have to think about activities that we'll do with the children, I still plan for the children, meet with the families - parent provider discussions about the child. I think what makes the biggest difference to me between family child care and a center; first, that is the continuity of care that you have with the children. In centers, children go from one teacher to another, every year. In family child care, I have the children with me at two weeks old sometimes until they're five. So, like they become part of my family. I think that's the big difference between centers is that when I let someone into my house, you become my family, it's my house. In the family, you also get to know each other because it's a small group, they get to know each other. We do a lot of get together - it's a small

community that we create as family child care providers, in my experience. Getting to know the child better every year that passes. In contrast with every year, having a new child walking into your room, when you are in a center - every year you have a new child coming to your room. It's great to get to know more children - you get to know more children, just a little bit, for a little bit. In family child care, in my experience, I get to know these children for the first five years of their life.

It's a family business.

Like my son, he has fed every baby a bottle, for the children that I care for. He picks up babies because he's so used to it.

Like today, I was reading a book and one of the children just started crying because he wanted to do something else. He walked away and went to the door and started crying. I guess he started missing mom or dad because I was waiting in there, and I wasn't giving him much attention. So, my son came in and started talking to him and started playing with him. He felt that attention that he needed and he got it. My son gave it to him and that was really sweet.

“Relationships are one of the most important things that make a difference.”

I think all that I say makes it special, very special. Relationships, I think the relationships is one of the most important things that make a difference. Those relationships that will last, I still get a letter in the mail every year for Christmas, from most of the families that I work with. Sometimes, like two months ago, I went to Minnesota for a camping trip and I contacted the family that used to come here and they wanted to say hello. They stopped by to see me for a moment. You keep those relationships. In my experience, working at a center, didn't talk to anybody else. Sometimes I'd run into people that I remembered, but they didn't remember me. They were so young they didn't even know who I was. To see them grow, for them to understand and know that, Oh, somebody took care of me. Who took care of me for my first years of life besides my parents and my grandparents? I think my perspective and from what I come from, it's important. I think it's important for children to know that what happened when you were growing up, right? Like, who was there? They spent here at least nine, ten hours a day for five years of their life, right? Eight to twelve hours they sleep right?

COVID-19: “I never closed.”

Actually, it impacts, but not as much as I thought it would, or not as much as other providers have been impacted. I think what greatest, what helped not be such a problem for us, for me and the families I work with, is that we communicate. When this all started, I asked them to join me in a Zoom meeting. They all say they could and they wanted to, and we share what we were doing - what each of us were doing from home to stay healthy to avoid contracting the virus. We

came up with a plan altogether. My families are amazing. I'm so thankful for the families I have, I work with. So yes, we made a plan. We agreed that wherever we go, we take all the families and children that come to this house with us. So, whatever we're doing, it can affect them too. We trust each other, which has been very important. We trust that everyone of us is doing it.

What we are doing right now is when families come in, I have a sign in the window, a green and red. Is green on one side, red on the other. When it is green, parents can come in. They come in one at a time. A parent and child, come in wearing a mask. Parents wear a mask. They say their good-byes, I take the child to the bathroom to wash hands, the parent grabs a sanitizing wipe, and wipes everything that the parents touched on their way out. When they came in, if they touch the door, then they wipe the door and also disinfectant. I have hand sanitizer outside the gate, so before they enter the gate, they use the hand sanitizer. They wash the child's hands and then on their way out of the bathroom we flip the sign. So, another parent can come in. So, I flip it to red when someone comes in, and when they leave, I turn it back to green.

The space is small in the entrance. To avoid crowding - to avoid having too many people at the same time. So that's what we're doing. It's working. I order most of the groceries online, which is that it's a little bit of a load of work, because sometimes you don't know what to ask for. So, I've been going to get the milk because I get a different type of milk than I ordered. So, now once a week I just go pick up mike, take care of myself, wear a mask.

I never closed. I say, this is what's happening, what do you think? That's what we talked about on Zoom meeting. I said if you need me, I'm here, but I need everybody to be on the same page, take care of each other, and I won't close. Most of my families were working from home, they need to work. You can't work for nine hours if you have a young child.

During COVID-19, more appreciation from parents.

Yes, please don't close Fernanda! We'll do whatever you want! I think we're all happy with what is happening. It hasn't affected us a lot. Nobody has gotten sick. Actually, last week I sent a survey asking a few questions about if they wanted me to make a plan in case somebody gets sick because I haven't made a plan. With these families, we take things as they come and so if they want to talk together, like when I had that surgery, they all helped. They are amazing.

“I was feeling very tired.”

Yes, I was reflecting about how I was feeling in the past years, maybe two, three years. I was feeling very tired. I wasn't enjoying my work with the children. I mean, I was enjoying the children, and doing my work, but it was work. I had to go to work, I have to get up, and I was so tired because I didn't have much time for myself. Saturdays, I would find myself cleaning the house and doing laundry, and having to do grocery shopping, and planning meals for the week and activities, so it was work. I was working every day of the week. So my Satellite consultant,

she asked me, Fernanda, what do you think about closing one day maybe? You can do all the work and try to put it on that day so you have the weekend for yourself. But it took me two years to make that decision and say, okay, you know what I have to do it and that's another thing because of COVID. Because it was too much. What am I doing? Now this is happening, we've got this pandemic. We don't know where the world is going. I had to take care of myself. I decided to close Fridays. I gave a three month notice to my families. They all thought that was amazing. They were all so happy for me. It makes me cry! I wasn't expecting!

I always thought, well, they need me, they work. They work Monday through Friday. For them, it was actually the best time for them because they're working from home now and the ones that are not, they just found the way to get there and I didn't lose a single family.