



Making Childcare Choices

Trying to juggle work with childcare?

Good quality childcare and early education is not only good for children; it gives parents more freedom to work, study or train for a job too. But juggling work with bringing up children is not easy. If you are struggling with this, you are not alone.

What's right for you and your child?

If you would like your child to be settled in one location all day with other children of their own age and a skilled team of carers then day nurseries or playgroups may be the right solution.

If you would like to have your child looked after by someone else or in your own home, then a childminder or home-based childcarer might be better, especially if you have a baby or a toddler under two.

Many places that offer childcare have a waiting list, so it's a good idea to start looking some time before you actually need it. Make a shortlist of places to visit by calling around first and asking a few questions, such as:

- Are there any age restrictions?
- Would your child have one main person looking after them?
- What sort of activities will your child do in a day?
- What hours can your child go there?
- How much does it cost?

Your next step

Visit at least two or three places. Ask questions about what happens during the day, what the children get to eat and how they are disciplined. Don't be afraid to visit a second time if you want to be sure it's right for you and your child.

Once you have made your decision, make sure you are happy with all the details of the arrangement. In some cases you will be given an agreement to sign and asked to secure the place by paying a deposit or retainer fee.

Tip: Visit when other children are there so you can watch them play and see how they are being looked after.

What help with childcare costs can you get?

Paying for childcare can take a big chunk out of your family income but don't rule out any options until you've looked at our fact sheets on Tax Credits and Financial Help.

Other Fact Sheets:

- Choosing Childcare: Top Tips
- Early Education Places for 3 and 4 Year Olds
- Tax Credits





What are your options?

Childminders

Childminders are trained, self-employed carers largely based in their own homes. They are registered with Ofsted and both the childminder and their home are regularly checked. A childminder can look after up to six children under eight-years-old including their own, but only three of them can be under the age of five. Childminders are perfect if your working day doesn't fit the 9-5, Monday to Friday pattern or if you have children of different ages and you want them to be looked after together. You may also want your child to be cared for in a home environment by just one person.

Day Nurseries

Day nurseries offer childcare and, in some cases, early education. They are for children between the ages of six weeks and five years and many offer out-of-school care for five to 11-year-olds. Opening times tend to coincide with a standard working day, 8am to 6pm on weekdays. Day nurseries charge between £114 and £197 for a full-time week but costs vary across the country, so it's best to check.

Nursery schools and classes

Nursery schools offer early education and are for children between the ages of three and five. They are open during school hours, normally only in term time for full or half-day sessions. Nurseries are free if part of a state education system (excluding meals and trips) but private ones charge £1,200 to £1,500 per term. As always it is best to check with the centre you're interested in.

Tip: When you visit, look for projects and drawings up on the walls. Are there stimulating toys and books for the children to enjoy?

Pre-school and playgroups

Organised by community or voluntary groups, often with the help of parents, these usually offer early education places. They give your child access to different toys, equipment and activities and ensure they mix with other children. Sessions last between two-and-a-half to four hours and take place either every day or several days a week, during term time. They are for children aged between two and five years and cost around £5 to £9 per session.

Out-of-school care

Some clubs are open before and after school and all day during school holidays. They offer a quiet space for catching up with homework as well as plenty of fun activities for children between the ages of three to 14-years-old (and up to 16 for children with special needs). Many breakfast, after school and holiday play schemes are linked to schools. Some of which offer a variety of activities on top of the normal school day such as music, art, sport or additional study support. Costs range between £5 and £10 a day for after-school clubs; £1 and £4 for breakfast clubs; and around £80 to £105 a week for a holiday place.