

# CHILDCARE FACT SHEET

You know what's best for your child. As a parent or guardian you are your child's most important carer, and it's what you and your child do together at home that is most important in giving them the best start in life. Care from friends, grandparents and other relative's plays a vital role too.

There's a huge amount of choice out there, from nursery schools to pre-schools to childminders, all offering benefits for your children and reassurance and flexibility to you.

Mums and dads are the most important influence on a child, but early learning and childcare is vital too. That's why the Early Years Foundation Stage – a play-based framework for learning for every child from birth to five in all ofsted-registered early learning or childcare has been created.

Find out more – You can get more information by visiting [www.direct.gov.uk/childcare](http://www.direct.gov.uk/childcare)

Most childcare providers looking after children under five have to be registered by Ofsted. There are also some that don't have to register but which may choose to do so this includes nannies, those providing activities such as sports coaching, and short-term care such as crèches.

It's best to choose a provider that's registered because you can then be sure that a check has been made on their suitability to care for children. Another reason is that you'll only be able to claim Tax Credits if your childcare provider is registered.

As part of the registration process Ofsted also carries out a Criminal Records Bureau check on all staff, to make sure they're safe to work with children.



### **Five essentials when choosing childcare.**

1. Research your options. Contact your local Families Information Service to find out the full range in your area at [www.hertsdirect.gov.uk/fsd](http://www.hertsdirect.gov.uk/fsd) or 0300 123 4052.
2. Make sure that the childcare is high-quality. Take a list of questions with you and don't be afraid to ask them.
3. Find out if the provider is registered with Ofsted and whether they've been inspected recently.
4. Ask other mums and dads about what's worked for them. And go with what you think best – you know your child.
5. Think about what suits your child; where would they thrive? Take your child with you to see how they get on with the staff and surroundings.

## **Day Nurseries**

Opening hours can be from 7am to 7pm though this varies. Your child can attend full or part-time. Day Nurseries are open all year round.

### **Choosing a Nursery**

When looking for a nursery it is important to find one that suits your family and we strongly recommend that you visit a shortlist of nurseries to take a look at what is on offer before you make your final decision. The National Day Nursery Association has more information on their website [www.ndna.org.uk](http://www.ndna.org.uk).

You will get a good idea which nursery is right for you from your visit, and it is important that both you and your child feel comfortable about your final choice.

When you are deciding which nursery to select it is important that you ask the nursery managers to clearly explain the contract you will need to sign. This will include all of your terms and conditions and payment information. Ask the manager to talk you through exactly what you will need to pay and whether bank holidays and training days are included in your fees or cost extra. Also, ask about any additional charges such as food, nappies, late collection fees and a registration fee. Gathering this type of information will mean that you can more easily compare the prices between nurseries.

## **Childminders**

Registered childminders provide care in a safe home environment for children. Many offer a level of flexibility to meet the needs of the parents and children.

The day often begins early when parents deliver children to the childminder's home, they will have planned and prepared the day's activities. This can include taking older children to school/playgroups, playing with the children, reading stories, preparing meals, allowing rest time, providing suitable toys and equipment and a range of play and learning activities.

Childminders aim to build good working relationships with both children and parents. They understand and provide for children's needs, maintain confidentiality and have the skills to run a small business.

Childminders must be registered with Ofsted and this regulation ensures adequate training and professional development to ensure the well-being of children in their care. Childminders provide professional individual care for children, giving them the meaningful rewarding experiences that quality care requires. All childminders are first aid trained and are required to keep their training up to date. For further information please check the childminding association website on [www.ncma.org.uk](http://www.ncma.org.uk).

## **Nannies**

Come to your home, and will often fit in with non-typical working hours. May choose to register with ofsted.

Nannies are childcare professionals who work at the home of one family at a time, they are employed by a parent rather than being self-employed. Because they are employed by parents, and work in the family home, nannies are very different from registered childminders.

Nannies are not required to register with Ofsted in England or the Care and Social services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). However, to encourage quality of care, nannies can join the voluntary Ofsted register, or the Childcare Approval Scheme in Wales. Nannies that have chosen to register provide parents with the reassurance that they have had an enhanced CRB check, first-aid and basic childcare training.

Only parents employing nannies who have joined the voluntary schemes can receive the childcare element of working families tax credit. In England, Ofsted inspects a random selection of people on the Childcare register to ensure they comply with the requirements for membership of the register.

## **Pre-schools**

Pre-schools provide early year's education and childcare for children up to the age of five and are subject to ofsted inspection.

All 'Early Years Practitioner' that are registered with ofsted follow the Early Year's Foundation Stage.

Guidelines stipulate a ratio of one adult to every eight children for children aged 3 and over, one adult to every four children for children aged 2-3 years. They offer a variety of activities providing play and learning opportunities and many are supported by the Pre-School Learning Alliance. Many voluntary playgroups are run by a parent committee providing a community-centred and child-led approach to play, activity and learning.

Some pre-schools are registered to take children at the age of 2 and funding is available to some families. Please speak to the pre-school when you make your application.

All Children are entitled to 15 hours free nursery education from the term after their third birthday. More information on this can be found at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk).

## **Nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools**

Open during school hours, usually 9am to 3.30pm, offering full or half-day sessions. Some offer out-of-school and holiday care. You will be sent information on this from County nearer your child's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

### **EMERGENCY**

It happens sometimes: your childcare provider falls ill, or there's a problem at the nursery, so you've got no childcare. All employees have the right to take unpaid emergency leave (sometimes called compassionate leave) at very short notice when there's a crisis.

### **Getting involved**

Talk to the childcare provider about your child – they can use what you tell them in what they do together

Most providers will give you written information about how your child is doing – a diary or a folder, perhaps – and will tell you about progress each day.

The following checklist may come in handy when choosing a childcare provider:

- Does the childcare setting have a friendly feel?
- Is it clean, light, well ventilated and big enough for children to be active indoors and outdoors?
- Are there places where the children can rest?
- Are the toys sufficiently varied (do they differ in size, texture, colour and shape)?
- Do the children look happy?
- Are the carers talking to the children in a way that interests and encourages them?
- Are there plenty of children of your child's age?
- Are the providers and carers Ofsted registered?
- Is the furniture of a sufficiently high standard?

Once you have chosen a provider, give them clear information about your child's likes and dislikes and any health issues they may have. After a few weeks, you might want to go back and speak to the provider to find out how your child is getting on.

What if my child has a disability or special educational needs (SEN)?

All early learning and childcare providers are under a legal duty to consider how best to offer extra support to meet the child's needs. The Special educational Needs Code of Practice (you can find this on [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)) gives guidance on the different levels of support that are available.

Local Authorities and most nurseries and local nursery schools will have an early Years SEN Coordinator who will be able to discuss your child's particular needs and ensure that your child can enjoy all the activities the nursery has to offer. Talk to the Coordinator if you want to discuss your specific issues and concerns.

Help with costs

Disability Living Allowance can help you with the day to day costs of looking after a child with a disability. Call the Disability Benefits Helpline on 0845 7123 456.

Childcare: What does it cost?

The cost of childcare varies widely, so it's important to check what's available near you. The Families Information Service (0300 123 4052) can advise you, and don't forget you may be able to get financial help.

## Tips for settling your child into early learning and childcare



- Take your child along before leaving them. Then, if you can, start leaving your child for, say half an hour, and build up to longer periods.
- Even when you're there let the childminder or key worker take charge so that your child gets used to them.
- When you leave, reassure your child that you'll be coming back and then say goodbye rather than slipping away or looking sad – go with a smile and a wave.
- With older children, tell them when you'll be back
- Let your child take a special toy or blanket so they'll feel more comfortable
- Always be happy about the day ahead, your child will pick up on your mood.
- It's usual to feel nervous. But remember that babies and young children are never confused about who their parents are, and outside influences can be very positive.

### IDEAS FOR PLAY

You can support your child's development by :

- Teaching them songs and nursery rhymes
- Playing with letters and numbers (for example with building blocks)
- Painting and drawing
- Reading storybooks and talking about the pictures
- Going to your local library and children's centre– they have lots of activities, including Rhyme Time and messy play sessions.



### FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local Families Information Service on 0300 123 4052, visit [www.hertsdirect.gov.uk/fsd](http://www.hertsdirect.gov.uk/fsd) or [www.direct.gov.uk/childcare](http://www.direct.gov.uk/childcare).

Check out The Orchard Children's Centre website [www.hertschildrenscentres.org.uk/orchard](http://www.hertschildrenscentres.org.uk/orchard) for more information.