

Factsheet for parents

What are my childcare options?

Families use childcare for many reasons - to help you work, look for jobs, train or study or just take time out, and to help your child's development. Childcare can offer many positive benefits for your entire family.

This factsheet looks at the different types of childcare and what they can offer you and your child. It aims to explain the different options available to you and could help you to decide which type of service best fits your needs.

Registered and unregistered childcare

There are two types of childcare, registered and unregistered. Childcare is registered and inspected by Ofsted. Childcare falls under one of three registers:

- Early Years Register (EYR): This covers childcare for children up to the age of five.
- Compulsory Ofsted Childcare Register (OCR): This covers childcare for children aged five to seven (unless exempt).
- Voluntary Ofsted Childcare Register (vOCR): This covers childcare for children aged eight and over and care for children of any age that is activity based or provided in the child's own home.

The different types of registered childcare include:

- childminders;
- children's centres;
- day nurseries;
- preschools/playgroups;
- crèches (open more than two hours per day and last more than five days per year);
- nursery schools;
- extended schools;
- out-of-school services or kids' clubs; and
- holiday playschemes/clubs.

Some types of childcare can be registered on the voluntary Ofsted Childcare Register; however, they are not legally required to register. These include:

- nannies and home childcarers;
- parent/carer and toddler groups; and,
- activity-based care.

Unregistered care includes:

- childcare provided by a family member;
- babysitting in the child's home; and
- childcare provided by a friend (who is not receiving payment for caring for your child).

Financial help for childcare costs is generally restricted to paying for childcare services that are registered.

All 3- and 4-year-olds are entitled to at least 12.5 hours of free early education per week. Many of the registered childcare providers discussed in this factsheet offer this free education.

For more information see our factsheets 'General help with childcare costs', 'Help with childcare costs for students', and 'Help with childcare costs for working parents'.

For a list of questions to ask potential childcare providers, see the Looking for childcare section of our website, www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

Your Family Information Service (FIS) can provide you with details of local registered childcare. You can contact your FIS through ChildcareLink on **0800 234 6346** or use the 'Find a FIS' function at www.familyinformationservices.org.uk.

Childminders

Childminders are self-employed childcare providers who will look after your child in their own home. They must be registered with Ofsted and are inspected at least once within three years of the last inspection. They may offer full day care or childcare before or after school or during school holidays.

Childminders are usually paid on an hourly basis. You may be able to negotiate the rates with them depending on your needs and the services they offer. Hourly rates vary around the country. See our annual 'Childcare Costs Survey', which is available on our website for details of average costs for a full-time place.

You'll need to discuss required hours, holiday pay and other terms and conditions and ensure that details of these are included in the contract you have with your childminder.

Childminders can often provide very flexible care. As they work with small groups of children, they may be able to provide more individualised care. They can also look after siblings of different ages. In some places, there are childminding networks that provide training for carers to work with children with disabilities and special needs.

How much can I expect to pay a childminder?

Childminders are self-employed, so there are no standardised rates; it is up to childminders to set their own fees. Currently, the average cost for 25 hours of care with a childminder is £83 per week (for a child under 2). However, prices can vary below and above that amount. Childminder costs are often slightly lower than nursery fees. This is not reflective of the service provided but linked to differences in overhead costs.

Do I have to pay for a childminder if my child is sick, on holiday or I am looking after them at home?

Yes, you may have to. Childminders are self-employed, so to some extent they set the 'policies' regarding sick pay and holiday pay. Childminding rates are a childminder's income, so - like all workers - they need to ensure that their income is maintained. All details relating to sick and holiday pay should be made clear in the original contract you sign with the childminder. The contract should state when you will and won't pay fees and also any notice period required. For example, some childminders may not

The National Childminding Association (see details below) can provide sample childminding contracts or can advise you on more common practice among childminders with regards to fees, contracts, holiday and sick pay.

charge a fee or may charge a reduced fee if either you or they notifies the other far enough in advance of forthcoming holidays.

How will I know if this is the right type of care for my child?

You will only really know if this is the right type of care after your child has been with the childminder for a while. It is advisable to negotiate a settling-in period. This is an agreed period (for example three to six months) where both you and the childminder can assess whether the care arrangements are working. After the settling-in period, if the situation is not suitable, alternative arrangements can then be made. Having this settling-in period stated in the contract ensures that both you and the childminder are aware that this might happen.

Is there anything that I should do before visiting potential childminders?

It is always a good idea to be as prepared as possible when visiting any potential childcare provider. You could ask your local Family Information Service or the National Childminding Association (see box) if they have a sample questionnaire to take with you when interviewing childminders. Alternatively you could refer to the Daycare Trust list of questions found at:

www.daycaretrust.org.uk/parentinformation.

For further information about childminding and childminding networks, contact your Family Information Service (FIS) or the National Childminding Association on 0800 169 4486 or www.ncma.org.uk

And remember, you can always talk to other parents who use the service.

Children's centres

Many children's centres provide childcare for children under the age of five, alongside other family services, such as links to Jobcentre Plus and health and family support. They can also provide you with advice about drop-in sessions, local childcare providers and free early education for three- and four-year-olds. For further information about children's centres, contact your Family Information Service (FIS).

Day nurseries

Day nurseries look after and educate children from birth to age five. They are usually open all day, but not in the evenings or at weekends. There are different types of nurseries, including private, community, local authority and workplace nurseries. All nurseries should be registered and inspected by Ofsted. All nurseries have a designated Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) to co-ordinate provision for children with special needs.

How much does nursery cost?

The typical average cost of a full-time nursery place for a child under 2 for 25 hours is £88 per week, but prices can vary quite dramatically. Nursery costs are higher for children under two-years old. In some areas and depending on the type of provision (such as private or local authority run), nurseries can charge as much as £11,050 per year for 25 hours childcare per week.

Our annual 'Childcare costs survey', available on our website, www.daycaretrust.org.uk, shows the typical costs of childcare in the UK. We also publish a summer 'Holiday childcare costs survey' each July, which is also available on our website.

For further information about day nurseries, contact your Family Information Service (FIS) or the National Day Nurseries Association on 01484 40 70 70 or www.ndna.org.uk.

Pre-schools/playgroups

Pre-schools/playgroups provide play and education sessions lasting about three hours for children aged two–five. Costs for this type of care will vary, check with individual settings for details.

For further information, contact your Family Information Service (FIS) or the Pre-school Learning Alliance on 020 7697 2500 or www.pre-school.org.uk.

Crèches

Crèches must be registered if they:

- are open more than four hours a day or if the parents are not within the immediate area; or,
- provide care for children under 8-years old for more than 14 days in a year.

Crèches provide occasional childcare during particular events (such as training courses) or at particular locations (such as supermarkets and leisure centres) while you are engaged in an activity.

Nursery schools

Nursery classes are offered at nursery schools as well as infant and primary schools. Nursery schools operate for school hours during term time. Children can attend all day or on a sessional basis. To find out about the nursery schools in your area, contact your local educational authority.

Extended schools

These are schools that open beyond the normal school day in order to provide the local community with facilities and services, such as childcare, throughout the year. The care is provided by the school itself or in partnership with local childcare providers. Extended schools offer care such as parent and toddler groups and breakfast, after-school and homework clubs.

If the school that your child attends does not offer extended services, they may be part of network of local schools that does. The local education authority or Family Information Service should be able to tell you which schools in your area offer extended services. Details of your local education authority will be in your telephone directory or on your local authority's website.

Out-of-school services or kids' clubs

Out-of-school services and kids' clubs generally provide care for children aged between 4 and 14-years old, but you should check with each individual setting to see if they have their own age limits. These programmes normally run during term time and can offer care before school - known as breakfast clubs - or after school. Some operate during the school holidays (See 'Holiday playschemes/clubs' below).

Out-of-school services and kids' clubs may pick your child up from their school and take them to a club on their own premises. However, not all clubs offer this service and you will need to check if you have to make arrangements for having your children transported there. Alternatively the club may be situated on the school's grounds.

There will be a range of activities offered by the club, which may include outings. There will be different areas for the children to play or learn, usually including an outdoor area. Out-of-school clubs should have a policy of promoting integration. They should be able to meet the requirements of children who have special or additional needs.

It is a good idea to look into these services as early as possible because they often have waiting lists. Your Family Information Service (FIS) will have listings of out-of-school services.

Holiday playschemes/clubs

Holiday clubs offer similar services to out-of-school clubs, but run during the school holidays. Some can offer a full-day place, but some only operate on a part-time basis and will only be able to offer children care for the morning or afternoon.

For more information about holiday clubs, contact your Family Information Service (FIS) or 4Children on 020 7512 2112 www.4children.org.uk.

Many local authorities offer subsidised holiday schemes, but places often fill up very quickly. Some clubs may have an advance booking system that allows you to reserve a place for your child, but others will offer places on a first-come first-serve basis as soon as the holidays begin.

Nannies

Nannies are employed by you, as the parent, to care for your children at home and may be suitable if you need a more flexible childcare option. Although many nannies do have nursery nurse or childcare training, they are not required to hold qualifications. However, nannies can opt to register on the voluntary Ofsted Childcare Register.

Nannies who have registered have gone through similar checks as other registered providers and have qualifications and training. They will also be insured. You may feel more reassured employing a registered, rather than unregistered, nanny. However, even if a nanny is registered, it is still important to interview them and thoroughly check any references provided.

It is important to agree your nanny's responsibilities before they start working for you. You should also write up and agree a contract of employment detailing duties, pay, working hours and holidays.

How can I find a nanny?

Your local Family Information Service will have details of registered nannies. They can also be found through reputable nanny agencies. If you cannot find an Ofsted-registered nanny in your area, you could approach an unregistered one to see if they would be willing to apply to be registered. Nannies may be more willing to do this if you offer to pay for the registration. However, as nannies are able to terminate their contract at any time, you may end up paying registration fees for a nanny you do not employ long term.

How much will a nanny charge?

Wages will depend on factors such as whether you provide a room for them, the number of children you have, your children's ages, the average wages in your area, the hours of work and specific duties required. The average weekly wage for a daily nanny in London was £466 in 2009 and £380 in outer London (Nannytax, 2009)

In order to qualify for the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit or for employer-supported childcare, such as vouchers, your nanny must be registered.

As the nanny's employer, you are responsible for paying their tax and National Insurance Contributions. This can be done by the Revenue's Pay as You Earn (PAYE) scheme. You can contact your local tax office and the Revenue's Employers' Helpline on 0845 714 3143 for more information, details are available on their website www.hmrc.gov.uk.

Is a nanny the same as an au-pair?

Nannies and au-pairs are quite different. A nanny is an individual who is employed (often full time) to care for your children. They often have relevant childcare qualifications. Au-pairs are students, usually from within Europe, who are here to study and increase their knowledge of English. Au-pairs often do not have childcare experience or qualifications and should not be left in sole charge of children below the age of four. Au-pairs can work between 25–35 hours per week if they are from an European Union country. If they require a visa, they can only work for a maximum of 25 hours per week. All au-pairs must be able to attend their language/study lessons. They must also be provided with room and board.

For further information, see the 'Finding and choosing nannies' section of our website, www.daycaretrust.org.uk. It offers information about choosing a nanny, questions to ask at the interview, contracts and pay.

Your Family Information Service (FIS) will have listings of registered nannies.

Parent/carer and toddler groups

Parent/carer and toddler groups are not childcare. They are drop-in sessions for children and their carers. As parents stay with their children, these groups do not have to be registered. Your local Family Information Service may have listings of local groups. You can also check for information at your library, in local newspapers and on notice boards.

Activity-based care

Activity-based care - such as sports or leisure activities - does not need to be registered. However, activity-based care that is provided for a child for over two consecutive hours is eligible for registration on the voluntary Ofsted Childcare Register.

Childcare provided by a family member

When a family member cares for your child in your home, the care they provide does not need to be registered. A family member can include a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, or brother or sister.

Care provided by a family member does not qualify for financial help with childcare costs unless:

- your family member is a registered childcare provider;
- the care is not provided in your home; and,
- the care is provided to non-related children in addition to your child.

Childcare provided by a friend

If you have a friend who cares for your child as an occasional 'favour' rather than for payment, they do not need to be registered. However, if your friend looks after your child in their home and you pay for the childcare, they will need to be registered as a childminder. In this case, the care your friend provides would qualify for financial help.

Daycare Trust is the National Childcare Campaign. We have been working since 1986 to promote high quality affordable childcare for all.

If you have any questions about the information provided in this factsheet, or other questions about childcare, Daycare Trust's Information Line is available on **0845 872 6251**, alternatively you can email info@daycaretrust.org.uk. You can also access information on our website, www.daycaretrust.org.uk or www.payingforchildcare.org.uk.

The information in this factsheet refers to childcare in England. However, much of the information will be relevant throughout the UK. For further information specific to your area, contact your local information service in Northern Ireland, Scotland, or Wales via ChildcareLink on 0800 234 6346. The information contained in this factsheet provides general information only and was accurate at the time of publication. This information is not to be taken as legal advice. You are advised to seek independent advice if you need further assistance.