

CHILDCARE:
ready to
choose?

A guide for parents



One of the most important decisions you will make.

Parents choose childcare for a number of reasons, maybe you're looking for work, doing a training course, or taking some time for yourself.

Choosing childcare for your child can feel daunting. Whoever cares for your child will have a huge influence on them during the most impressionable years of their life.

The thought of handing over your child to a relative stranger is likely to make you feel a little anxious. However, high quality childcare will not only benefit children and help give them the best start in life, it will provide peace of mind. It will mean you can concentrate on work, studies, or time for you knowing your child is safe, and being well looked after.

There are lots of different types of childcare to choose from, and thousands of different childcare providers in the UK. The selection process can feel overwhelming, so this leaflet is designed to give you an overview of the options available; practical considerations; as well as the some questions to ask, so you can make an informed decision.

Make a start

One of the most important things to do is to start your search sooner rather than later. A lot of childcare providers have waiting lists, so don't leave it until the last minute to start researching your options.

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First impressions count for a lot, but before you even visit a setting you can do some background checks. All childcare providers in England have to, by law, be registered with Ofsted (reports.ofsted.gov.uk) or a childminder agency. By reading their latest inspection report you can get a good overview of their offering.

But only when you go and visit a setting can you truly get a feel for the quality of the childcare they offer. High quality childcare settings ensure that carers and children form strong bonds, that children feel safe and have opportunities to learn and develop through a range of varied activities.

Days are structured and children can enjoy nutritious food and lots of positive interactions from those who are caring for them. They will also have lots of ways to keep you involved in your child's progress – a daily update or a shared learning journal, for example, so you don't miss out on those important milestones. These are all key signs to look out for.

Types of childcare

There are broadly two different types of childcare. Home-based (domestic) childcare which includes registered childminders and nannies; and group-based (non-domestic) childcare which includes day nurseries, pre-schools and school nurseries. The type of childcare you choose is really down to individual preference; budget; how many days childcare you need; and your child's age and needs.

Home-based (domestic) childcare:

A registered childminder is self-employed and most work in their own home caring for other people's children. They care for small numbers of children, all year round, and will often care for a range of ages – from babies through to school children.

Childcare on domestic premises is where five or more people work together from a domestic setting. This could be, for example, five childminders, or three childminders and two assistants.

A nanny is employed to look after children in your own home. They care for the children within your household, usually siblings. They tend to look after all aspects of caring for your child including household chores such as laundry and food preparation.

Group-based (non-domestic) childcare:

A day nursery looks after children from 3 months to 5 years and tend to operate Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 6.00pm, but some have extended hours. They are generally open all year round.

A pre-school provides sessions for children between the ages of 2 and 5. Most offer either three-hour morning or afternoon sessions, and run term-time only, these are often in church halls.

A school nursery is attached to a school and usually accepts children from the age of 3. Nursery classes operate during school hours, term time only, with a session in the morning and a session in the afternoon.



➤ Childminders, day nurseries, pre-schools and nursery classes in England ALL have to be registered with Ofsted (or a childminder agency), and deliver the same Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework.

Doing your research

When it's time to start your search, think about the type of parent you are and what you want your children to get out of their time with a childcare provider.

What kind of experience do you want them to have?

- Do you prefer a personal, flexible, home-based approach, or a bigger setting?
- Think about the hours and days you need childcare for. Whether you work standard office hours or irregular shifts will have a big impact on your choices.
- Location is key. You will be spending a great deal of time travelling to and from the setting you choose, so it is important to get this aspect right.
- Start by searching online, you can easily find childcare providers in your area by going onto the early years page on your local authority website.
- Ask friends, neighbours and parents you know in the local area for recommendations. Personal experience will give you the best insight into what a setting is really like.
- Use your local Family Information Service which has details of all the local registered childcare providers. Read their Ofsted report and then make a shortlist of those you would like to visit. Find your local FIS at finder.familyandchildcaretrust.org

Asking the right questions

Next, draw up a shortlist of providers. Make initial enquiries as to their availability and make sure they are able to accommodate the days and times you need, before you go and see them.

When you arrange an appointment at the setting, it can be a good idea to take your child with you. Watch how the practitioner interacts with your child. Does the practitioner focus on your child? How do they engage with your child? Do they appear interested? Research shows that positive interactions between practitioners and children are at the heart of high quality care.

Prepare a list of things that you would like to find out. Try and find out as much background information as possible, such as, how long the setting has been registered, how many children are cared for, the ages of the children and opening times.



Potential questions to ask include

What is the cost of care?
What is included in fees and what isn't (e.g. are there extra costs for food, nappies, wipes etc)?

How do they ensure the safety of children in their care?

Does the setting offer government funded places?

Can they provide a copy of the mealtime and snack menus?

How is a child's learning and development supported?

What experience and qualifications do they have and what training is undertaken?

What is the typical daytime routine?

How is a child's progress recorded and how is information shared with parents?

Do they have access to outdoor space and do they arrange any outings?

How is children's behaviour understood and supported?

What is the setting's policy on illness?




If you hold strong views on any aspect of parenting, make sure you discuss with the setting. If your child has additional needs, suffers from a medical condition or an allergy or intolerance, you should ensure the setting understands their requirements and is able to cater for them.

When visiting a group setting, find out about their key worker system and ask about staff turnover and how they cover staff absence.

If you meet a childminder, find out about the other children in their care, their ages and if they manage school drop-offs and pick-ups at schools near you.

If you think a nanny will be the best option for you, you will effectively become their employer, so when you interview them you will need to talk them through your routine and requirements.



 If your child has additional needs ensure the setting is able to cater for them.

Support with childcare costs

The Government provides varying levels of funding to help parents and carers of children aged 9 months and above with childcare costs. To find out what childcare options are available and for more detailed information visit: childcarechoices.gov.uk

15 hours childcare

- Eligible children aged 9-months to 2-years-old with working parents may be entitled to 15 hours of funded childcare a week (term time).
- Each parent has to earn at least the equivalent of 16 hours on the national minimum wage per week on average.
- All 3- and 4-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours of funded childcare a week (term time)

30 hours childcare

- Eligible children aged 3- or 4-years-old with working parents may be entitled to 30 hours of funded childcare a week (term time).
- Each parent has to earn at least the equivalent of 16 hours on the national minimum wage per week on average.

Tax-free childcare

- Working parents can also access tax-free childcare. The government initiative means that you can pay up to £2,000 a year in childcare costs without paying tax, or £4,000 if the child is disabled.
- The scheme is for parents of children up until the age of 12.

Families receiving additional forms of government support may be eligible for 15 hours funded childcare for 2-year olds.

Have you thought about a childminder?

Registered childminders are able to support your child's learning and development in a home setting. They meet the same requirements for quality and procedures as group settings. There are lots of benefits of choosing a childminder to care for your child:

Personalised care

Childminders only look after small groups of children, so they are able to give a child the individual attention and secure attachment they need. Childminders, especially, make an ideal choice for young children. Research has shown that childminders have a particularly positive impact on young children's language and cognitive development.

Flexibility

Home-based childcare can often allow for early starts; school pick-up and drop-offs; trips to nursery, pre-school, toddler groups or soft play sessions; as well as overnight or emergency care and flexible sessions for shift workers.



Spontaneity

The small home-based setting means childminders can make the most of the weather with impromptu trips out. Plus, your child can enjoy real-life learning experiences like cooking, shopping, gardening and shared mealtimes.

A family environment

Because childminders care for mixed-age ranges, it means brothers and sisters can be cared for together, helping them create and maintain a strong sibling bond – making life easier for the whole family. Being with others of different ages also helps children learn to adapt when it comes to working and playing together.



Continuity

Childminders can often stay working with a family for years – looking after children from a young age, through to school years where they offer wraparound care before and after school. Providing childcare for such a long length of time allows for strong bonds to form between childminders and the children in their care.

Professionalism

To become registered, childminders must demonstrate they can deliver the EYFS; have an enhanced DBS check and undertake training, including paediatric first-aid. Then they will receive a home visit from an inspector before registration. Childminders must hold public liability insurance, be regularly inspected and take part in ongoing training. Coram PACEY offers membership to registered providers including childminders, helping them to provide the best standards of care and education to young children.



98% of childminders in England have a 'good' or 'outstanding' grade from Ofsted.

A parent perspective

“When I started my search for childcare, my priorities were to find someone experienced who would support my child’s development – physically and emotionally. I was keen to explore childminding as I knew I wanted my daughter to be in a home setting.

Once I found my childminder, I never looked back. It made returning to work so much easier finding someone I could trust. As a member of Coram PACEY, she takes her professional training and development very seriously and I have total faith in her professional knowledge as an early years expert. She has exceeded my expectations and I have always been so happy seeing my kids shine in her care. Her home is full of love, and her advice, empathy and flexibility has made a real difference to our lives.

Our childminder made a lasting impact on my children, they adore her, and they are more sociable. For that I feel incredibly fortunate and know I made the right decision.”

Emma Nugent

Mother to Rosa aged 6
and Katherine aged 2

A childminder perspective

“I love being a childminder for so many reasons. Its the little things that children do that melt my heart, putting their hands in mine , snuggling up to share a book, jumping in puddles together, the list is endless. Watching and helping the children grow and develop is a privilege and sharing special moments is just a joy.”

Belinda O'Hare
Childminder, Leeds

Annette Kingsley-Scott
Childminder, London

“The best part of being a childminder is nurturing and watching children as they grow, develop and flourish, knowing that I helped to enable each child's development and celebrate their achievements”


“I absolutely love what I do and I truly believe caring for children is my vocation. I just wish I had realised this earlier in my life and not wasted many years in unfulfilling roles. Being trusted to care for the children and watching them develop and grow is an absolute privilege.”



Amanda Calloway,
Childminder, Wales
Winner of Childminder
of the Year, 2024

CORAM PACEY (previously the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years)

Formed in 1977, we are a professional association dedicated to supporting home-based childcare professionals including childminders and nannies to provide high quality services, information and advice to children, their families and carers. We want all children to experience high quality childcare and early education, helping them to have a bright future.



For more
information
about PACEY go
to pacey.org.uk

High quality
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a bright future
for your child.