

# Childcare: make the right choice

A guide for parents



in association with

# One of the most important decisions you will make.

Choosing the right childcare for your child can be 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 little one 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 or studies, 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 right 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.

First impressions count for a lot, but before you even visit a setting you can do some background checks. All childcare providers have to, by law, be registered with Ofsted in England ([reports.ofsted.gov.uk](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk)). 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.

Start your  
search sooner  
rather  
than later.



## 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 works 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 four or more people work together from a domestic setting. This could be, for example, four childminders, or two 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 ALL have to be registered with Ofsted in England, and deliver the same Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum.**



## 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 at [searchchildcare.org.uk](https://searchchildcare.org.uk) – PACEY's childcare directory. There are many other websites to help you find childcare.
- 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.



## 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 childcarer interacts with your child. Does the childcare professional 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.

➤ **Start by searching online, you can easily find childcare providers in your area at [searchchildcare.org.uk](https://searchchildcare.org.uk)**

## 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?

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

What is the typical daytime routine?

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

What is the approach to discipline and how is a child's behaviour managed?

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

How is a child's learning and development supported?

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

What is the setting's policy on illness?

What is their procedure for giving medicine to a child?

Can they provide parent references?



If you hold strong views on any aspect of parenting, make sure that the setting mirrors your point of view. 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. For further information and guidance about interviewing, go to [searchchildcare.org.uk](https://searchchildcare.org.uk)

➤ 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 two and above with childcare costs. To find out what childcare options are available and for more detailed information visit: [childcarechoices.gov.uk](https://childcarechoices.gov.uk)

**15**  
hours  
childcare

When a child reaches age 2, they may be eligible for 15 hours of funded early education for 38 weeks of the year (term time), if parents already receive some level of support. But, all 3 and 4-year olds in England are entitled to these 15 hours each week, from the term after their 3rd birthday.

**30**  
hours  
childcare

If a child has working parents, they may be entitled to 30 hours of free childcare a week (term time). Each parent, or the sole parent in a single parent family, of a 3 or 4-year old has to at least earn the equivalent of 16 hours on the national minimum wage per week, but no more than £100,000 per year, to qualify. Parents can also split their funded hours allowance across more than one provider.

**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.



➤ The Government has also produced a simple calculator for parents so you can check what help you could get with childcare costs: [gov.uk/childcare-calculator](https://gov.uk/childcare-calculator)



## Have you thought about a childminder?

Registered childminders offer a high quality, home from home setting. They meet the same requirements for quality and procedures as group settings, and provide early education from the comfort of their own home.

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

➤ **92% 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 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



“Working in a home-based setting means we have small ratios between adults and children, which is really useful for children, as their passions and interests can be picked up, noticed and nurtured, and we have a meaningful connection. I think the start of life is fascinating and I became a childminder as I wanted to be part of making those early experiences as useful and as interesting as possible. It is a real honour, and very exciting to see how children progress and blossom, right in front of your eyes.”

**Maisie Collin**  
Finalist –  
Childminder  
of the Year,  
Nursery World  
Awards:



“I became a registered childminder seven years ago and since then I have never looked back, I can’t imagine not working with children and am incredibly proud of my job. The children in my care are a constant reminder of the importance of kindness, play and laughter and I pride myself on offering high quality childcare which provides the flexibility and support that parents and families need. As a childminder, each of the children in my care is treated as an individual and I aim to give all of them the best possible start in life, and to support every family on their journey in ensuring their child’s life-long happiness.”

**Rebecca Lihou**  
Winner – Childminder of the Year,  
Nursery World Awards:

➤ For more information  
about childcare and  
early learning resources go  
to [pacey.org.uk/parents](https://pacey.org.uk/parents)



## **PACEY is the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years.**

We are a charity dedicated to supporting everyone working in childcare and early years to provide high quality care and early learning for children and families.

By choosing a childcarer who is a member of PACEY, you can be sure that they've made a commitment to their professionalism and the quality of childcare they provide.

**High quality  
childcare can  
help you build a  
bright future for  
your child**

For more information about  
PACEY go to **[pacey.org.uk](https://pacey.org.uk)**

Start your childcare search  
at **[searchchildcare.org.uk](https://searchchildcare.org.uk)**  
the completely free childcare  
directory, provided by PACEY