

- ✓ Childminders, nannies and other home-based childcarers
- ✓ Day nurseries, nursery schools and classes, pre-school and playgroups
- ✓ Out-of-school care and Sure Start Children's Centres



# Making **childcare choices**

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department for  
education and skills

# AT A GLANCE



## Choosing the best childcare for you and your child

- Find out what childcare is available in your area.
- Choose from a range of options: from childminders, nursery schools, pre-schools and playgroups to out-of-school care.
- You can mix and match different types of childcare to suit your daily schedule, working hours, study or training.
- You may qualify for financial help to make childcare more affordable.

### Did you know?

Recent research has shown that good quality childcare and education help you give your child the best possible start in life.

# 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're struggling with this, you are not alone.

The good news is that there are plenty of different childcare options for you to choose from – whatever your set-up at home and financial situation. What's more, you may be able to get help to pay for them.

This booklet covers many aspects of childcare and will help you to:

- find out what childcare is available in your area
- work out what childcare best suits you, your family and your child
- ask the right questions when choosing a childcarer
- find out what financial support may be available
- talk to your employers about how they can help
- find more information (see the back page).

## Free part-time early education for all three and four-year-olds

All three and four-year-olds are entitled to free part-time early education, providing your child with two-and-a-half hours of early education a day, five days a week, 33 weeks a year. Available from the first nationally-prescribed term following your child's third birthday. Call ChildcareLink on freephone **0800 096 02 96** for the telephone number of your local Children's Information Service (CIS) to find out how and where to claim.

## 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.

### Find childcare in your area

Your local Children's Information Service (CIS) will have up-to-date lists of local and registered childcare and early years services. Call **ChildcareLink** on **freephone 0800 096 02 96** for the telephone number and address of your nearest CIS.

## Planning ahead

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 sorts 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 go for a second visit if you want to be sure it's right.

Once you have made your decision, make sure you are happy with all 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.

## Visiting tip

**When you visit, go when other children are there so you can see how they are being looked after and watch them play.**

### Did you know?

By 2008, at least 1,000 primary schools will offer 8am to 6pm wraparound care, up to 48 weeks a year.



# What are your childcare 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.

## Is a childminder the right choice for you?

A childminder could be the best bet if:

- your working day doesn't fit the 9–5, Monday to Friday pattern
- you have children of different ages and want them to be looked after together
- you find a childminder whose views on childcare are similar to your own
- you want the same childminder to look after your children over time
- you want your child to be cared for in a home environment by one person.

## Make sure your childminder:

- is registered with Ofsted
- has a public liability insurance certificate
- has a current first aid certificate
- has a safe home environment with plenty of opportunities for playing and learning
- has a car with properly fitted car seats if your child is travelling with them.

## Nannies and other home-based carers

You may decide that you want your child looked after in your own home. A nanny or other home-based carer can 'live in' or come to your home for set days and hours. It is your responsibility to conduct interviews and check references before you take someone on. Most nannies and some other home-based childcarers have a recognised childcare qualification or nursery nurse training, but this isn't compulsory.

Not all are inspected by Ofsted but they can apply to the new Childcare Approval Scheme under which they will have to meet basic criteria before being approved.

Thousands of parents are now entitled to financial support to help pay for childcarers if they are approved through the Childcare Approval Scheme.

You might be able to share a nanny with other parents, which spreads the cost too.

Au pairs are not registered or usually trained to work with children so are generally considered inappropriate to care for a young baby, but can be a good option when it comes to providing affordable after-school care.

Make sure your carer:

- knows how you feel about sleep, food, discipline and any other important issues
- has references from previous employers that you can check. You should call at least two previous employers, even if you've used an agency.

### Childcare Approval Scheme

For information on the **Childcare Approval Scheme** call **0845 767 8111** (calls are charged at the local rate or higher from a mobile or public phone) or visit **[www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk](http://www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk)**

## Day nurseries

### What do they offer?

Childcare and, in some cases, early education.

### Who are they for?

Children between the ages of six weeks and five years. Many also offer out-of-school care for five to 11-year-olds.

### When are they open?

Opening times tend to coincide with a standard working day, 8am to 6pm on weekdays.

### How much do they cost?

£114 to £197 for a full-time week but costs vary across the country, so it's best to check.

## Nursery schools and classes

### What do they offer?

Early education.

### Who are they for?

Children between the ages of three and five.

### When are they open?

During school hours, normally only in term time for full or half-day sessions.

### How much do they cost?

Free if part of a state education system (excluding meals and trips). £800 to £1,200 per term if private but it's best to check with the centre you're interested in.

### Visiting 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

### What do they offer?

Organised by community or voluntary groups, often with the help of parents, these usually offer some early education. They give your child access to different toys, equipment and activities, and make sure they mix with other children.

### Who are they for?

Children between two and five years.

### When are they open?

Sessions last between two-and-a-half to four hours and are either every day or several days a week, during term time.

### How much do they cost?

Around £3 to £5 per session.



## Out-of-school care

You can also find childcare in out-of-school clubs (sometimes known as kids' clubs) and through school-based care.

### What do they offer?

Clubs are open before and after school and all day during school holidays, providing a safe and enjoyable place to play and meet friends. Out-of-school clubs offer quiet space ideal for catching up with homework as well as plenty of fun activities and opportunities.

Many breakfast, after school and holiday play schemes are linked to schools. Some schools offer a variety of activities on top of the normal school day such as music, art, sport or additional study support. In coming years even more schools will be open outside the normal school day. Some will organise childcare themselves but others will work with local voluntary groups, private providers and childminders.

### Who is this type of care for?

Children between the ages of three to 14-years-old (and up to 16 for children with special needs).

### When is this available?

During the same hours as most people are at work, 8am to 6pm on weekdays, even during holidays.

### How much do they cost?

Between £5 to £10 a day for after-school clubs; £1 for breakfast clubs; around £15 a day or £75 a week for a holiday place.

### Extra help at school?

Your local Children's Information Service can provide more information about what's available in your area.

## Sure Start Children's Centres

Sure Start Children's Centres are new. They provide full daycare along with early education and health services for children under five. Many of them also offer support for families and information about jobs and further education for parents. There are over 270 centres in England already as part of a growing network and by 2010 there will be a centre in every community. They are open:

- 48 weeks a year
- five days a week
- ten hours a day.

Call your local Children's Information Service to see if there's a centre open in your area yet, or to find a suitable alternative.

## 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 worked out what financial help is available and the benefits you can claim.

All three and four-year-olds are entitled to **free part-time early education** which can mean a big saving for you.

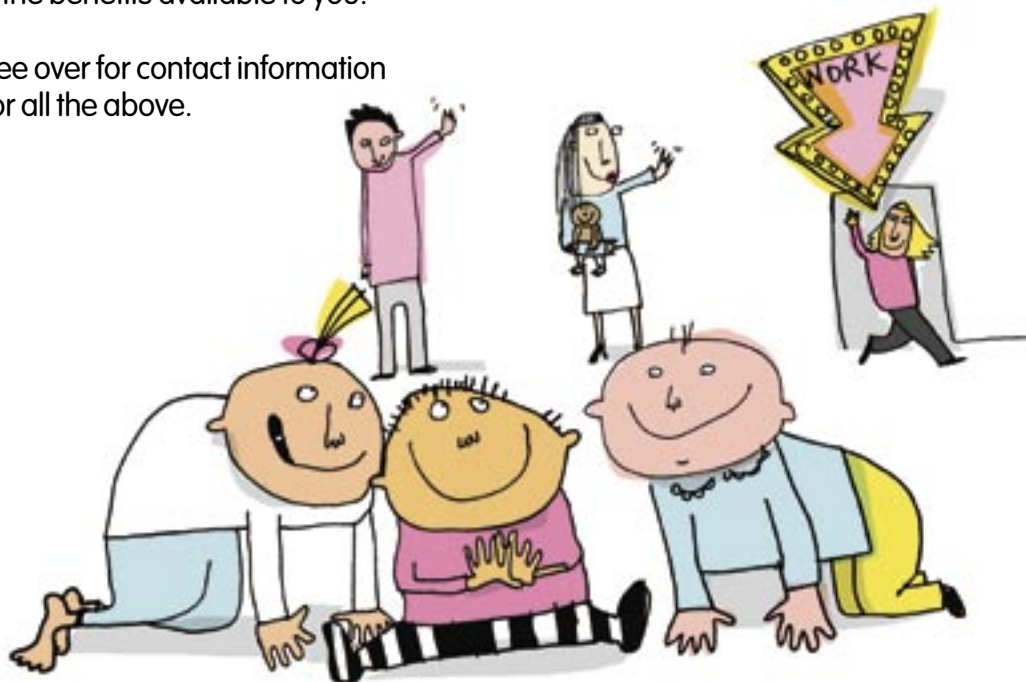
Nine out of 10 families can claim financial help through the **Child Tax Credit** and **Working Tax Credit** system. The amount they receive will depend on how much they earn and whether they are working or not.

Your employer can give you **childcare vouchers** that you can use to pay your childcare provider. You don't have to pay tax or National Insurance on the first £50 worth of vouchers you receive each week.

## More help with costs

- If you are a single parent and need help finding work, job training or childcare, the New Deal for Lone Parents could help.
- If you get pregnant, you can claim Statutory Maternity Pay or, if you are in the lower paid or self-employed group, Maternity Allowance. Don't forget to apply for Child Benefit when your baby is born.
- If you or your child is disabled, make sure you are claiming all the benefits available to you.

See over for contact information for all the above.



## Want to find out more?

Send for a **FREE** copy of the Sure Start 80-page **Looking for childcare** booklet, a comprehensive guide to childcare and early education options.

 **0845 60 222 60** and quote reference LEA-1252-2005.

 **ChildcareLink on freephone 0800 096 02 96** for the telephone number of your nearest **Children's Information Service (CIS)**. Your local CIS can provide you with information about childcare, early education and other services in your area. Also visit **[www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk)** and **[www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)**

For information on your entitlements and advice on how you could get help with the costs of childcare, call the Inland Revenue **Tax Credit helpline**:

 **0845 300 3900** or visit **[www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/taxcredits)**

For more information and a copy of the **Childcare Vouchers for Employees** factsheet:

 **020 7840 3350** or visit **[www.daycaretrust.org.uk](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk)**

For information and advice on employment rights, legislation and work/life balance:

 **08457 47 47 47** (ACAS helpline), or have a look at the information on **[www.dti.gov.uk/er/workingparents.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/workingparents.htm)**

For more information about **out-of-school care** and holiday schemes in your area:

 **020 7512 2100** or visit **[www.4children.org.uk](http://www.4children.org.uk)**

For information on a range of issues for working parents:

 **020 7253 7243** or visit **[www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)**

A special helpline is in place for **low-income families**:

 **0800 013 0313**

Read more about childcare options through Directgov:

**[www.direct.gov.uk/parents/childcare/fs/en](http://www.direct.gov.uk/parents/childcare/fs/en)**

For serious complaints and/or concerns about any registered childcare provision call the **Ofsted helpline**:

 **0845 601 4771** or visit **[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)**

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