



Care first

childcare

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Whether you are seeking childcare for the first time or wishing to improve your existing arrangements, this leaflet will help you through the process one step at a time.

You need to find a solution that not only fits with your practical circumstances but also feels safe and comfortable for you – enabling you to go to work with a clear mind.

Give yourself enough time, assume it will take six weeks from start to finish and keep your eye to the future – try to make arrangements which will continue to work over the coming years.



Contact details for any of the organisations mentioned in this leaflet are available from **Care first**.

The options

day nursery / nursery school

playgroup

school

after school club / homework club / breakfast club

holiday club / camp

childminder

nanny / nanny share

friend / relative / colleague



mother's help

workplace crèche

student / lodger

private pre-primary school

home alone

au pair

emergency cover

All three and four year olds are entitled to 15 hours of free early years education for 38 weeks of the year. This applies until they reach compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday). This is subject to change in accordance with Government policy, please check with Care first or for more information about free nursery education in your area, contact your Family Information Service (FIS). The FIS provides information, advice and assistance to parents and carers on the range of children, family and young people's services available in their area.

day nursery

Many run from birth to 5 years and open from 7am to 7pm five days a week, with meals included. Children who are ill have to be kept at home. There are strict rules on adult to child ratios depending on the age of the child. Some nurseries designate a 'keyworker' carer to each child. Ask the nursery any questions you feel appropriate, spend time there with your child to get a feel of the nursery environment and the interaction between staff and children.

- **Private nursery** – expensive but geared up for parents in full time work.
- **Local authority nursery** – run by the local authority. Places tend to be hard to get.
- **Community nursery** – worth investigating but may involve you in voluntary work.
- **Workplace crèche** – often subsidised by the employer, otherwise similar to a private day nursery.
- **Private pre-primary school** – often running from 3 years. Aimed more at providing part-time education than full time childcare.

playgroup/ parent toddler

Not a practical form of childcare for working parents, but a nice group activity for toddlers to visit with their carer. Sessions vary – around two hours. 3–5 year olds can be dropped off. All are registered.



school

When your child starts school, try to arrange time to drop off and collect them for the first few days, both to help your child's confidence and to make direct contact with the teachers and other parents (who could be vital for future reciprocal arrangements).

after school club

School clubs generally run from the end of school to 6pm, they may also have a before school session. Carers accompany children from school to the club. Most offer a snack and organized play and have quiet areas for homework. You pay, but it often depends on your income/circumstances. If your school does not have one, call 4Children's Information Helpline on 020 7512 2100 or look online at www.4children.org.uk. Ofsted registered if catering for under 8's. Secondary schools often have 'homework clubs' on site.

holiday clubs

Often run right through the holidays offering activities and supervision. Could be run by after school clubs, your local leisure centre or within a school. Older children might enjoy week-long camps and activity holidays. Ofsted registered if catering for under 8's.

holiday camps

Contact ISIS Education for a free Spring and Summer Schools Supplement and the British Activity Holiday Association for their guide.

childminder

Generally the cheapest option and often turns into a long term arrangement – from babyhood through to after-school play and holidays. Usually there will be other children for yours to play with and plenty of toys and games. Many childminders will drive or walk your child to a local playgroup and activities. Some have their own backup arrangements for illness and holidays. Spend time with and choose the one you feel comfortable with rather than the one with the tidiest house. Childminders have to be registered, check the maximum number of children allowed (www.ncma.org.uk). Many do reduced rates for siblings.

nanny	Expensive unless you have numerous children. May have qualifications, or could be untrained but experienced (cheaper). Live in or out and tailor their hours around your needs. Normally do child-related housework and laundry only. Will care for poorly children. Most drive and expect to take children to plenty of activities/parties. Hidden costs are high. Sharing a nanny can reduce the cost but creates other problems. There is no official register, it is essential to check references and qualifications carefully. You are responsible for tax and NI – Care first can advise.
au pair	Suitable if you have a spare room and English classes nearby. Au pairs are different from nannies. They usually work for 25-30 hours a week and are seen more as 'one of the family'. They receive their board and lodging, and in return receive "pocket money". This amount can vary depending on the circumstances, but an acceptable amount for an au pair to be paid would be £70-£90 per week. There are immigration rules to consider, depending on your au pair's country of origin. Some au pairs can only work for six months, although some can work for longer. You can find further information about employing au pairs on the Home Office website. Unless your au pair is registered with Ofsted as a home carer, you cannot receive financial help. For information about types of childcare that are eligible for financial support, see the national childcare charity "Daycare Trust's" parent factsheet, 'What are my childcare options?' in the 'Parent Information' section of their website. www.daycaretrust.org .
relative/friend	Can be the most flexible arrangement. Think through the relationship and discuss all pros and cons on both sides. Relatives/friends are often more willing to look after a sick child than a childminder or nursery and may be more tolerant of lateness. Are they really suitable? Perhaps just get a commitment for emergency cover.
student	For after school care and holiday time try a student nursery nurse or other student wanting work experience. Cost: based on au pair if living in, or mother's help if not. Unregistered.
home alone	It is prosecutable neglect to leave children who are under 12 at risk from burning. Err on the side of caution.



Finding each option

<p>childminder day nursery workplace crèche pre-primary school playgroup school after school club holiday club</p>	<p>As all of these are obliged to be registered with OFSTED, local lists are available free.</p> <p>Call Care first for your local area contact. You might want to consider the options in the area near your work as well.</p>
<p>nanny/nanny share au pair mother's help student/lodger</p>	<p>None of these are obliged to register with OFSTED, though you should ask whether they have CRB clearance (Criminal Records Bureau). You will find au pair agencies and nanny agencies (which also cover mother's helps), in the local directories and <i>The Lady</i> or <i>Nursery World</i> magazines or online at www.nurseryworld.co.uk. The National Childbirth Trust run a national nanny share register.</p> <p>Try advertising in local papers and on notice boards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• jobcentre• parish notice board• school• library• church• newsagent's window• childrens' shop• sports centre• supermarket• F.E. colleges with Nursery Nurses ExaminationBoard courses – your LEA has a list. <p>Checklist for ads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Ages of the children<input type="checkbox"/> Duties & hours of the job<input type="checkbox"/> Own car required/not required<input type="checkbox"/> Live in or out<input type="checkbox"/> Pay, net of tax<input type="checkbox"/> Smoking/non-smoking<input type="checkbox"/> Start date<input type="checkbox"/> Contact details – use a box number? <p>Be cautious about the information you give away on a public notice board or advertisement.</p>

Interviewing

It may be hard to decide which form of childcare is going to suit you best until you start interviewing – make sure you see at least three people. It can be useful to have your child present for part of the interview.

Be direct – you have every right to get a good insight into the person you are going to trust with your child. It is much better to get all the details clear than to assume too much.

Interview notes

Overleaf is a checklist of topics to cover with a potential carer, whether they will be someone working in your home or a childminder or nursery manager. Add your own points before the interview. You could photocopy the sheet and make notes. This can be a good basis for a written agreement.



If you interview on the carer's premises, also jot down your impressions. For example:

- clean and pleasant?
- you and your child felt welcome?
- the children present seemed happy, relaxed, busy?
- sensible safety precautions?
- fun/messy activities?
- somewhere quiet for children to rest?
- pets under control?

Registered childcare

Providers of child minding or day care services to under 8's are obliged to register with OFSTED. Registered facilities have annual checks to assess the safety and suitability of premises and equipment. The staff are checked regarding police records, health records and personal references. Check registration with OFSTED

Interview notes

Applicant's name and address:

Qualifications/registration (check):

Insurance (check):

Smoking:

First aid training certificate (check):

Days, Hours:

Flexibility on collection time?

Safety in the applicant's home (check):

Facilities for sleeping:

Toys/games/activities:

Outdoor play:

Reading/drawing:

Discussed attitudes towards –

fussy eaters:

toilet training:

discipline:

tv/video and computer games:

Rates of pay:

Payment time and method:

Overtime rates:

Holiday/Sick pay

Backup arrangements (illness):

After school/holiday arrangements (re: carer's own children):

Other children (carer's own or other charges):

Other adults in contact with your child:

Pets:

Driving – whose car:

Who to provide car seats:

Car insurance for work use (check):

Regular drop offs/collections:

School:

Parks:

Playgroups:

Swimming/clubs:

Shopping trips:

Previous jobs/children:

References (parents of at least two previous children):

Regular time to discuss progress:

Carer in your own home:

Household duties:

Use of telephone/other household facilities:

Visitors:

References

References are really important – be sure to speak to the referees on the phone or in person. People will often be much more honest in confidence than they would in a written reference which can be seen by the carer. Be wary of long gaps in employment or dates which don't tally.



Reassure the referee that the conversation is 'off the record' and that you will not repeat anything they tell you.

Points to cover:

- check dates against the facts given by the carer
- check that the job description also tallies
- how reliable – how many times were you let down?
- why did the relationship end and how?
- were there any occasions when they felt anxious about the quality of care?

Making the decision

You have done all the right things and asked all the right questions but you may still be uncertain which will be the best choice. Ask yourself five questions:

- convenient?
- reliable?
- fun for children?
- affordable?
- feels right?

Go with your instincts – if you don't trust the carer who looks great 'on paper', forget them and keep looking. It is not worth jumping at the first option – wait until you feel sure it is going to work.

Making it work

written agreement Have a written agreement with any carer. This needs to be a straightforward list of your expectations, including timings, costs, and 'what-ifs'.



The relationship

If you can keep your child's carer happy, it will make your life less stressful too. Things you can do to ease the relationship:

- avoid lateness and give good warning when it is unavoidable
- pay on time
- ask about their day – don't assume it was easier than yours
- report back nice comments made by your children
- give them credit for your child's progress
- take account of their own family ties

Money

- Check whether you can claim extra tax credits to help with childcare costs if you are eligible, so long as the childcare provider is registered, or meets certain requirements. Call Care first in confidence to work out what you are entitled to claim.
- Ask your employer whether they provide childcare vouchers.

Family Support

- Your local council may have details of organisations in your community that can give families and young people help and support.

Care first provides a full range of confidential support, advice and information services to staff of participating employers. Our Information Specialists provide information and support on consumer issues, employment, benefits, housing, taxes and education as well as debt counselling.



A wide range of printed material is available including the following booklets:

Bereavement Checklists of the practical matters that have to be dealt with when someone dies. There is also an outline of the 'normal' path of grief.

Childcare A practical guide to finding the right childcare for your family, covering the options, the help available and checklists for interviewing.

Dealing with Debt There is often more leeway than you think. A step by step guide to assessing your position, dealing with creditors and creating a workable solution.

Drinking Drinking may affect your job, family or friends; or all three. Use the scorecard to assess drinking habits; and find help if you or someone you know needs it.

Elderly Relatives An elderly relative can be a source of concern – information and advice on managing accommodation, finances and funding.

Family Breakdown Advice on the decision to separate, the practical implications for now and the future.

Discuss these or any other issues in confidence. Call **Care first** free on **0800 174319** to speak to a Counsellor or an Information Specialist.