

# Looking For Childcare?

## A Sure Start guide to help you make the right choices

### Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| How childcare and early education can help you and your child | 2         |
| Affordable childcare  | 3         |
| <b>Your choices</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| Childminders  | 6         |
| Nannies and other home-based childcarers                      | 8         |
| Day nurseries   | 11        |
| Nursery schools and classes                                   | 13        |
| Pre-schools or playgroups                                     | 15        |
| Sure Start Children's Centres                                 | 17        |
| School-based childcare  | 19        |
| <b>Choosing and arranging</b>                                 | <b>21</b> |
| Some do's and don't's of choosing and arranging childcare     | 22        |
| What to look out for  | 23        |
| Settling them in  | 25        |
| Learning as they grow   | 26        |
| Quality childcare   | 29        |
| If your child has a disability or special educational needs   | 34        |
| <b>How much will it cost?</b>                                 | <b>36</b> |
| Help with costs   | 37        |
| How much will it cost? A quick guide                          | 39        |
| <b>Balancing family and work</b>                              | <b>42</b> |
| Who gets what?  | 43        |
| Returning to work or study                                    | 45        |
| Flexible working  | 46        |
| Thinking about a job in childcare?                            | 47        |
| The future for Sure Start, childcare and early years          | 49        |
| <b>Where to find info</b>                                     | <b>50</b> |
| Contacts  | 50        |

## How childcare and early education can help you and your child

Nowadays there are so many different kinds of family, all with a variety of needs and demands on their time and income. You'll need to work out which is the best arrangement for you – from a personal point of view as well as a financial one.

### Benefits for you

- There are lots of different good quality childcare arrangements on offer which you can mix and match to suit your daily schedule, working hours, study or training. To help you make the right choice for you and your child, turn to **page 5**
- Flexible ways of working give you the chance to fit in childcare and studying, too (see **page 46**)
- There is also financial help from the Government to make childcare more affordable, regardless of whether you are working or not. See the 'Help with costs' section starting on **page 37** for what's available and how to claim it.
- You can use the free early education places to take a break, even if you are not working or training.

### Benefits for your child

- High quality childcare and early education gives your child a head start in primary school, as research shows that it improves their educational, emotional and social development.
- Children with experience of high quality childcare and early education do better in Key Stage 1 national assessments in English and mathematics and age seven.
- Children who attend a good quality setting are more likely to be able to concentrate and more sociable at the start of primary school.
- The benefits of part-time attendance are just as good as those for full-time attendance.
- Don't forget that regardless of the type of childcare you choose, what you do at home can make a real difference to your child's development. Along with good quality childcare and early education, you can support your child's development by:
  - reading to them
  - teaching songs and nursery rhymes
  - playing with letters and numbers
  - painting and drawing
  - taking them to the library
  - creating opportunities for them to play with friends at home

Visit [www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk) for more information about the benefits of quality childcare.

## Affordable childcare

**Before you start looking, it's easy to think "Forget childcare, I can't afford it". Many people think that good quality childcare and early education come with a hefty price tag and are only for the well-off. However, it's worth remembering that whatever your financial position, there are plenty of options. Most families are helped with the cost from the very start, and a growing number of employers provide childcare help (see page 37).**

There are benefits that, surprisingly, many working families in the UK don't claim because they just don't know about them or think they aren't eligible. Missing out on them can make a massive difference to your choices. For an essential list of what's on offer, whether you are entitled and how to claim, see **page 37**.

### Summary

#### **Get the tax credit you're entitled to**

Nine out of ten families are eligible for tax credits. The amount you receive depends on your circumstances and income, so it is important to call the Tax Credits Helpline on 0845 300 3900 to inform them of any changes. See also [www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits)

**Child Tax Credit (CTC)** Worth £44 weekly for one child and it goes up for more children. In general, families with income up to £58,000 (or £66,000 if there is at least one child under one year old) are eligible. The maximum CTC child element is over £33 a week for each child. There is extra help if you have a child with a disability.

**Working Tax Credit (WTC)** This is a top-up to wages/salary for those working on low to middle incomes. For full details of WTC see **page 37**.

**Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit** This is aimed at helping working parents cover childcare costs. From April 2006, you may be able to claim up to 80p for every £1 you pay for registered or approved childcare, up to certain limits. See **page 37** for full details of the Childcare Element of the WTC.

#### **For more info**

Call the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Tax Credit Helpline on 0845 300 3900. If you use a textphone, the number is 0845 300 3909. See also [www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits)

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

All three- and four-year-olds are entitled to a free part-time early education place. This means your child will be eligible for five two-and-a-half hour sessions of free early education a week for 33 weeks a year. From April 2006, the entitlement increased from 33 to 38 weeks a year.

The part-time, free early education places are available

- in school nursery classes
- in state or private nursery schools
- in day nurseries
- in playgroups and pre-schools
- with accredited childminders who are part of a quality assured network

For information on how to access your child's free early education place, including when your child will become eligible and the options available, please contact your local Children's Information Service (CIS) via ChildcareLink on 0800 096 02 96.

# Your choices

**Each type of childcare has its pros and cons, and you'll need to work out what suits you and your family needs best, based on work hours, budgets, etc. But the first step is to find out what's available near you.**

More and more services are providing more than just childcare – many offer a range of health, parental and family services too, in support of the whole local community. Your local Children's Information Service (CIS) can tell you what's available – you'll find one in your area. They hold up-to-date lists of the majority of local childcare and education services. Registered childcarers or places on the lists will be regularly checked by the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) so you can be sure of safety and standards (see **page 29**). As well as contact details, the CIS will provide you with useful information such as opening hours, age restrictions, parking facilities and costs.

## **For more info...**

Call ChildcareLink on 0800 096 02 96 for the telephone number of your local Children's Information Service (CIS) or visit [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk)

## **Contents for this section**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Childminders                             | 6  |
| Nannies and other home-based childcarers | 8  |
| Day nurseries                            | 11 |
| Nursery schools and classes              | 13 |
| Pre-school and playgroups                | 15 |
| Sure Start Children's Centres            | 17 |
| School-based childcare                   | 19 |

## Childminders

✓ **Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit**

✓ **Free Early Education Offer**

### The facts

- Registered childminders look after your child along with other children, usually in their own home.
- They are allowed to care for up to six children under the age of eight, including their own – but only three of them can be aged under five.
- Self-employed, they decide on working hours. Most are willing to work early morning, evenings and weekends, as well as part time.
- All childminder are required to have completed a basic training course, including first aid, and most go on to do further training and professional development.
- Your child should experience learning and development activities suitable for their age which are based on the Birth to Three Matters Framework and the Foundation Stage (see 'Learning as they grow' on **page 26**).

### How can I be sure of good quality care?

Childminders must be registered and inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, see **page 29**), who carry out regular checks on the home and childminder. What's more, all adults (16+) living and working in the childminder's home will be police checked. Not all have childcare qualifications. Once you've met and interviewed the childminder, you will get a feel for whether they are suitable for your children (see **page 23** for what to look out for).

### What will it cost me?

You will need to negotiate hours, terms and conditions with your childminder (see **page 24**). Rates vary from area to area and can cost you on average £2.80 an hour (£3.60 in London) per child. See **page 39** for comparative costs.

### Is it for me?

- I need flexible care because I work irregular hours which don't correspond to a normal 8am-6pm nursery day
- I want my child to be cared for in a family home
- I want my child to have one carer
- I have children of different ages and it's important they're cared for together
- I'm good at saying what I want
- Mixing with large groups of children isn't a priority right now

### Questions to ask your childminders

- How long have you been childminding?
- What extra training have you done?
- Why do you like this job?
- How long do you intend to do it for?

- What other children will be with my child, and how old are they?
- Can I have the phone numbers of other parents you work for so I can follow up references?
- Have you joined any quality assurance schemes?
- Do you belong to a childminder network?
- Do you charge for sick days?
- Ask to see if all the rooms in the house are clean and tidy.
- Where will your child sleep? Make sure is quiet.
- How do you spend the day and how do other children's schedules fit in with my child? Find out simple things, such as when she or he does shopping/banking/chores.
- Do you go out on day trips? Where to?
- Do you have properly fitted car seats?
- What kind of meals and drinks do you give the children?
- Do you keep a file about a child's progress?
- Will you agree to a trial run (say a couple of mornings) to see how it's going to work out? Most childminders will agree to this.

**Also remember...**

- Ask for the childcarer's up-to-date registration, public liability insurance and first aid certificate.
- Check all rooms and garden are insured, otherwise your child will be excluded from those areas.
- Who is coming and going? Ask how many other adults will be in the house.
- Agree on feeding, learning, TV watching and discipline policies.
- Any contract should cover hours, pay, sickness and holiday pay (see **page 24**).

**Your childminder can provide free, part-time early education if they are part of a quality-assured childminder network such as the NCMA Children Come First (CCF) network scheme.**

**For more info...**

Call ChildcareLink on 0800 096 02 96 for the telephone number of your local Children's Information Service (CIS) or visit [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk) – your CIS will have a list of childminders in your area

Or call the National Childminding Association (NCMA) on 0800 169 4486  
Or [www.ncma.org.uk](http://www.ncma.org.uk) for more information on childminder networks.

## **Nannies and other home-based carers**

### **✓ Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit**

#### **The facts**

- Nannies and other home-based childcarers are employed by you to provide care for children, usually in your home.
- They will fit in with unusual working hours, and work part-time or even live in. Some may agree to do additional jobs around the house (cooking, tidying etc.).
- Shared nannies work for you and another family.
- Most nannies and some other home-based childcarers have a recognised childcare qualification or nursery nurse training, but this isn't compulsory.
- Thousands of parents are now entitled to financial support to help pay for childcarers working in the child's home if they are approved through the Childcare Approval Scheme – see **page 32**.

#### **How can I be sure of good quality care?**

Nannies and childcarers working in the child's home are not normally inspected by Ofsted. However, the reassuring news is that nannies and other home-based childcarers can apply to the Childcare Approval Scheme (see **page 32** for details) and will have to meet basic criteria before being approved. Employing an approved carer under the scheme may enable you to take advantage of tax and National Insurance credits.

#### **What will it cost me?**

Wages range from £132 to £400 per week, depending on hours, their experience, where you live and whether they live in. You will also have to pay their tax and National Insurance contributions. Other costs include holiday and sick pay, a mobile phone for emergencies and putting them on your car insurance if you want them to drive the family car.

#### **Is it for me?**

- I need someone to fit around my routine and lifestyle
- I want a big say in how my child is cared for – what they do, when they sleep etc.
- I've got children of different ages to find care for – this way they can be together and it's less expensive
- My child will be happier in his own home (and own bed, if I'm late home etc.)
- I need someone full time, as my child isn't at school
- I'm happy to take on the legal and financial responsibility
- I'm happy with the idea of someone else living with us (and have the space)

#### **Questions to ask your nanny or home-based childcarer**

- What qualifications or training do you have?
- Have you been approved through the Childcare Approval Scheme?

- What kind of experience do you have?
- Why do you enjoy the job?
- Why do you want this particular job?
- How would you organise my child's day? And help them achieve developmental goals?
- Will you keep a food and day diary?
- Where would you take my child out?
- How do you feel about early starts/late finishes?
- Can you babysit in the evenings?
- What's your policy on potty training, feeding, teaching right from wrong?

**If living in:**

- How will you spend your days off? You should be clear about friends or partners staying over, issues like smoking and use of the telephone.

**Also remember...**

- Ask to see their first aid certificate (is it current?) and Childcare Approval Scheme letter.
- Put everything in writing (hours, job description, length of employment, sick/holiday pay etc. See **page 24**).
- You must take out employer's indemnity insurance in case of an accident.
- If choosing a nanny, always use a reputable nanny agency and check references. Talk to at least two previous employers.
- If your nanny lives in, you'll be expected to provide them with a room and food on top of their salary.

**Au pairs**

Au pairs are usually single young women (occasionally men) from overseas. They come to the UK to study English, live with a family and help out in the home for a maximum of five hours a day. In exchange, they must have two days off, and be provided with a weekly allowance (around £50), meals and their own room. 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.

**Find out more...**

For details of the Childcare Approval Scheme see **page 32** or visit [www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk](http://www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk)

Call the Tax Credits Helpline on 0845 300 3900 for information about tax credits if you employ an approved carer

Call the Working Families Helpline on 0800 013 0313 or visit [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

Call the National Childbirth Trust on 0870 444 8707 for local branches with a nanny-share register

Call the Professional Association of Nursery Nurses (PANN) on 01322 372 337 for a Nanny Pack

Read the 'Need A Nanny' guide:

[www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/parents/needananny](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/parents/needananny)

## Day nurseries

✓ **Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit**

✓ **Free Early Education Offer**

### The facts

- A day nursery provides care and education for children between the ages of six weeks and five years. (Many also offer out-of-school care for five- to eleven-year-olds.)
- Day nurseries can be run by the council, the community, based in the workplace or privately run.
- Opening times tend to coincide with a standard working day – 8am to 7pm weekdays, 50 weeks of the year. You can send your child full or part time.
- Your child should experience learning and development activities suitable for their age which are based on the Birth to Three Matters Framework and Foundation Stage (see 'Learning as they grow' on **page 26**).

### How can I be sure of good quality care?

Always use a registered day nursery to ensure they are regularly inspected by Ofsted (see **page 29**), but also to check that the free part-time early education is satisfactory. Children will be grouped together by age and looked after by carers according to specified staff/children ratios to help ensure your child gets the attention they need. The day nursery will have qualified staff and will usually take between 25 and 40 children.

### What will it cost me?

On average £197 (in London) and £148 (elsewhere) for a full-time week for children under two, but rates will vary across the country. Your local Children's Information Service will be able to give you up-to-date local costs.

### Is it for me?

- I feel happy leaving my child in a place where there are qualified staff
- I need somewhere open virtually all year
- My hours fit in with their opening times
- I need to know that there will always be someone to look after my child – if one carer is sick, another can cover
- I have emergency backup – ill children can't attend day nursery
- I want my child to have access to different toys, equipment and stimulation
- I think my child is ready for new experiences

### Questions to ask your day nursery

- What is the ratio of carers to children? Remember the rules: for under-twos, it's three children per carer; for two-year-olds, four children per carer and older children, eight children per carer
- What is the daily routine?
- Where will my child eat/play/nap?

**Ask a member of staff to walk you round, room by room.**

- Is it clean, light and big enough?
- Is there a safe and secure outdoor play area?
- Are the children well supervised?
- Do they look happy and purposeful?
- Is there a lot going on?
- Look for projects and drawings up on the walls. What about stimulating toys and books on show?
- Will your child be taken off the premises? Ask for examples of where.
- Are nutritious meals provided?
- Will you keep a daily record of what they've done?
- Do you offer school pick-ups and out-of-school care? Some nurseries will do this.
- Are there penalties if you're later to pick up your child?
- Are the security arrangements satisfactory?

**Also remember...**

- Be certain the day nursery has places for your child's age group. Some don't take children under two.
- Find out whether the nursery operates a key carer system – whereby each child is assigned a particular member of staff.
- Go back for a second 'viewing'. Do this at a different time of day to your first visit. Take your child with you to see how they get on with other children, staff and in the surroundings.
- Talk to other parents who use the nursery – ask their views on the provision.

**For more info...**

Contact your local Children's Information Service (via ChildcareLink on 0800 096 02 96) for a list of local day nurseries

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA): call 0870 774 4244 or visit [www.ndna.org.uk](http://www.ndna.org.uk)

Free part-time early education offer – see **page 3**

Tax credits information – see **page 37**

## Nursery schools and classes

✓ Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit

✓ Free Early Education Offer

### The facts

- Nursery schools and nursery classes provide early education and childcare for children between three and five years old (some will take children from two and a half).
- Some schools and classes are part of the state education system, others are run by private and voluntary sector organisations. They charge fees which vary across the country.
- Nursery schools are open during school hours, usually 9am to 3:30pm in term time for full or half-day sessions. Many have extended their provision to include daycare for working parents.
- Your child should experience learning and development activities suitable for their age which are based on the Birth to Three Matters Framework and Foundation Stage (see 'Learning as they grow' on **page 26**).
- Some may also offer out-of-school care before or after school during term time and in the school holidays.

### How can I be sure of good quality care?

All nursery schools and classes are regularly inspected by Ofsted (see **page 29**) to check that the early learning and care is satisfactory. The size of school or class will vary, but at least one carer should be allocated to every 13 children, and the team will include qualified teachers and nursery assistants.

### What will it cost me?

It's free if part of the state education system (except for meals and trips). Other nurseries are run by private and voluntary organisations and charge fees. Most offer free part-time early education places for eligible three- and four-year-olds. See **page 39** for an idea of costs.

### Is it for me?

- It's important to me that my child mixes with similar-aged kids
- I'm close to a state nursery school (so it's free)
- My hours fit around opening and term times
- I like the fact that my child will be taught by qualified teachers
- I'm looking for continuity of care
- I need to know there will always be someone to look after my child – if one carer is sick, another can cover
- I want my child to have access to different toys, equipment and stimulation
- I think my child is ready for new experiences

### **Questions to ask the nursery school**

Ask a member of staff as you walk around.

- Are the rooms clean, light and big enough?
- Do the children look happy and purposeful?
- Are toys/books/furniture well kept?

Ask a member of staff to talk you through a day/session.

- What kind of activities do you plan?
- Are there suitable sleeping arrangements?
- Are there opportunities for children to play outside?
- How many children will be the same age as my child?
- Are there any additional costs?
- How can I get involved?
- Where do they go (parks, swimming, for instance)?
- How can I make sure my child is settling in well?
- Will you keep a daily record of what they've done?
- Are the children well supervised?

### **Also remember...**

- See the nursery school when a session is in full swing. That way you'll get to see the setting and atmosphere first hand.
- Go back for a second viewing. Take your child with you to see how they get on with other children, staff and in the surroundings.
- Find out what sort of helpers the school employs and how much continuity of care there is. A rapid turnover of staff can be quite bewildering for small children.

### **Find out more...**

Contact your Children's Information Service (CIS) via ChildcareLink freephone 0800 096 02 96 for a list of local nursery schools, or the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA): 0870 774 4244 or visit [www.ndna.org.uk](http://www.ndna.org.uk)

Forum for maintained nursery schools and Sure Start Children's Centres:  
[www.early-education.org.uk/nsfnewhome.htm](http://www.early-education.org.uk/nsfnewhome.htm)

## **Pre-schools or playgroups**

✓ **Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit**

✓ **Free Early Education Offer**

### **The facts**

- Pre-schools or playgroups provide care and most also provide early education for children between three and five years old.
- A pre-school or playgroup is a group organised by the community or voluntary groups on a not-for-profit basis, often with help from parents.
- They offer sessions from two-and-a-half hours to four hours, during term time, either every day or on several days a week.
- Your child should experience learning and development activities suitable for their age which are based on the Birth to Three Matters Framework and Foundation Stage (see 'Learning as they grow' on **page 26**).
- Pre-schools are a good way of extending your childcare and some are developing their services to offer longer sessions or full-time daycare.

### **How can I be sure of good quality care?**

A registered pre-school or playgroup is regularly inspected by Ofsted (see **page 29**) to check on the quality of care and free part-time early education (if provided).

Most pre-schools or playgroups will provide places for between 24 and 28 children. There should be one member of staff for every eight children aged three to five.

Most staff are trained to work with children or are mid-training.

### **What will it cost me?**

£3 to £5 per session, but kept to a minimum. Some may ask you to pay for a block booking of half a term in advance. Costs will vary across the country. Your local Children's Information Service will be able to give you up-to-date local costs.

### **Is it for me?**

- My childminder can take my child to pre-school (they can supplement existing childcare arrangements)
- I think it's great that they'll mix and make friends with other children
- I don't want to leave my child for longer than I need to
- I've got the spare time, and want to get involved with the playgroup and help out
- I want my child to have access to different toys, equipment and stimulation
- My hours fit around opening and closing times
- I feel happy leaving my child in a place with there are trained professionals
- I need to know that there will always be someone to look after my child;

if one carer is sick, another can cover

### **Questions to ask the pre-school/playgroup**

- What qualifications do your staff hold?
- Can you talk me through the learning and developmental activities my child will take part in?
- How will I find out how well my child is settling in?
- Can I stay and join in at least two sessions to be sure this type of care is right for my child?
- How many children do you care for?
- Is the building/room safe and well kept (especially if it is used for other purposes e.g. a church hall)?
- Are there lots of toys and equipment?
- How much emphasis is on parental involvement and how can I get involved?
- How will outings be supervised?
- Will you keep a daily record of what they've done?
- Are the children well supervised?

### **Also remember...**

- Put your child's name down on a pre-school list ASAP to avoid delays – and disappointment. They are extremely popular.
- Make sure that the leader is suitably qualified. National Standards state they should have a level three qualification, plus trained staff.
- Check facilities are of a high standard. There should be a 'quiet time' area for sitting-down activities (such as playing with construction toys, puzzles, drawing and story times), an area for free play, and an area for more physical play like pram pushing.

### **For more info...**

Contact your Children's Information Service (CIS) via ChildcareLink (freephone 0800 096 02 96) for a list of local pre-schools or playgroups.

Call Pre-School Learning Alliance (PLA): 020 7833 0991 or visit [www.pre-school.org.uk](http://www.pre-school.org.uk)

## **Sure Start Children's Centres**

✓ **Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit**

✓ **Free Early Education Offer**

### **The facts**

- Sure Start Children's Centres are new. They provide a range of easily accessible and flexibly tailored services for families and children from pregnancy until the age of five. Their services include integrated early years provision and health services for children.
- They may also offer parenting education, family support services, outreach to parents, a base for childminders and links with Jobcentre Plus, Children's Information Services (CIS) and further education institutions too.
- They are open a minimum of 48 weeks a year, five days a week, ten hours a day.
- Many centres will be developed from Sure Start local programmes, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence Centres, Maintained Nursery Schools and health centres, and will involve private/voluntary provision.

A Sure Start Children's Centre usually serves a community with about 800 children under five years old. In rural areas with a more dispersed population, numbers may be smaller. Note: early years provision means early learning integrated with care.

### **How can I be sure of good quality care?**

All early years provision delivered in Sure Start Children's Centres will be registered, checked and inspected by Ofsted. Note: a centre might not have been inspected if only opened recently. You will need to check.

### **What will it cost me?**

All Sure Start Children's Centres will be run differently, so talk to staff. You will probably have to pay for childcare, but this will depend on your circumstances, for instance, whether you are working or are claiming state benefits.

### **Is it for me?**

- I work full time and need qualified staff I can trust
- I want my child to learn while being cared for (it'll give them a good start for school)
- I'm not working and want to meet other parents, carers and children
- I want to get health advice from people trained to help
- I want to find out more about training and job opportunities for the future
- I want just one place to go for all my childcare needs, advice and support

**By 2008, 2,500 Sure Start Children's Centres will be open, and by 2010 there will be one for every community.**

### **Questions to ask the Sure Start Children's Centre**

- How long has this centre been operating?
- What else does it offer beyond childcare?
- How many children is it registered to care for?
- What provisions are made for non-toilet trained children?
- Are safe, sanitary, hygienic conditions maintained?
- Are there both indoor and outdoor learning opportunities?
- Do I need to pay for any of the services?
- How can I get involved at the centre?
- Are the children well supervised?
- Can I talk to other parents or carers who use the centre regularly?

For more childcare questions, see the day nurseries section on **page 11**.

### **Who can use Sure Start Children's Centres?**

You are eligible to use a Sure Start Centre: if you are pregnant, a parent or carer of a child or children under five years old. The centre may provide adult education and employment advice. Contact your local Children's Information Service for details of a centre in your area and what it offers.

### **Also remember...**

- Ask about the child protection and health and safety policies and how everyone (staff, volunteers, parents and carers) is made aware of procedures.
- Check how staff are prepared for special needs. What happens in your child is ill (emergency procedure?) and do they hold up-to-date first aid certificates?
- Have a good look round the premises to check it is a safe and stimulating place to be.

### **Find out more...**

Call your local Children's Information Service via ChildcareLink on freephone **0800 096 02 96** to see if there's a Sure Start Centre open in your area yet, or a suitable alternative

For more details on Sure Start Centres visit [www.surestart.gov.uk/mag3](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/mag3)

## School-based care

### ✓ Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit

#### The facts

- Many schools provide access to a variety of activities beyond the school day. These can range from high quality childcare to activities such as music, art, sport or additional study support. As a result the school is often open from 8.00am to 6.00pm, all year round.
- Depending on the hours you work, you can opt for a combination of breakfast clubs (normally open from 8.00am), after-school clubs (typically from 3.30pm to 6.00 pm) and holiday play schemes (8.00am to 6.00pm) which run outside of term time.
- Sometimes referred to as out-of-school clubs, these services are based on school sites, but may also be in youth clubs, community centres or nurseries. Some schools organise the childcare themselves, but others will work with local voluntary groups, private providers and childminders, who will provide staff and sometimes facilities.
- The Government wants all schools to provide access to a menu of extended services by 2010 so that all children and parents across the country can benefit. High quality wraparound childcare, alongside other activities, will be provided on the school site or through other local providers, with supervised transport arrangements where appropriate, available 8.00am to 6.00pm, all year round.
- The Working Tax Credit childcare element is available for certain types of school-based childcare. For more information, phone the Tax Credit Helpline on 0845 300 3900 (textphone: 0845 300 3909).

#### Is it for me?

- I'm looking to bridge the awkward gap between school and work hours
- It's an affordable option for me
- My child will love the chance to play with new friends
- I want one 'drop off' and my child to be in a place he or she is used to
- I'm not covered during the holidays
- I have to be in work early

#### How can I be sure of good quality care?

All schools offering school-based childcare are registered and inspected by Ofsted, as are out-of-school clubs, if the children are under eight years old and if the club is open for more than two hours a day for six or more days in any year.

**TIP:** Clubs catering for eight years and over are not registered by many will be 'quality assured' by a scheme recognised by the Government. If registered, playworkers, and at least half of the staff will be trained/qualified.

#### What will it cost me?

The form of childcare being offered and funding in your local area will determine what it costs. On average, expect to pay from around £5-11 a day for an after-school club place, about £1 a day for a breakfast club, and around

£15 a day, or £75 a week, for a holiday place. Privately-run holiday play schemes cost more – around £150 a week.

### **Questions to ask about out-of-school childcare**

- What do the children do?
- Are there activities such as art, sports and music?
- How are they supervised?
- How much individual attention do they get?
- Do they offer homework facilities?
- Who is the leader, and what kind of qualifications and experience do they (and other staff) have? Arrange to meet and talk to them.
- Are the staff trained in first aid?
- Is there a separate section for younger children? Some can't cope being in a large group of older ones.
- What about a quiet area where all children can chill out?
- Can I see how the security and signing-in book works?
- If private, what are the arrangements for payment?

### **Find out more...**

Contact your local Children's Information Service via ChildcareLink on 0800 096 02 96, or contact the national organisation, 4Children on 020 7512 2100 – or by visiting: [www.4children.org.uk](http://www.4children.org.uk) for information on school-based care, out-of-school and holiday clubs in your area

# Choosing and arranging

**Finding the right type of childcare to suit you and your child is crucial, especially when there is so much to consider – what the place is like, will your child really like it there? There will be different options available in every year – what’s important is to give yourself plenty of time to research them.**

Draw up a list of all registered childcare from your Children’s Information Service (CIS) (see below) and have a list of questions ready to ask when you visit prospective childcarers – everything from opening hours to taking up references. Here are our tips to get you started, along with essential safety checks and how to make sure the transition for you and your little one goes smoothly.

## **For more info...**

Call ChildcareLink on 0800 096 02 96 for contact details of your local Children’s Information Service (CIS) who can provide a list of local and registered childcare services. Visit [www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/parents/lookingforchildcare](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/parents/lookingforchildcare) for copies of childcare and early education checklists

## **Contents for this section**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Some do’s and don’t’s of choosing and arranging childcare   | 22 |
| What to look out for/contracts and interviewing             | 23 |
| Settling them in  | 25 |
| Learning as they grow                                       | 26 |
| Quality childcare – your child’s safety                     | 29 |
| Quality childcare – Childcare Approval Scheme               | 32 |
| If your child has a disability or special educational needs | 34 |

## Some do's and don't's of choosing and arranging childcare

× **DON'T leave it until the last minute.** Even if you're not yet ready for childcare, give yourself plenty of time to make your choice. If it's popular, expect long waiting lists; interviewing a nanny or home carer can take months.

✓ **DO research the options.** Call your local Children's Information Service (CIS) for a list of registered childcare in your community – see opposite for contact details. Jot down basic requirements e.g. opening hours, costs, location, and make those your first questions when you phone around. You will immediately discount some of them.

✓ **DO think about your child's age and personality (see page 26).** This is particularly advisable when it comes to small babies and children under two, who need a close one-on-one relationship. You know your child best, so keep in mind your gut instinct, too.

✓ **DO shop around.** Aim to visit at least two or three places to meet the carer and compare what's on offer. Make a formal appointment when you see how the children behave, and take a list of prepared questions – see **page 23** for some examples. Where possible (for instance, at nurseries) drop in randomly to see exactly what you walk into.

× **DON'T rule out combining care.** If playgroups, nurseries, etc. can't offer you five-day-a-week care, think about merging your care e.g. nursery (two days) and childminder/shared nanny (three days).

✓ **DO check references.** This is vital. Most carers (including nurseries, pre-schools etc.) will be happy to give you names of other parents to speak to about their work, so take up references for peace of mind.

× **DON'T feel guilty about double checks.** Go back for a second or third look once you've narrowed down your choices. This gives you the time to confirm that they meet **all** your requirements. Some carers will agree to trial runs before a formal agreement, to see how it's going to work out.

✓ **DO get it all in writing once a decision has been made.** Nurseries will ask you to sign a contract/letter, outlining details such as costs, rules, hours, etc. Read it carefully before signing. You should provide contracts for childminders and nannies. See **page 24** for more on this.

### Finding childcare in your area...

Call ChildcareLink on freephone 0800 096 02 96 for the address and phone number of your local Children's Information Service (CIS), who have an up-to-date list of local and registered childcare services – or visit

[www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk)

## What to look out for

### Your checklist...

- **Qualifications**  
What training or experience does the carer/team have?
- **Environment**  
Is it secure, does it feel nurturing, are there pets, is it non-smoking? Enough space?
- **Diet**  
What's on the menu? Fresh fruit and veg? Access to water when they want it? Cater for special requirements?
- **Supervision**  
Who supervises and how? Staff-to-child ratio?
- **Emotional care**  
What are the routines? Difficult behaviour dealt with? There should be a written policy. Are staff warm, joining in, showing affection?
- **Equipment**  
Is it creative, varied, plentiful, of a high standard? Do displays show different cultures in a positive way? What about physical activities? Is there outside space, secure? If not, where will they play in fresh air?
- **Health habits**  
Are the toilets and basins clean, child-sized? And facilities for potty training/baby changing?
- **Expectations**  
Lay all yours out, such as your working hours, time-keeping, meal preparation, washing, baby sitting. Policy on late pick-ups?
- **Safety**  
What happens in the case of an emergency or accident? What safety procedures do they have in place?
- **Inspection reports**  
Is there a copy of the latest Ofsted inspection report?

## Contracts and interviewing

### What should be included in your contracts

#### If you're signing

- The retainer fee or deposit to secure your child's place
- The amount you pay and what it covers (e.g. nappies, food, days out)
- The hours/days your child will attend
- What you pay if your child or the carer is sick

#### If you're hiring

- A job description and hours of work
- Salary and agreed method of payment
- Length of employment (e.g. rolling 6-month contract) and notice period
- Details of sick/holiday pay/expenses
- Add personal additions such as limiting TV watching (e.g. not every day), no sugary treats or juices

#### For more info...

Call the National Childminding Association (NCMA) on 0800 169 4486 or visit [www.ncma.org.uk](http://www.ncma.org.uk)

Or call the Working Families helpline on 0800 013 0313 or visit [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk) for more contract info or legal advice

#### When interviewing and visiting...

Interviewing potential carers and visiting childcare centres is critical – it gives you the best idea of their parenting style, how they'd get on with your child and in what setting. We've outlined questions you should ask specific types of carers in the 'Your Choices' section, starting on **page 5**. see 'Your checklist' on **page 23** for some general areas to check and ask about.

## Settling them in

**Once you've gone for the childcare you want, you'll want to know how to get the best out of it. Your child will want to be eased into his or her new routine – and you'll want to get off on the right foot with your carer.**

Leaving your child with a carer is a big step for both you and your child. It will take time to adjust, but here's how you can help them through the jitters and feel more relaxed.

- Visit the new childcare facilities or home carer at least twice with your child. Before you go back to work, leave your child for 30 minutes while you stay in the background; later try 30 minutes while you walk round the block. Build up to one hour. Another option: start your care on a Wednesday so they don't have to start with a full week.
- Try to let the carer take charge and help your child so they get used to the face, the voice and the security.
- Prepare toddlers and older children for what to expect. For instance, some nurseries ask that children at appropriate ages can tie their own shoelaces and go to the toilet on their own etc.
- Until your child feels comfortable, get there with five minutes to spare. This gives you enough time to settle them into an activity.
- If you're dropping babies or small children off in another location, pack something they're attached to or recognise from home (a favourite toy or blanket).
- Don't be sad or look torn when you leave your child – they'll pick up on your mood. Keep it upbeat when the carer arrives ("Look who's here!"), always say goodbye rather than slip away (but don't linger). Be sure to remind toddlers you'll be back at a particular time.
- Make sure you provide your nanny with the facilities for learning and play e.g. paint, shape sorters, pens, books etc., to keep them busy and having fun.

### **For more info...**

[www.surestart.gov.uk/lookingforchildcare](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/lookingforchildcare) for copies of childcare and early education checklists

## Learning as they grow

Every parent knows that each child is unique and that he or she will develop at their own pace. It helps to consider carefully your child's age and stage of development when choosing the right care and learning setting for them.

Research shows that the years between birth and three are particularly important for your child because the experiences they have during this time will have an impact on their future.

### The step-by-step guide to how learning develops

**0-8 months:** During this time, young babies react to people and situations with their whole bodies. They're also observing and responding to their environment and communicating with those around them.

**8-18 months:** Babies' exploration of what's around them now becomes more purposeful. They're more mobile and their language is developing, so they can find out and understand more about their world.

**18-24 months:** At this stage, babies will be showing increased independence and clear pleasure in moving, communicating and learning through play.

**24-36 months:** Their competence at moving, talking and pretending is more and more evident, and they show increasing confidence in themselves and in making relationships.

### Birth to Three Matters

The years between birth and three are particularly important. Because many children now spend some time before the age of three with a carer, Sure Start has produced Birth to Three Matters as a guide to the way your child is cared for. It's not a curriculum, but just as important in helping your carer think about:

- your child
- your child's needs
- the things your child enjoys doing
- how they can ensure that your child's time in the childcare setting is happy and productive

If you're interested in reading more about your child's development, see Birth to Three Matters on the Sure Start website:

[www.surestart.gov.uk/resources/childcareworkers/birthtothreematters/](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/resources/childcareworkers/birthtothreematters/)

### Age three to five: the Foundation Stage

The Foundation Stage is the first part of the National Curriculum, focusing on the distinct needs of children aged three to the end of the reception year in primary school.

The Foundation Stage curriculum builds on a child's enjoyment of play – it's about learning through lots of stimulating activities. The Foundation Stage has

six areas of learning. Each area of learning contains a number of Early Learning Goals setting out what most children are expected to achieve by the end of the Foundation Stage. It also sets out stepping stones which help to show a child's progress towards the goals. For more information about the Foundation Stage, visit the Sure Start website:

[www.surestart.gov.uk/improvingquality/ensuringquality/foundationstage](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/improvingquality/ensuringquality/foundationstage)

### **The six areas of learning at the Foundation Stage are...**

1. Personal, social and emotional development
2. Communication, language and literacy
3. Mathematical development
4. Knowledge and understanding of the world
5. Physical development
6. Creative development

### **Remember!**

All three- and four-year-olds are entitled to free part-time early education (see **page 3**)

### **How parents can help with learning**

- Where parents and their early learning settings work closely together, children do better.
- You know your child better than anyone else so talking to your carer about what your child enjoys doing and their needs and strengths will boost all-round development.
- Talking to your carer about what they plan to do on a daily basis will help you track progress and play an active role in the home in ways that are fun.
- Early learning settings welcome your input and encourage parents to spend time in the setting, either on a regular basis or whenever they can.

### **The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**

The Government is currently developing a single integrated early education and childcare framework, which will ensure a consistent approach to care, learning and development from birth to the end of the Foundation Stage.

The framework will bring together the Birth to Three Matters Framework, the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage and elements of the national standards of for daycare and childminding. The EYFS will help raise the quality of provision and reduce the number of changes that children and families experience.

The content of the whole framework will be thoroughly consulted on in 2006. Early years providers will have a requirement to deliver the EYFS from 2008 onwards.

Further information on the EYFS can be found at [www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)

## Free books for babies and toddlers

Sponsored by Sure Start, Bookstart is a scheme that gives books to every baby and toddler born in the UK as a gift. So what's on offer?

- **Bookstart for babies** – a bag of baby books and nursery rhymes placemat, usually given out by a health visitor
- **Bookstart Plus** – books, crayons and a note pad encourage the first steps towards writing, and an invitation to join the library, for your 18-month old toddler
- **My Bookstart Treasure Chest** – a pack for three-year-olds, with hidden compartments for small toys and books, scribble pad, activity pad and much more

Parents and carers can contact their health visitor or local library to ask about Bookstart.

## Reading tips: how to help your child enjoy books

- Follow the words with your finger or let your child do it. This shows the child that the squiggly lines are important.
- Listen to your child, allow them to lead.
- Turn the book into a play by acting out the story using toys and props. Do they want to join in? Speak or sing in different voices to represent characters.
- Ask them about the story later and see what words they remember. If you talk and listen to them, they learn a lot more.
- Have a regular story time (say before bed) but add extra ones, maybe if friends come over.
- You can borrow lots of books from your local library. Libraries also hold story and rhyme sessions. Ask them for details.

### For more info...

For Birth to Three Matters, the pack for parents and support in the early learning years, visit

[www.surestart.gov.uk/resources/childcareworkers/birthtothreematters](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/resources/childcareworkers/birthtothreematters)

For an online guide to the curriculum for parents, a search of educational resources to help you and your child work together, and detailed info about many other areas of education, see [www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk)

## Quality childcare – your child’s safety

### Quality of childcare

**Top priority for any parent is to know their child is in safe hands. It’s the job of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) to register and inspect childminders, nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school and holiday clubs, as well as some nannies and crèches for children under eight.**

Fourteen national standards must be met relating to the suitability of the person, health and safety, equipment, and the care, learning and play that services deliver. Childcare services for children under eight are checked once by Ofsted before they are registered, and inspected regularly to ensure they maintain standards. Individual complaints may be made to Ofsted – and are followed up.

### Which providers are inspected?

- People who work as childminders or provide daycare for children under eight years old for more than two hours each day.
- Nursery education settings which are on the local authority’s directory to provide free places for three- to four-year-olds.
- Nannies who work for more than two families at the same time, but not nannies who are employed by one or two families to work in the family home.

You can read the service’s most recent Ofsted report for a better idea of checks made, but remember to make your own personal assessment of the quality (see **page 30**).

### Ensuring suitability

When registering a childcare provider, Ofsted checks that the person providing the care is suitable to do so. Ofsted carries out a series of checks, including:

- a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check
- a check with each social services department where a person has lived for the last five years
- a medical report from the person’s GP for childminders and managers of daycare
- references

Ofsted may also conduct any other checks they judge are necessary to determine whether or not the person is suitable, for example, checks with a health visitor, or with the probation service.

### Unregistered childcare

All registered providers have a certificate of registration which they are required to display in their setting. Parents may also contact Ofsted on 0845 640 4040 to check that providers are registered.

Not all provision needs to be registered – exceptions include services such as hotel babysitting and short-term occasional care, which includes childcare operating for less than six days in a year. Nannies who are employed by one or two families to work in the family home also do not need to be registered.

**If you are considering using unregistered childcare provision, you should check references and ask the provider what sort of checks they carry out on employees.**

Do they, for example, carry out a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check? This check helps the provider to decide whether the police and other records contain information which would make the applicant unsuitable to work with children.

### **6 things you can do to monitor your child's care**

**1. Talk to your child carer every day.** She or he needs to know about what's happening at home that might effect your child's needs during the day. You also need to know how your child's day went – what they ate, how well they slept etc. Ask your carer to keep an activities diary (sometimes known as a 'My Day' sheet) outlining the day.

**2. Keep saying what you expect.** Although certain requirements will have been agreed from the outset, new concerns will inevitably come up.

**3. Look out for changes in your child's behaviour or mood.** If they can talk, ask questions (what have they eaten, slept, done?). Early on, it's good to know the names of children and parents to know who they're talking about/playing with.

**4. Make occasional unexpected visits to the childcare centre or childminder's home,** or arrive early to see what's happening. Talk to other parents and neighbours.

**5. Ask to see a copy of the latest Ofsted inspection report every year for the service you are using.** Or visit [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) to view it online.

**6. Book time two months or so into a new arrangement** to discuss your child's progress/improvements/issues together.

**What if...** you're unhappy about a certain aspect of childcare?

- Make sure you raise this with the carer. A good childcarer is a professional, and generally they should really want to get it right.
- Think carefully about what's bothering you. Calmly explain why you are concerned, and allow your carer the time to respond.
- Suggest ways around the problem. Ask your carer for their advice on how to tackle it. Then agree on a plan of action.
- If the situation doesn't improve, or the carer hasn't made the changes that were agreed, ask to speak to the person in charge (if you haven't

already), check your notice period and start looking for alternative childcare.

- If you are concerned that a childcarer is not meeting the required standards, you can complain directly to Ofsted, and an inspector will investigate. Ofsted's complaints number is 0845 601 4771.

## Quality childcare – Childcare Approval Scheme

**More and more parents are looking for childcarers in their own home – particularly if awkward hours/shifts need to be covered, transport is a problem, or they have a child with disabilities or other special needs.**

The voluntary Childcare Approval Scheme applies to all childcare provided in the family home, and to childminders caring solely for children over the age of seven on other domestic premises.

For more information on the Childcare Approval Scheme call 0845 7678 111 (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)

### What does the scheme do?

- It verifies the childcarer has a childcare qualification (or has attended a relevant childcare induction course). See an up-to-date list of all acceptable childcare qualifications at [www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk](http://www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk)
- It guarantees that the childcarer is 18 or over, and has an appropriate first aid certificate which is no more than three years old at the time of application.
- It carries out a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check to ascertain that there is nothing in their background that makes them unsuitable to care for children.
- The scheme only applies to childcare provided in England.

### How does the scheme benefit me?

- It will help put your mind at rest. By using an approved carer, you'll know that they've been checked and have met the basic criteria.
- This means they're not unsuitable to work with children, have some understanding of their needs, and will know what to do in an emergency.
- Some working parents and disabled people who use an approved carer may be able to get financial support via the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, or employer-supported care, such as childcare vouchers or childcare places contracted by the employer (see **page 38**).
- It provides more affordable childcare that is available to parents when and where they need it.

### The checks you will still need to make

If he or she is allowed to work in the UK – ask them for evidence.

What age group the carer is best suited to. Take up references to see what previous experience they have.

Whether or not a childcarer will meet your personal requirements. This is your responsibility. See the section on nannies and other home-based childcarers

starting on **page 8** for an idea of the right questions to ask and checks to make to help work this out.

A guide for parents employing an approved childcarer is available from [www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk](http://www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk)

## If your child has a disability or special needs educational needs

All childcare providers must meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and make 'reasonable adjustments' to include disabled children. They must not treat a disabled child 'less favourably' than someone else for a reason related to their disability.

- Most early years settings/providers have a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) who will be able to discuss what's right for you and your child in that particular setting.
- The Early Support Programme is a Government initiative to improve services for disabled children and their families, especially those under the age of three. For an Early Support Family Pack, call DfES publications on 0845 60 222 60, quoting reference ESPP1. For more info, visit [www.earllysupport.org.uk](http://www.earllysupport.org.uk)
- Contact a Family is a voluntary organisation that provides information and support for families with disabled children. Their helpline may be able to put you in touch with other parents in your area (call 0808 808 3555).

### Funding

In addition to the financial help listed on **page 39**, don't forget a parent of a disabled child can also help pay for childcare costs via:

- Direct Payments are cash payments from your local authority for parents of disabled children to buy their own support or care. Call 0845 602 2262 for a copy of 'A Parent's Guide to Direct Payments'.
- Child Tax Credit can include additional amounts for disabled children. Working Tax Credit can include help with childcare costs. For advice or a claim form, call 0845 300 3900.
- Through the Childcare Approval Scheme, working parents may now be eligible for financial support to help pay for approved home-based childcare (**page 32**).
- Your Children's Information Service (CIS) may know of local arrangements to help cover childcare costs for disabled children (call 0800 096 02 96).

### Your child's needs: questions to ask

- What qualifications and/or training do staff have, and are they relevant to your child?
- Does your child need extra help – and are the staff willing for you (and/or a health professional if appropriate) to show them how to look after his or her needs?
- Are they ready and able to provide practical support (e.g. with personal care)? Is the building accessible?

- Are physical adaptations needed to the building?
- What equipment is essential?
- Are carers willing to be shown how to administer medicine? Do they have relevant insurance?

**For more info...**

ChildcareLink on 0800 096 02 96 for options, including childminders, nurseries, etc. who can provide good care for children with disabilities or special educational needs.

Your local Social Services departments for info on short breaks, Direct Payments, childcare for disabled children and play and leisure services for older disabled children.

Childcare providers can contact their local authority to find out about Sure Start funding to help with additional costs, staff training, and adapting facilities and premises (e.g. enabling wheelchair access).

Call Crossroads on 0845 450 0350 for information on how to find the right childcare, pay for additional support and who to turn to for help.

Call the Disability Rights Commission on 08457 622633 for guidance on legal requirements relating to childcare providers.

## How much will it cost?

**Paying for childcare for the first time can be quite daunting – you know you have options, but they all come at a price, right? That is where this next section can help. We compare the cost of all the different types of childcare, but as you read on you will also find information about the sources of financial help you can get towards the cost of it, including all-important tax credits which can make a real difference to your bank balance.**

### **For more info...**

Call the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Tax Credit Helpline on 0845 300 3900, or visit [www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits) for info on your entitlements and advice on how you could get help with the costs of childcare.

## Help with costs

**Paying for childcare can take a big chunk out of your household income. However, don't rule out any options until you've worked out what financial help is available. Also take into account any benefits you can claim – see page 43.**

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| For <b>three- and four-year-olds</b> | If your child is three or four years old they are entitled to a free part-time early education place from 1 September, 1 January or 1 April following their third birthday.  |
| For <b>single parents</b>            | If you need help finding work, job training or childcare, the New Deal for Lone Parents could help. Call 0800 868 868.   |
| For <b>special circumstances</b>     | Covering the day-to-day costs of disability: make sure you are claiming all the benefits to help you with the cost of everyday living. For more info on the Disability Living Allowance and other benefits call the Disability Benefits Helpline on 08457 123 456. |

### **Tax credits**

Nine out of ten families are eligible for financial help. As the award depends on a family's circumstances and income, it is important to inform the Tax Credit Office of any significant changes. So what do tax credits offer?

#### **Child Tax Credit**

Generally, families with income of up to £58,000 (or £66,000 if there is at least one child under a year old) are eligible. The maximum CTC child element is over £33 a week for each child. There is extra help if you have a child with a disability. CTC is paid directly into your bank account, in addition to Child Benefit. There are no work conditions.

#### **Working Tax Credit**

For people on low to middle incomes that can include help with childcare costs and extra amounts for disabled people. It is paid into your bank account.

#### **Childcare element of Working Tax Credit**

Extra help is available through a childcare element of the Working Tax Credit for working parents. It is aimed at helping working parents cover childcare costs. You can claim up to a maximum of 80p for every £1 you pay for registered or approved childcare up to certain limits. The limit is £175 a week for one child, and £300 for two or more. It's paid direct to the main carer in the family.

To be eligible:

- lone parents must work 16 hours or more a week
- a couple must both work 16 hours or more a week, or one partner must work 16 hours or more and the other is incapacitated, or in hospital or prison
- the child you are caring for is school-age or under

### **Disabled child's premium**

You may be eligible for the disabled child element of CTC; proof of eligibility is usually having the Disability Living Allowance. A growing number of employers provide their employees with some kind of childcare help.

### **Employer-supported childcare – the voucher scheme**

Further to the tax credits mentioned above, some employers give employees vouchers to pay for childcare. The vouchers are usually offered in place of part of your salary under a system known as 'salary sacrifice'. The first £55 per week of any voucher you receive is exempt from tax and National Insurance contributions provided it is used to pay for registered or approved childcare. For people who employ a childcarer in the family home, it is possible to receive these benefits if the nanny is approved under the Childcare Approval Scheme (CAS).

For more information, visit [www.daycaretrust.org.uk](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk) and for more information on the Childcare Approval Scheme, visit [www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk](http://www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk).

### **For more info...**

Call the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Tax Credit Helpline on 0845 300 3900, or visit [www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits) to find out if you're eligible for help

## How much will it cost?

These facts and figures give a general indication, but you will find costs vary across the country. We recommend you check these figures locally.

| Type of childcare or early education        | Where?                           | Age group | Cost   | Free early education offer?                     | Working Tax Credit* | Opening times  | Ofsted registered?   | Other advice  |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------|--|---|---------------------|--|--|---|
| Childminders<br>pg 6                        | Mostly in childminders' own home | Any       | On average £2.80 per hour per child, but anything between £2.50 and £7       | Yes, if part of an approved childminder network | ✓                   | Flexible, but most work between 8am and 6pm  | Yes, if they care for children under 8                             | The typical cost of a full-time place for a child under two is £132 a week. You'll need to negotiate hours, holiday pay and other terms and conditions set out in a contract            |
| Nannies and other home-based carers<br>pg 8 | In the family home               | Any       | The average rate varies between £2.50-£4.50 per hour per child               | No  | ✓                   | Flexible, can work part-time or even live in   | No, but they may be approved through the Childcare Approval Scheme | A full-time place varies between £132 to £400. You will have to pay tax and National Insurance as well. For advice contact HM Revenue and Customs' employers' helpline on 0845 6070 143 |
| Day nurseries<br>pg 11                      | Centre-based                     | 0-5 years | On average £148 per week but anything from £120 to £197 for a full-time week | Yes   | ✓                   | Usually 8:30am to 7pm weekdays, but can sometimes offer part-time, and early drops/late pick-ups | Yes  | If your child is three or four years old, fees may be reduced because they are eligible for a free part-time early education offer (see <b>page 3</b> )                                 |

\* Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit applicable in registered or approved childcare services – see **page 37**

| Type of childcare or early education   | Where?       | Age group | Cost  | Free early education offer?              | Working Tax Credit* | Opening times  | Ofsted registered? | Other advice   |
|--|--------------|-----------|---|--|---------------------|--|--------------------|--|
| Nursery schools<br>pg 13               | Centre-based | 2-5 years | Free if part of a state education system (bar meals and trips). Go private and costs are around £800 to £1,200 per term | Yes                                      | ✓                   | Usually 9am to 3:30pm, term-time only. Option to go part-time (morning or afternoon) is common | Yes                | You may need to pay for school-based nursery schools and nursery schools at fee-paying schools may charge a top-up for early education as well as care |
| Pre-schools and playgroups<br>pg 15    | Centre-based | 2-5 years | Around £3-£5 per session  | Yes, if registered for the time involved | ✓                   | Sessions from two-and-a-half to four hours, during term time, every day or several days a week | Yes                | Block bookings (e.g. half a term may need to be paid for in advance)   |
| Sure Start Children's Centres<br>pg 17 | Centre-based | 0-5 years | From £120 to £197 for a full-time week but will differ depending on circumstances                                       | Yes                                      | ✓                   | Open five days a week, 48 weeks a year   | Yes                | If centres have only just opened they may not have been inspected yet  |

\* Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit applicable in registered or approved childcare services – see **page 37**

| Type of childcare or early education | Where?       | Age group                             | Cost   | Free early education offer?                    | Working Tax Credit* | Opening times   | Ofsted registered?                              | Other advice  |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------|---|---|---|
| School-based care pg 19              | Centre-based | 5-11 years, up to 16 if special needs | Between £5 to £11 a day for after-school clubs; £1 for breakfast clubs; around £15 a day or £76 a week for a holiday place | Check with settings where 3-4 year olds attend | ✓                   | 3:30 to 6pm for after-school clubs; from 8am for breakfast clubs; 8:30am to 6pm for holiday clubs | Yes, if they care for children aged under eight | Holiday place costs may vary between £60 and £88 per week. Private out-of-school clubs may charge more. For instance, expect to pay around £150 a week for private holiday clubs. |

\* Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit applicable in registered or approved childcare services – see **page 37**

## Balancing family and work

Preparing to start a paid job or returning to work or study when you have a young family is a challenging time. Don't miss out on any of your entitlements (even if you're a working mum-to-be) or be afraid to ask your employer or college about childcare help they could offer. You have rights as a working parent – over the next few pages we'll fill you in. For instance, did you know it's your right to ask for flexible work options like term-time work or jobshare? It means you should find it easier to combine a happy family and working life. Here's how to go about it.

### For more info...

Visit [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk) or call 08457 47 47 47 for maternity and paternity rights, entitlements and booklets, or see the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) website on [www.dti.gov.uk/workingparents](http://www.dti.gov.uk/workingparents) for a range of information for working parents. Call the Know Your Rights Line on 0870 600 4882 or visit [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

### Contents for this section

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Who gets what?                                       | 43 |
| Returning to work or study                           | 45 |
| Flexible working                                     | 46 |
| Thinking about a job in childcare?                   | 47 |
| The future for Sure Start, childcare and early years | 49 |

## Who gets what?

**Don't miss out on the benefits you're entitled to when you're pregnant and a new parent. Some employers have their own, more generous policies.**

### **For mums-to-be**

As a pregnant employee, you can take paid time off for all antenatal appointments. Think your job may harm you or your baby? Talk to your employer immediately – if there is a risk, they must make changes to your existing job or offer you suitable alternative work, otherwise they will have to suspend you on full pay.

### **For mums**

From the day you start a job, you're entitled to 26 weeks of Ordinary Maternity Leave (OML), regardless of your position or hours. You have the right to return to the same job at the end, too. You may also be able to take Additional Maternity Leave, unpaid, for 26 weeks from the end of your OML.

You can claim Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) if you have been employed by the same employer since before you became pregnant and earn at least £84 a week (before tax). SMP provides 90% of your average earnings for six weeks, followed by £108.85 a week (or 90% of your earnings, whichever figure is less) for 20 weeks. Some employers do offer to top this up.

### **For lower-paid/self-employed mums**

If you cannot get SMP – for example, because you have changed employer since becoming pregnant, do not earn enough or are self-employed – you may be able to claim Maternity Allowance (MA). This is paid at £108.85 for 26 weeks, or 90% of your average weekly earnings, whichever is less. You must have been employed or self-employed for at least 26 weeks (not necessarily consecutively) in the 66 weeks before your baby is due, and earn at least £30 a week for 13 weeks (again, not necessarily consecutively).

### **For low income parents**

Receiving a low-income benefit or tax credit? You may be able to claim the Sure Start Maternity Grant (SSMG) – a one-off payment of £500.

### **For adoptive parents**

Up to one year's leave is available for an individual who adopts or one partner of a couple jointly adopting. The other partner can take paternity leave. Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP) may also be available while on adoption leave, broadly mirroring SMP and paid at the same flat rate – currently £108.85 – for 26 weeks.

### **For both parents**

If you've been in the same job for a year or more, both parents can take Parental Leave – 13 weeks leave per child, to be taken before the child's fifth birthday, usually in blocks of one week, up to a maximum of four weeks per year. If your child has a disability you will be entitled to 18 weeks leave to be taken by their eighteenth birthday.

The Government gives Child Benefit to all parents - £17.00 per week for the first child, £11.40 for each child after that.

**What about dads?**

You may be able to claim Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) if you have worked for the same employer since before your partner became pregnant and will still be in that job at the time of birth. It's paid at the same rate as SMP – currently £108.85 – and to be eligible, fathers need to earn at least £84 a week (before tax).

**For more info...**

Visit [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk) or ring 08457 47 47 47 to find out how to claim maternity and paternity rights.

See the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) website – [www.dti.gov.uk/er/workingparents.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/workingparents.htm) - for working parents information

Contact your local Jobcentre Plus office for a Sure Start Maternity Grant application form or Maternity Allowance Claim Pack

## Returning to work or study

**Holding down a full-time job, running a house and being a loving mum or dad – there are practical and emotional issues to deal with if you are planning to go back to work. Here’s some tips to help you find a happy balance.**

### How to prepare yourself for work

**“I’m thinking about going back to work and I’m worried how I’m going to manage it.”**

It’s advisable to sit down and chat through your situation with employers. You might need to negotiate new arrangements (see **page 46** for your right to ask for flexible ways of working). Don’t fall into the trap of making excuses, being embarrassed or feeling you’re letting work down when you rush off to sort the odd childcare problem – everyone has commitments outside work from time to time.

**“Will my employer help with childcare costs?”**

About one in ten employers provide some kind of childcare help to employees, such as childcare vouchers, subsidised workplace crèches and nurseries and provision of childcare from a third party. Just ask. But remember that if you accept any childcare support from your employer then you have not met these costs yourself and cannot claim help through tax credits on the same costs. It makes no difference if you receive the support from your employer as an additional perk or if your employer asks you to exchange part of your salary in return for the support. Some forms of employer support are exempt from tax and NICs if certain conditions are met, saving you and your employer money. See HMRC’s website at [www.hmrc.gov.uk/childcare](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/childcare) for more information.

**“What if I need time off in an emergency?”**

It’s bound to happen – your childcarer falls ill or there’s a problem at school you need to sort out. However, all employees have the right to take emergency leave at very short notice in a family crisis – as much as you need to deal with the emergency and put other care arrangements in place. For full details, contact the Acas helpline or website (see **page 44**). If you can, it’s a good idea to build up a list of possible childcarers to call on, or keep some holiday days at the ready to use in an emergency.

### At home tips

As a working parent, your time at home is precious. It sounds obvious, but simple time-saving measures can take the pressure off a hectic schedule. Plan your day, make a note of important dates, have a set time to do chores, and establish routines, such as getting yours and your child’s clothes ready the night before. If you have older children, ask them to help out around the house, and go easy on punishing yourself about standards of perfection – it will make life easier.

## Flexible working

### Who can apply?

Parents (including adoptive parents, guardians and foster carers) of children under six or disabled children up to the age of 18 can now apply for flexible working hours, including home working, once they have worked for their employer for six months. More than one million parents have asked to work flexibly since the law came into effect. Your boss has to listen and can only say “no” when there is a clear business reason, which he/she must provide in writing. The request has to be worded properly; forms are available from [www.dti.gov.uk/er/workingparents.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/workingparents.htm). You may also have other rights under the Sex Discrimination Act.

Check out the chart below to see if any of these flexi-options would work for you.

| Ways of working      | What this means   |
|----------------------|---|
| Part-time            | Anything less than the regular number of hours worked in a week, but you must not be treated any differently just because you work fewer hours than a comparable colleague doing the same work.                                       |
| Flexi-working        | You agree to work certain hours, known as core times (for instance, 10am-12pm and 2pm-4pm). But outside these hours, you can dip in and out as you please, clocking up a fixed amount of time and taking banked hours as flexi-leave. |
| Job sharing          | A job is split between two people. Income, benefits and pensions rights are also divided.   |
| Term-time working    | In a permanent full- or part-time job, you take unpaid leave during school holidays, spreading salary payments over the year so you still receive a regular wage packet.  |
| School hours working | You work during school hours, in order to be able to drop the children off and collect them.  |
| Staggered hours      | Instead of 9-5, what about 7-3, or 11-7? But if you work six hours or more, you must take a break of at least 20 minutes.   |
| Compressed hours     | You work more hours, fewer days of the week (e.g. four ten-hour days, four days a week, Fridays off).   |
| Working from home    | You swap the office desk to work at home, all or some days of the week, going in for meetings/catch-ups.  |

### For more info...

Visit [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) for more on employment rights

Visit [www.dti.gov.uk/er/workingparents.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/workingparents.htm), or call Working Families' free legal helpline on 0800 013 0313

## Thinking about a job in childcare

**Raising your children in a safe, healthy and happy environment is of utmost importance to you as a parent. But did you know there are also opportunities for you to work in childcare yourself?**

Many childcare jobs are ideal for parents. The benefits can include:

- a job with hours that fit around family life
- varied, fun and challenging work
- a career you can be proud of
- opportunities to gain training and qualifications

So why not consider a career in childcare yourself?

High quality childcare and education are in high demand in this country. That's why people like you – with commitment, energy and a caring nature – are needed to play a key role.

There is a wide range of career opportunities in the childcare sector. Jobs can vary widely in terms of venue, hours and the age of the children you are caring for.

Employers are looking for unqualified as well as qualified staff, and there is a range of on-the-job training available at all levels.

Here are some examples of jobs in childcare:

- Nursery nurse – you'll work as part of a team, planning and organising lots of play activities, helping children develop, building a relationship with their families.
- Pre-school worker – looking after children aged between two and five, you'll work in a pre-school or playgroup helping to stimulate a child's development before they start full-time education.
- Childminder – caring for children, usually in your own home. Doing creative activities with the children in your care, feeding and changing them, taking them out – ensuring they're happy and having fun (see **page 6** for facts about childminders).

### **Care to learn?**

If you are a teenage mum or dad aged between 16 and 19 and want to start or carry on with studying, how can you make it work? Thanks to the Care To Learn Scheme, your childcare and extra travel costs could be paid for. Call the helpline on 0845 600 2809 or visit [www.dfes.gov.uk/caretolearn/parents.cfm](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/caretolearn/parents.cfm) to see if Care to Learn can help you. You'll find real life stories, types of learning courses, FAQs and useful links.

### **For more info...**

If you are interested in a rewarding and flexible career in childcare, why not call the National Childcare Recruitment order line on 0800 996600 for a free information pack?

Alternatively, you can contact the Recruitment Team at your local authority. Their details can be found on [www.childcarecareers.gov.uk](http://www.childcarecareers.gov.uk). They can provide you with information and training opportunities in your area. An insider's view of what to expect and case studies of people who already work in this field are also on this website

## The future for Sure Start, childcare and early years

Over the past few years, the Government has greatly expanded childcare and early years services. All three- and four-year-olds are entitled to a free, part-time early education place; there are now over 1.2 million registered childcare places available; early education and childcare are increasingly available alongside a wide range of health and family support services; there is a Children's Information Service in every local authority providing up-to-date information on early education and childcare in their area; and there are national standards in place to ensure that the person looking after your child has been properly trained and checked.

**But there is still more to do.** The Government's Ten Year Childcare Strategy aims to make sure all children have the best start in life and to give parents more real choices in balancing work and family life. Plans include:

- **More time off with your baby in the first year:** paid maternity leave will increase to nine months by April 2007, and the Government aims to extend it to twelve months by 2010.
- **More Sure Start Children's Centres:** by 2008, every local authority will have at least one, and by 2010 every family with children under five will have access to Sure Start services.
- **More help with costs of childcare for many parents:** From April 2006, a parent could claim through the Working Tax Credit up to 80% of eligible childcare costs which is up to £175 a week for one child and £300 for two children or more. This means that a couple with a joint family income of £35,000 where both partners work 30 hours a week, with eligible childcare costs of £300 a week, will be entitled to a tax credit of £7,740 per year. If they had no childcare costs, their tax credit award would be £545 per year.
- **All primary and secondary schools** will offer childcare and supervised activities and homework clubs between 8am and 6pm by 2010.
- **In April 2006, free early education places for all three- and four-year-olds** were extended to a guaranteed 38 weeks of the year, and the hours per week will increase to 15 by 2010.
- **Reform of the regulation and inspection systems** will improve standards and give parents better information

The Government introduced a **Childcare Bill** in November 2005 to take forward, and give statutory force to, key commitments in the Ten Year Strategy.

**For more info...**

Visit [www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)

## Where to find info

Start by contacting your local Children's Information Service (CIS). There is a CIS in every local authority and each one holds a list of all the various local childcare and early education services available in your area. Their lists are regularly updated and the registered childcarers and places on them will be subject to regular checks by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) so you can be sure of safety and standards (see page 29). As well as contact details, your local CIS will provide you with useful information such as opening hours, age restrictions, parking facilities and costs – enough to get you started before you call direct.

### For more info...

Call ChildcareLink on 0800 096 02 96 for the phone number of your local Children's Information Service, or visit [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk)

Visit [www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk) for information on Government support for children, parents and communities. Visit [www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk) for information and advice about your child's learning and advice and support for parents. Visit [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) for an A-Z of information about central Government departments

## Contacts

There are lots of organisations ready to offer you information and answer specific questions about childcare and early education issues – online or at the end of the phone. Try these as starting points:

### **4Children (formerly Kids' Club Network)**

City Reach  
5 Greenwich View Place  
London  
E14 9NN  
Tel: 020 7512 2100  
Email: [info@4children.org.uk](mailto:info@4children.org.uk)  
[www.4children.org.uk](http://www.4children.org.uk)

### **Basic Skills**

[www.basic-skills.co.uk](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk)

### **Bookstart**

A national scheme offering free books to children.  
[www.bookstart.co.uk](http://www.bookstart.co.uk)

### **CAPT (Child Accident Prevention Trust)**

22-26 Farringdon Lane

London

EC1R 3AJ

Tel: 020 7608 3828

Email: [safe@capt.org.uk](mailto:safe@capt.org.uk)

[www.capt.org.uk](http://www.capt.org.uk)

### **Care to Learn**

If you are a student (under 19) you might get help paying for childcare.

Helpline: 0845 600 2809

[www.dfes.gov.uk/caretolearn/parents.cfm](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/caretolearn/parents.cfm)

### **Child Benefit Enquiry Line**

Tel: 0845 302 1444

[www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)

### **Childcare Approval Scheme**

Helpline: 0845 767 8111

[www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk](http://www.childcareapprovalscheme.co.uk)

### **Childcare Careers**

Information, advice and case studies on careers in childcare.

[www.childcarecareers.gov.uk](http://www.childcarecareers.gov.uk)

### **ChildcareLink**

Gives details on your local Children's Information Service (CIS), who provide a list of registered childcare in your area.

Tel: 0800 096 02 96

[www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk)

### **Children's Information Service (CIS)**

Based in the community, your local CIS has information on all local childcare, early education and other care and support services for children and parents. Call 0800 096 02 096 for your local CIS number or visit [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk)

### **Children in Scotland**

Information on services for children and their families in Scotland.

Tel: 0131 228 8484

Email: [info@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@childreninscotland.org.uk)

[www.childreninscotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk)

### **Children in Wales/Plant Yng Nghymru**

Information on services for children and their families in Wales.

Tel: 02920 342434

Email: [info@childreninwales.org.uk](mailto:info@childreninwales.org.uk)

[www.childreninwales.org.uk](http://www.childreninwales.org.uk)

**Citizens Advice Bureau**  
[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

**Contact a Family**

Supports families with disabled children.

Helpline: 0808 808 3555 – where you may be able to discuss your needs with other parents in your area.

**Crossroads**

Can provide advice and trained support workers if your child has complex needs.

Tel: 0845 450 0350

**Daycare Trust**

National childcare charity.

21 St George's Road

London

SE1 6ES

Tel: 020 7840 3350

Email: [info@daycaretrust.org.uk](mailto:info@daycaretrust.org.uk)

[www.daycaretrust.org.uk](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk)

**Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)**

[www.dti.gov.uk](http://www.dti.gov.uk)

A range of guidance on parental rights is available.

**DirectGov**

A-Z of central government.

Lots of information on parental employment rights and benefits.

[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

**Direct payments**

Tel: 08701 555 455 for a copy of 'A Parent's Guide to Direct Payments' (quoting reference 31762).

**Disability Benefits Helpline**

Tel: 08457 123 456

**Disability Rights Commission**

For detailed guidance on legal requirements.

Tel: 08457 622633

**Early Support Programme**

A Government initiative to improve services for disabled children and their families, especially those under the age of three. For an 'Early Support Family Pack' call 0845 60 222 60 and quote reference ESPP1.

[www.earlysupport.org.uk](http://www.earlysupport.org.uk)

**Early Years Equality**

Offers support for ethnic minority parents.

Tel: 0124 431 0569

Email: [info@earlyyearesequality.org](mailto:info@earlyyearesequality.org)

[www.earlyyearesequality.org](http://www.earlyyearesequality.org)

**Employment Agency Standards – Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)**

Free confidential complaints service about agency conduct. Investigates any complaints made by families or nannies.

1 Victoria Street

London

SW1H 0ET

Helpline: 0845 955 5105 (local call rates apply)

Email: [eas@dti.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:eas@dti.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.dti.gov.uk/er/agency-kyr.html](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/agency-kyr.html)

**Employment Opportunities Commission**

Advice on parental rights in the workplace.

Tel: 0845 601 5901

[www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk)

**Fathers Direct**

Useful information for dads.

[www.fathersdirect.com](http://www.fathersdirect.com)

**Forum for maintained nursery schools and Sure Start Children's Centres**

[www.early-education.org.uk/nsfnewhome.htm](http://www.early-education.org.uk/nsfnewhome.htm)

**Gingerbread**

Advice line freephone service.

Tel: 0800 018 4318

**Health**

Advice on health issues relating to under-fives.

[www.publications.doh.gov.uk/birthtofive](http://www.publications.doh.gov.uk/birthtofive)

**HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)**

For info on your tax credit entitlements.

Tax Credits Helpline: 0845 300 3900

[www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits)

**HomeDad**

Supports fathers who are staying at home to raise their children.

[www.homedad.org.uk](http://www.homedad.org.uk)

**Home Start**

Offers friendship, support and practical help to parents with young children.

[www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk)

**Jobcentre Plus**

[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

**Kidsactive**

Play and opportunity for disabled children.

6 Aztec Row

Berners Road

London

N1 0PW

Tel: 020 7359 3635

Email: [enquiries@kids.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@kids.org.uk)

[www.kids-online.org.uk](http://www.kids-online.org.uk)

**Know Your Rights**

For info on workplace issues call the Know Your Rights Line.

Tel: 0870 600 4882

[www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

**Learndirect**

[www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk)

**Maternity Grant**

Sure Start Maternity Grant.

Contact your local Jobcentre Plus for an application form.

**National Association of Toy & Leisure Libraries**

Tel: 020 7255 4600

Email: [admin@playmatters.co.uk](mailto:admin@playmatters.co.uk)

**National Childbirth Trust**

For info and support for pregnancy, birth and early years parenting.

Alexandra House

Oldham Terrace

London

W3 6NH

Enquiry Line: 0870 444 8707

Email: [enquiries@national-childbirth-trust.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@national-childbirth-trust.co.uk)

[www.nctpregnancyandbabycare.com](http://www.nctpregnancyandbabycare.com)

**National Childminding Association (NCMA)**

Information on choosing a childminder and drawing up contracts.

8 Masons Hill

Bromley

Kent

BR2 9EY

Tel: 0800 169 4486

[www.ncma.org.uk](http://www.ncma.org.uk)

**National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)**

For a list of day nurseries and tips on choosing childcare.

Oak House  
Woodvale Road  
Brighouse  
West Yorkshire  
HD6 4AB  
Tel: 0870 774 4244

**National Family & Parenting Institute (NFPI)**

430 Highgate Studios  
53-79 Highgate Road  
London  
NW5 1TL  
Tel: 020 7424 3460  
Email: [info@nfpi.org](mailto:info@nfpi.org)  
[www.nfpi.org](http://www.nfpi.org) or [www.e-parents.org](http://www.e-parents.org)

**NCH Action for Children**

Helpline: 0845 762 6579  
[www.nch.org.uk](http://www.nch.org.uk)

**NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)**

Helpline: 0845 800 5000  
[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

**Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)**

For serious complaints and/or concerns about any registered childcare provision.

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE  
Helpline: 0845 640 4040  
Inspection reports can be viewed on the Ofsted website:  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**One Parent Families**

Information and advice for parents bringing up children on their own.

Tel: 0800 018 5026  
[www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk](http://www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk)  
For local support groups, see Gingerbread.

**Parental Involvement**

Information on all aspects of parental involvement can be found on this site.

[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement)

### **ParentsCentre**

ParentsCentre is for all parents and carers who want to help their child or children learn. It is here to offer your support, information and advice about your child's learning and the English education system.

[www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk)

### **Parentline Plus**

A UK-registered charity which provides a free 24-hour helpline and offers support to anyone caring for a child.

Tel: 0808 800 2222

[www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

### **Parents Online**

Learn about your child's early education, interactive links and information about online safety.

[www.parents.org.uk](http://www.parents.org.uk)

### **Pre-School Learning Alliance**

For info on pre-school provision.

Tel: 020 7833 0991

[www.pre-school.org.uk](http://www.pre-school.org.uk)

### **Professional Association of Nursery Nurses (PANN)**

For an information pack on employing a nanny.

2 St James Court

Friars Gate

Derby

DE1 1BT

Tel: 01332 372 337

Email: [pann@pat.org.uk](mailto:pann@pat.org.uk)

[www.pat.org.uk](http://www.pat.org.uk)

### **Quality checks**

See Ofsted.

### **Read and Write Plus**

[www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus)

### **Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC)**

For information on all forms of childcare options and sample contract of employment for nannies.

36-38 Mortimer Street

London

W1W 7RG

Tel: 020 7462 3260

[www.rec.uk.com](http://www.rec.uk.com)

**Sure Start**

Information on Government support for children, parents and communities and details of local Sure Start settings.

Tel: 0870 000 2288

[www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)

**Tax Credit Helpline**

You might be able to get help with paying for childcare. Information on Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

Tel: Tax Credit helpline on 0845 300 3900

[www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits)

**TUC**

Free range of leaflets on workplace issues, including maternity rights. Know your rights helpline: 0870 600 4882

[www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

[www.worksmart.org.uk](http://www.worksmart.org.uk)

**Working Families**

Supports working parents and carers and offers free fact sheets on flexible working, maternity leave and childcare on their websites.

1-3 Berry Street

London

EC1V 0AA

Tel: 020 7253 7243

Email: [office@workingfamilies.org.uk](mailto:office@workingfamilies.org.uk)

Free legal helpline: 0800 013 0313 – for parents and carers

[www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)