

Childminding & daycare

"Andrew is 7, and I was very careful to visit and discuss his needs at the after-school club. It now means I can work a full day knowing his needs are being met and he is in a safe environment. He has made lots of new friends not just other kids but members of staff too. I can relax and get on with what I need to do... life is so much easier."

- All registered childcare in England must meet the National Care Standards set down by the DfES and be registered and inspected by OfSTED
- Childrens' information services hold lists of registered out-of-schools clubs, playgroups, childminders and children's leisure activities
- Talk to other parents. Personal recommendations are helpful, but you should take up at least two references
- Make a list of questions and take it with you when you visit each childcare centre
- Make sure the childcare provider knows how to contact you in an emergency and who you will allow to collect your child
- If you are considering a private foster carer, you must contact your local social services office

How do I make the right choice?

As a parent you are often the best judge of whether a childcare service will suit your child.

When you leave your child in the care of others, you might want to check that:

- Their needs are being met and respected.
- Their cultural background is recognised.
- They will be happy there.
- The atmosphere feels right.
- There is a settling in arrangement.
- A stable group of children attends so your child can make friends.
- Mealtimes are relaxed and fun.
- The outside area is well planned and spacious.
- Activities are varied and carefully planned.

Ensure that your child is left in secure premises and that well trained and experienced staff are caring for your child. You will also want the opportunity to get involved and know about what your child is doing day to day.

The main types of childcare available are:

Childminders look after children in the childminder's own home. They are registered with OFSTED and inspected every year. Childminders can often be flexible about the hours they work and they should provide your child with lots of care, fun and learning. Many childminders hold early year's qualifications. Some childminders provide an all year round service while others operate term time only.

Day nurseries are for the under 5s for the length of the working day. Local Authority, voluntary organisations, private companies, individuals, business or community groups might run them. They are registered and inspected by OfSTED.

Playgroups Preschools / Playgroups / Private Nurseries operate from a broad range of sites and generally cater for children from two and a half through to five years old. They provide early education and care and offer sessions of around two and a half hours at a time, but some are open for the whole day. Most pre-school and

WARNING SIGNS

Sometimes, children are not always able to tell you if something is wrong so note changes in their moods, behaviour and physical appearances.

ACTION

Speak promptly to the person in charge about concerns. If you have serious concerns about your child's safety, remove your child immediately and contact your local child protection team at your local social services department. Call the OfSTED complaint line.

WHAT TO SAY

Tell your child who will be looking after them, where they are going, how long for and whom they need to ask for their daily needs. Find out about what a typical day or session consists of. Be prepared and ask plenty of questions.

PREVENTION

Take up references from others who have used a particular childcare service. Look for trained and experienced staff. Visit the facilities and look for busy and relaxed children. Check how you will be informed about your child's progress and in case of emergency.

CONTACTS

- Children's Information Service (CIS)
0800 328 9148
- Early Years Service
01344 352202
- OfSTED Helpline
0845 601 4772

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playgroups open during term times in line with local schools. Staff undertake training and qualifications specifically to meet the needs of this particular age range.

Out-of-school clubs, or kids clubs, provide sessional play and care for school aged children from 3 upwards. There are breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday playschemes. Many clubs are sited on school grounds and offer wrap around care from 08:00 to 18:00. They are inspected by OfSTED once a year.

Early Education As a general rule, early years or nursery education takes place before children reach statutory school age. Early Years Education or the foundation stage is now recognised as part of the national curriculum and leads to key stage 1. All providers who are registered within the Early Years and Childcare Partnership are obliged to deliver a high quality programme of learning [curriculum] for the Foundation stage within the framework of the Early Learning Goals.

If your child is between 3 and 4 years old , they will be entitled to a free part time nursery place. Registered providers of Early Education include Pre-schools, Playgroups, Day nurseries, Network childminders and Maintained Nurseries. Contact Your Early Years Service for more information.

Private fostering is very different from the care provided by local councils through approved foster carers. It occurs when a child under 16 is cared for for more than 28 days by an adult who is not a close relative, by private arrangement between the parent and the carer. If you are thinking about placing your child with a private foster carer, or becoming a foster carer, the first thing you must do is contact your local social services area office. Social Services are required by law to approve such arrangements. The prospective foster carer will need as much information as possible about your child (including medical history) and Social Services can give you a form to help with this. As the birth parents, you retain full parental responsibility. You must remain in touch with the private foster carer and participate in all decision-making processes concerning your child's life.