

How do I choose a place for my child?

Choosing childcare is one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent. There are many types of childcare provision so you can choose an arrangement that is most likely to suit your child's personality, your parenting style and your family needs. Although parents do not have to send their child to any form of early years provision before statutory school age, good quality childcare and early years education is proven to help your child's personal, emotional and social and intellectual development.

You will need to apply to individual providers for information. Visit all the providers that interest you, if possible with your child. Choose a place that is right for your child. It should be a place where your child feels welcome, comfortable and safe. It should provide opportunities for your child to develop and learn in stimulating, varied and enjoyable ways.

You may find it helpful to consider the following questions:

- Are you and your child made to feel welcome and at ease?
- Do the children look safe, calm and happy?
- Does each child receive warm and individual attention?
- Do the adults listen and respond sensitively to each child at the child's level?
- Is there a good variety of clean, safe and well-maintained toys, books and play equipment for the children to use?
- Is there a wide range of stimulating and fun activities planned to help children learn and play? Do the activities take in to account each child's age, cultural background and special needs? Can children plan and choose some of these themselves? Are the staff members playing an active role in the children's activities?
- Are the children encouraged to think and talk? Do the staff help build up the children's self confidence and independence? Do the children have opportunities to make choices?
- Is there a quiet area available should your child wish to rest or have 'time-out'?
- Is there outdoor play available? If not, how will access to outdoor play be provided?
- How do children spend their time - what routines will they be expected to follow?
- What types of food and drinks are provided, and when? Is the food balanced and varied?
- Does the food take in to account different cultural backgrounds?
- Do the children enjoy mealtimes?
- Are the premises clean, well-kept and safe?
- What safety measures are in place to prevent the children leaving the premises unsupervised?
- Are there clear procedures for first aid, or emergency medical treatment?
- Do the staff carry out fire drills and maintain their fire equipment?
- How will the staff reach you in an emergency?
- Is there a procedure for ensuring that you, or a person appointed by you and known to the staff, can collect your child?
- What Early Years qualifications and training do the staff members hold?
- What is the ratio of adults to children?

- Will there be a regular time set aside for you to discuss the progress of your child? How will the staff share information regarding your child's well-being and progress? Will you have access to any records about your child?
- Does every child have someone who will take special responsibility for them?
- How is discipline handled?
- Are parents ideas for activities and arrangements welcomed? Is parental involvement encouraged?
- Will you be encouraged to stay with your child during the settling in stage?
- Most of all, do you feel the setting will meet the needs of your child?

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