












Childcare Checklist

Choosing the right childcare setting

Choosing the right kind of childcare setting can be a difficult decision but help is available. Altogether Better for Children, the Government's Early Years campaign has produced a Childcare Checklist that you might find helpful when choosing the type of childcare best suited to both you and your child. The best childcare settings expect questions and are happy to answer them.

-  Visit the nursery or children's centre to get a feel for the day-to-day routine, and take your child with you to see whether they like it too. Visit when it is in full flow and, if possible, make a return visit so you can see the setting at different times during the day and week
-  Does the nursery or children's centre have a friendly feel? Does it have plenty of space inside and outside? If there's no outside space where do children play in the fresh air?
-  Check the equipment and facilities on offer. Is there a variety of creative equipment, such as painting stations, sand pits and play areas? Are they kept at a high standard? Are the children's paintings and other work displayed on the walls? It's important your child is offered a number of creative and stimulating experiences throughout the day, within a friendly environment
-  Ask about safety. What happens in an emergency? What precautions have been put in place? Do they have finger guards on doors? Is it secure? Do they have visitor control systems in use? Your child's safety should be top priority
-  Check the number of staff. There should be at least one member of staff for every eight children between three and five-years-old. Will there be a key person with special responsibility for your child and who will you be able to talk with about how your child is getting along?
-  Take time to see whether the staff and children are talking and playing together. Are the staff questioning and responding to questions in a way that interests the children and are the children encouraged to ask questions of their own?
-  Ask about the latest Ofsted inspection or view it online at www.direct.gov.uk/doitonline. Also ask about the staff. Are they well trained? Do they have qualifications at the levels needed to best help children learn and develop at their own pace?
-  How do the staff deal with misbehaviour and homesickness? There should be a written policy in place so ask to see it
-  Talk to staff about their flexibility. Can they provide childcare that fits in with your work hours? Ask about costs. Ask about contracts. Do they charge for late pick-up?
-  Check what food is provided. Is there a healthy, balanced diet on offer? Is water available whenever children want it?
-  Find out about the financial help you can get. Working parents can get up to 80% of their costs back through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, when you use childcare that's registered or approved. Call the Tax Credits Hotline on 0845 300 3900 to find out what you can claim. And remember, if you have a child aged three or four-years-old, you are eligible for 12.5 hours of free early learning a week for 38 weeks of the year. For more information go to www.direct.gov.uk/earlylearning

And remember, not every nursery or children's centre will match your child's personality, so be prepared to look around. Don't get disheartened – there's a suitable childcare setting out there for you and your child.

You can get more information on choosing a childcare setting from your local Family Information Service. Find the one nearest to you by phoning 0800 234 6346 or visiting www.direct.gov.uk/childcare