

Guide to Choosing Childcare

Questions for Parents and Carers



**Childcare
Information
Service**

Guidance for choosing childcare

As a parent/carer, you'll be very aware of your child's needs. To help you make the right childcare choice, this booklet offers you some ideas on what to look for and what to ask when you visit potential settings. The term 'Setting' covers nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools, childminders and out of school childcare. Don't be afraid to ask whatever you need to know – childcare providers expect lots of questions!

Here are some general tips:

- Allow as much time as you can to choose childcare – plan ahead if you can.
- Always arrange to visit at a time when children will be present, for example if you are visiting a nursery, visit when things are in full swing. This really allows you to experience the setting and atmosphere first hand.
- Go back for a second viewing and take your child with you to see how they get on with other children, staff and how they feel in the surroundings.
- Ask other parents who have used the setting about their experience. The setting may be able to provide you with references from parents or names of parents who will be happy to speak to you.
- Aim to visit at least two or three settings to compare what's on offer.
- Take this booklet with you and jot down the answers to the questions you want to ask. This will help make sure you have all the answers you need when making a decision.

If your child has a special educational and/or additional need there are some further points to consider at the back of this booklet.

General Questions – make you own notes in the spaces

- Can I see a copy of your information for families please?
- What are your opening times and holiday dates?
- What happens if I am late?
- Can I make a same-day booking? If yes, is there a cut-off time and/or additional charge?
- How much will I have to pay? Do I have to pay a holiday retainer or deposit? How can I pay? (Direct Debit / Cheque / Cash? In advance / in arrears? Half-termly / Monthly / Weekly?)
- What happens if my child is sick or can't attend?
- What kinds of meals, drinks and snacks do you provide and please can I see the menus? (Look out for healthy food and drink options.) Can children choose what they want? Is drinking water available at all times?

- What are your emergency procedures? E.g. What happens if my child is ill? Do the staff have up to date First Aid certificates?
- Is there a medical room or quiet area?
- Please could I have copies of your policies on issues such as: Health and Safety; Safeguarding; Equalities; Safe Recruitment; Complaints and Behaviour Management?
- How many children do you have at any one time?
- Can children move freely around the setting?
- What is the adult:child ratio?
- Can children choose what they want to do?

The Setting

- What do you do to continually improve the quality of the childcare that you offer?

- Do you have a 'buddy system' / settling-in policy? (This is when an older child tells the new child about the setting and shows them around.)
- What activities are on offer to children and how are these activities planned to meet the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)? What play planning do you have for children?
- Could you show me the range of resources and equipment available both inside and outside please?
- How will you keep me informed about my child?
- How will my child be involved in planning activities?
- What information do you hold about the children in your care?
- What happens to this information when my child moves on?

Getting to know the staff

- What qualifications and experience does your staff group have? (You may want to ask about qualifications and/or training in areas relevant to your child.)

- What is your policy and practice for confidentiality and privacy?
- What do you do to manage behaviour? (If your child has particular behavioural support needs you may wish to discuss in detail how staff will best manage them.)
- How do you involve parents? What will you do if I am concerned about my child or the care that they receive while they are with you?
- What would staff do if they had concerns about my child's welfare?
- Do you operate a key person scheme?

Environment – Indoors and Out

- Is it welcoming, friendly and stimulating?
- Is there enough space for my child to be active both indoors and outdoors?
- Are there places where my child can rest?

- Is it safe, clean and secure?

- Can you see staff listening, talking and interacting appropriately with the children and with each other?

Further information for parents or carers whose child has a special educational and/or additional need:

If your child has a special educational and/or additional need there may be some extra points to consider and discuss when visiting a setting.

It is really important to be open with the setting from the start. Giving them all the relevant information about your child will help them to meet his/her individual needs more effectively. Your child will then settle better and you will feel more confident.

Examples of the sort of information the setting will need:

- Details about your child's needs - for example, do they need support for intimate care, feeding, moving and handling etc.?
- Do they need any specialist equipment, for example cups, crockery, hoists, hygiene suit, etc?
- Your child's medical needs (including any medication they take).
- The names and contact details of all professionals who work with your child, including the school they attend.

To help you cover some of the key areas that you'll want to know about, here are some extra questions:

- Who is the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo)?
- Is it possible to meet the SENCo today/when I visit?
- How will I be able to set up meetings/talk to the SENCo?
- Please could I have a copy of your Special Educational Needs policy?
- Are there any other children with similar needs at the setting?
- Is it possible to have extra staff to support my child?
- How will you meet my child's individual needs?
- Will staff be trained to meet my child's needs?

- My child takes regular medication, are you able to administer this? If not, what arrangements will I have to make?
- Is there a system/room for children to rest/calm down/have a 'time out' as part of their behavioural management?
- Is the building accessible to my child? E.g. Is there wheelchair access throughout the setting, wide doors, ramps and toilets?
- How will you cater for my child's special diet?

Other things to consider

- Did the setting welcome your questions?
- Were they enthusiastic about your child attending their setting?
- Did they appear to value your knowledge of your child?

Help With Paying for Childcare

Possible sources of help towards the cost of childcare available to parents/carers are listed below. The Childcare Information Service can provide detailed information on 0845 04 54 014.

Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work: This supports certain adults (aged 20 years and over) by paying for childcare and travel costs while they are undertaking training or learning leading to work. Household income is assessed.

Employer supported childcare: If you are working and pay for childcare your employer may be able to help you with some of your childcare costs. This could be through vouchers, directly contracted childcare or providing workplace childcare.

Tax Credits: These are payments from the government. You may qualify as follows:

- **Child Tax Credit:** If you have at least one child who normally lives with you.
- **Working Tax Credit:** If you work a certain number of hours, but earn low wages.
- **Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit:** If you use registered childcare.

Free places: Three and four year olds are entitled to 12½ hours of free early learning and childcare per week (15 from September 2010) for a certain number of weeks per year. This is sometimes referred to as Nursery Education Funding. Some two-year-olds are also entitled to a free place.

Care to Learn: If you're a young parent (under 20) Care to Learn can help pay for your childcare and related travel costs while you are learning.

More details from Childcare Information Service **0845 04 54 014**.

Your notes:



Cambridgeshire Childcare Information Service

If you need more help to find suitable childcare or have any other queries, please contact **The Childcare Information Service**. We provide information about all types of childcare, activities and services in your area, as well as information on how to pay for childcare.

Our helpline is open 8.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday. We provide an out of hours answer service and our aim is to respond to all enquiries within 24 hours of receipt.

Phone: 0845 04 54 014

Email: info@opp-links.org.uk

Fax: 01223 500281

Web: www.opportunity-links.org.uk

Compliments, Complaints and Suggestions

We value all comments from our customers and use them to improve our service. All complaints are taken very seriously and will be dealt with promptly. Please contact us directly if you wish to discuss the service you have received.

Working in partnership:



If you would like a copy of the text of this booklet in another language or an alternative format, please contact 01954 273360 or eycinfo@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

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