

Choosing childcare



Family Information Service
01905 790 560

There are many different types of childcare available. You will want to choose a childcare provider (the person or group that will care for your child) that is suited to you and your child's needs. This leaflet helps explain your options and gives you information on things to consider when choosing childcare.

Remember, you need to feel confident about the childcare you are using. Find out as much as you can and follow your feelings!

Children with additional needs

All parents should be able to access childcare that meets the individual needs of their children. Children with additional needs and/or disabilities should, wherever possible, be included in mainstream childcare. Childcare providers can access a range of support to help include children with additional needs. The Family Information Service can help parents to find a suitable place and tell you more about the support that is available.

Ofsted Early Years Register

Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education) is responsible for regulating and inspecting childcare and education in England. Most childcare providers who care for children aged 0 to 5 years are required to join the Ofsted Early Years Register. Those who are not required to register may instead join the Ofsted Childcare Register on a voluntary basis (see opposite). Ofsted will inspect all childcare providers on the Early Years Register and you can ask to see a copy of their inspection report or find them online at www.ofsted.gov.uk



Ofsted Childcare Register – compulsory and voluntary registration

Most childcare providers who look after children aged five to seven are required to join the Ofsted Childcare Register. In addition, many childcare providers who do not have to register with Ofsted may choose to join the Childcare Register on a voluntary basis. This includes:

- Childcare providers who work in the child's own home, such as nannies, au pairs and babysitters
- Activity based clubs/holiday schemes e.g. sports or crafts
- Childcare providers offering care to individual children for less than two hours per day
- Childcare providers only offering care to children aged eight years and over.

Childcare providers who join the Ofsted Childcare Register, whether on a compulsory or voluntary basis, will be checked through random inspections.

Childcare provided by schools

Some schools run their own childcare on the school premises, such as pre-schools, out-of-school clubs or wrap-around care*. If caring for children aged 0 to 3, the childcare provider will be registered on the Ofsted Early Years Register. Any other childcare run by the school on school premises will be registered and inspected as part of the school's Ofsted registration.

*Wrap-around care is the provision of care before and/or after an early years education place.

Financial assistance

There is a wide range of financial assistance available to help with the cost of eligible childcare,* including tax credits and employer supported childcare vouchers. In addition, all three and four year olds in Worcestershire are entitled to 15 hours of early education each week, for 38 weeks of the year, free of charge.

*Eligible childcare must be either registered with Ofsted (including voluntary registration) or run by schools on school premises.

For more information on financial assistance, please contact the Family Information Service on 01905 790560.

Childcare options

Childminders:

- Care for children from birth upwards, in the childminder's home
- Look after a maximum of six children under eight years, with usually only one child under one year
- May offer before/after school care for school aged children
- May offer free early education places for three and four year olds if part of a network and accredited
- May offer flexible hours.

Day nurseries:

- Care for children from birth upwards
- May be on non-domestic premises, or domestic premises where the nursery owner lives on site
- May offer before/after school care for school aged children
- May offer free early education places for three and four year olds
- Have fixed opening times, usually opening all day, all year.

Pre-schools/playgroups:

- Offer part-time care for children aged two to five years
- May offer free places for three and four year olds
- Have fixed opening times, usually morning or afternoon sessions, term time only. Some may offer extended hours.

Local authority nursery classes:

- Offer free early education places for three and four year olds
- Are usually on school sites
- Have a qualified teacher in each class
- Usually have fixed session times, either morning or afternoon, five days a week, term time only. Some may offer extended hours.

Nursery classes of independent schools:

- Are linked to independent schools
- May offer free early education places for three and four year olds.

Childcare in the child's own home:

- Includes nannies, au pairs and babysitters.

Crèches:

- Offer short term, on-site childcare
- May be located in supermarkets and leisure centres.

Out-of-school clubs and holiday playschemes

- Care for children aged three years and over, outside school hours
- May run before school/after school and/or during the school holidays
- May be on school sites, or if not, may take to/collect from local schools.

Children's Centres:

- Aim to bring family services together within the local community
- Services include healthcare, family support and groups/activities for parents/carers and children
- May offer childcare facilities and free places for three and four year olds.

How to choose childcare

Childcare providers may have waiting lists so it is good to plan ahead to ensure there is a suitable place for your child. If possible, visit more than one type of childcare, and where possible, more than one childcare provider so that you can compare them. Try to visit at least once on a normal working day and take your child along to see how he/she reacts. Think about what you would like to know beforehand, and ask lots of questions. Spend as much time as you need, visiting a second or third time if you would like to, before you make a decision.



Things to look for:

- Are you and your child made to feel welcome?
- Are children having fun - will your child be happy and settled there?
- Do staff interact with children as you would want?
- Are children able to choose what they do and enjoy free play?
- Can children play outside safely and securely?
- Do staff behave in an inclusive way towards all children, showing positive attitudes towards disability, gender and cultural differences?
- The certificate of registration (if required) should be on display, as well as a certificate of insurance.

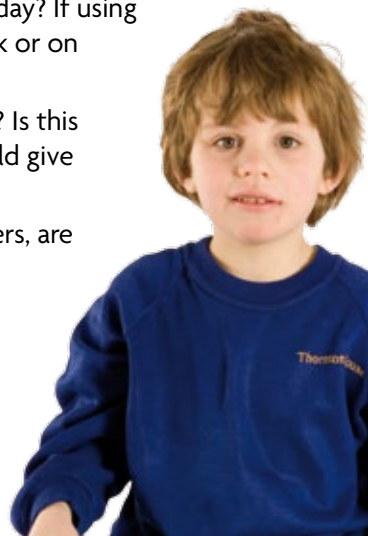
Questions to ask:

- How will you find out what your child has been doing each day?
- How will the day be structured and can they follow routines started at home?
- Is food provided and if so, is a healthy, balanced diet on offer? Can they cater for any special dietary needs? How and when can children access drinking water?
- What happens in an emergency and what precautions have been put in place?

Contracts and payments should always be agreed in advance and you will need to consider:

- Will you need to pay a deposit or retainer?
- How and when are you expected to pay?
- Will there be additional charges for late pickups, snacks, nappies, meals, school pickups etc?
- Will you pay if your child is absent due to illness or holiday? If using a childminder, what will happen if the childminder is sick or on holiday?
- What is the notice period for changing hours or leaving? Is this the same notice period that the childcare provider would give you?
- If you plan to use employer supported childcare vouchers, are they happy to accept them?

Remember, not every setting will match you and your child's needs, so be prepared to look around.



The Family Information Service (FIS) provides free and impartial information and advice to families with children aged 0 to 19 years on:

- Childcare
- Free early education places
- Sport and leisure activities
- Your rights as a working parent
- People and services that support families, children and young people
- Support for children with additional needs and/or disabilities
- Working with children, young people and their families.

If you don't know who to ask... Ask us!

All information is available by phone, email or on our website (see back page).

You can contact the Family Information Service in the following ways:

By telephone:

01905 790 560 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Answer machine at all other times)

By fax:

01905 790 551

By post:

Family Information Service,
3 De Salis Court, De Salis Drive, Hampton Lovett, Droitwich,
Worcestershire, WR9 0QE

By email:

familyinfo@worcestershire.gov.uk

Online:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/familyinfo



This publication can be made available in other languages and alternative formats (including large print, audio tape, computer disc and Braille) on request from the Marketing Team on telephone number 01905 728912 or by emailing cmetcalf@worcestershire.gov.uk.

To the best of our knowledge all information is correct at time of printing. March 2009.