

Choosing Childcare and Early Education



Please contact us on 0845 090 8044 for other leaflet formats e.g. large print, audio, another language or through discussion.

What you should know about choosing childcare and early education

Choosing childcare and early education is a big step for you and your child. Not only do you have to decide which type of provision suits you and your child best, but you need reassurance that your child will be:

- safe
- secure
- well looked-after
- happy

This booklet will help to answer some of the questions or concerns that you may have and will help you to make the best choice for you and your child. If you would like to discuss your childcare options in more detail, please contact the Warwickshire Family Information Service. You will find our contact details on the back page of this booklet.

Disclaimer:

Please note that the information contained in this booklet was accurate at the time of going to print.

Childcare Act 2006

The Childcare Act 2006 brought about changes to the childcare registration process. Some providers who were exempt from Ofsted registration were able to join the voluntarily part of the new Ofsted Childcare Register which now enables parents to claim Tax Credits when using these providers.

Changes to the regulation and registration of childcare providers are explained in more detail on pages 3 and 4.

Childcare Regulation

Ofsted Childcare Registers

The Early Years Register (EYR): From September 2008, people providing childcare for children from birth to the 31st August following their fifth birthday, for more than 2 hours in any one day, **must** join the Early Years Register (EYR) and deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (unless exempt*). EYFS is a single framework which will set the standard for care, learning and development and is mandatory for all schools and early years providers in Ofsted registered settings attended by children within this age group.

Childcare providers on the EYR are inspected at least once every three years and Ofsted gives each inspection a rating as follows:

- Outstanding
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Inadequate Category 1 – Inspector states that setting has ability to improve
- Inadequate Category 2 – Inspector states that setting is unable to bring about necessary improvements

Ofsted Childcare Register: The Ofsted Childcare Register is split into two parts: compulsory and voluntary.

From September 2008, those providing childcare for children from 1st September following their fifth birthday up to the age of eight **must** join the compulsory part of the childcare Register (cOCR). These providers will have to ensure that they comply with the Childcare Register Regulations set out by Ofsted.

Those providing childcare in both age groups must join both registers.

* Exempt groups include: some crèches, settings where childcare is provided by a school's governing body and where the childcare is provided in the child's own home by for example, nannies.

Ofsted will also check that early education and childcare provision meet the five outcomes specified by the Childcare Act 2004. These are:

- Children are healthy
- Children are safe
- Children enjoy and achieve
- Children make a positive contribution
- Children can achieve economic well being

A third group of people can choose whether to join the voluntary part of the Childcare Register (vOCR), which is open to those who want to register but do not have to do so. This group includes:

- people who care for children aged eight and over
- home-based carers, such as nannies
- other providers not currently required to register such as those who provide sports coaching.

Childcare providers on both cOCR and the vOCR must meet the demands of the Ofsted Childcare Register Regulations, which will require them to demonstrate that their people, premises and provision are all suitable to deliver childcare. Providers will be required to undertake CRB checks on anyone who will have unsupervised access to children in their care.

Care registered on the OCR will be inspected by Ofsted randomly or following a complaint. Ofsted will notify providers of the results of the inspection. However, they will not produce an inspection report.

Registration on the Ofsted Childcare Register enables the childcare setting to become qualifying childcare for the purpose of working tax credits and employer childcare vouchers. This means that eligible parents or carers can access financial support from the government for the cost of their childcare.

You can find further information about the Early Years Register and Ofsted Childcare Register and how Ofsted inspect at www.ofsted.gov.uk

As well as meeting the standards set by Ofsted, other legislation covering health and safety, food hygiene, fire or planning requirements must also be followed by settings included on the Early Years Register and the Ofsted Childcare Register.

Childcare

What childcare and early education options do I have?

Type of childcare / early education	Childcare - age range catered for	Free Early Education (currently 5 x 2.5 hours per week)
Childminders	6wks – 14 (16 with SEN)	Childminder needs to be accredited on the Warwickshire Specialist Network'
Day Nurseries	6wks – 5 (older children cared for if out of school service is offered)	If registered with the Local Authority to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage
Crèche	6 wks - 8	Not eligible
Out of School Care	4 - 16	N/A
LA Maintained Nursery Class/School	3 - 5	Yes – funding allocated
Pre-Schools/Playgroups	3 – 5*	If registered with the Local Authority to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage
Private Nursery Schools/ Nursery Units of Independent Schools	3 – 5	If registered with the Local Authority to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage
Nursery Units of Independent Schools	3 – 5	If registered with the Local Authority to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage

**However some may take your child at 2yrs 9mths dependent on staff ratios at the setting*

Please note: If setting is not registered for Early Years Foundation Stage funding, full fees will apply

Registered Childminders

- Self-employed carers who look after children in the carers home
- May look after up to 6 children up to age 8, this is dependent on conditions of their registration – ask to see these!
- May also care for over 8s but this is not a condition of registration
- Can offer flexible, family-friendly care and continuity as they can look after children over a wide age range
- Always ask to see a current Ofsted registration certificate, and ask for references from other parents
- Accredited childminders can offer Nursery Education Funded places
- Phone the Family Information Service on 0845 090 8044 or 01926 742 274 to check if a childminder's registration is active or to obtain a list of childminders and accredited childminders in your area.

Training and Qualifications

Childminders must hold a current paediatric first aid certificate at point of registration and must have attended a training course approved by the local authority. Within six months of registering, they are also required to implement an effective safeguarding children's policy.

You can ask to see a childminder's record of training and qualifications and the childminder should be happy to discuss them with you.

Contracts

An agreement or contract is important and you should make sure that you understand what you are agreeing to before you sign it. This document should cover things like:

- Charges e.g. per hour, day, week or month
- What will happen and whether there will be charges; if you or your child is ill/on holiday; if your childminder is ill/on holiday, or for public holidays
- Extra costs e.g. for meals, drinks, snacks, nappies, outings
- Extra availability e.g. early morning, late evenings, overnight and whether there are extra charges.
- Procedure if you are late picking up your child/who can pick up your child?
- Notice period to cancel or change terms of the contract.

Contracts should be renewed every 6 to 12 months, giving you a chance to discuss your child's needs and progress. The contract is a legally binding document and if it breaks down in the future it will be used to show what has been agreed. In a small number of cases the contract will be used in the small claims court if it has been shown to have been broken.

In addition to the contract you should also discuss the following points with your childminder:

- your child's likes/dislikes, favourite activities, routines
- methods of behaviour management
- transport arrangements
- the policy for sick children, giving medicines, medical emergencies
- complaints policy

Day Nurseries

- Many provide childcare and early education for children aged 6 weeks to 5 years
- Can register for Nursery Education Funding to cover the costs of Early Years Foundation Stage pre-school education.
- Usually open 8am to 6pm daily and offer full-time or part-time care
- Some will offer school pick-up and out of school care

Day nurseries must meet strict guidelines on staff/children ratios:

- For under twos, one carer to three children
- For two to three year olds, one carer to four children
- For three to five year olds, one carer to eight children

Pre-schools/Playgroups

- Offer sessional daycare and Early Years Foundation Stage early education for children from age 3 until they start school
- Opening hours (usually during term-time only) generally coincide with a school day 9.00am – 3.30pm
- Can register for Nursery Education Funding to cover the cost of Early Years Foundation Stage pre-school education

Most pre-school staff are trained to work with children or are undergoing training. There should be one member of staff for every eight children aged three to five and one adult for every four children aged two to three.

Crèches

- Facilities that provide occasional short-term care for child under 8
- Some are in permanent premises and care for children while parents are occupied in activities, e.g. shopping or sport
- Some are established on a temporary basis to care for children while their parents are involved in time-limited activities, e.g. a conference or exhibition

Out of School Services (including Holiday Schemes)

- Meet the needs of children with working parents as they provide care for school age children before the school day begins and after it ends. There are four types of service available: breakfast clubs, after school clubs, before and after school clubs and holiday schemes
- Usually, these services are based on school premises or in youth or community centres. Sometimes, nurseries also offer this type of care
- Out of school services offer children opportunities to play and learn and have fun in groups

As with other types of childcare the settings must meet set adult/child ratios, and the size of the group can vary from 10 to 40 children of mixed age groups.

Early Education

Warwickshire County Council Maintained Nursery schools/classes

- Usually based on school sites and funded by the Local Authority to provide Early Years Foundation Stage early education
- In Warwickshire, these schools/classes offer free places for about 45% of all three and four year olds for five 2.5 hour sessions of early education each week. From September 2010, this will rise to 15 hours a week which can be taken flexibly
- Places are usually available in the September after your child is three, but occasionally places will be available the term after your child is three
- Applications are via the head teacher of the nursery school

Other nursery settings

Many day nurseries, pre-schools, private/independent providers and some childminders receive Government funding in the form of the Nursery Education Funding to enable them to offer early education (via the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum) to all 3 and 4 year olds, which continues until statutory school age. The early education entitlement begins for children as shown in the table below:

Child born between	Entitlement begins
1 January to 31 March	From the start of the summer term following their 3rd birthday until statutory school age
1 April to 31 August	From the start of the autumn term following their 3rd birthday until statutory school age
1 September to 31 December	From the start of the spring term following their 3rd birthday until statutory school age

Currently the early education entitlement is for five free 2.5 hour sessions each week for 38 weeks per year. From September 2010 all settings will be able to offer 15 hours per week which can be taken flexibly.

- To apply for the funding, you need to contact your chosen provider who will claim funding for the free sessions on your behalf.

Contact the Family Information Service on **0845 090 8044** for details of registered childcare and early education in your local area. Details matching your criteria can be sent to you by post, fax or email. Alternatively, you can visit <http://childcarefinder.direct.gov.uk/childcarefinder> to search for local childcare.

Tips for choosing childcare and early education

It is recommended that you visit a selection of providers in your area to give you an idea of what will best suit your child. It can be a good idea to take your child to the various providers to see how staff talk to them. Try to visit during opening hours so you can see if the children are calm, happy and busy. If possible arrange for a couple of trial sessions before signing a contract. When visiting a provider ask to see their Ofsted registration certificate and a copy of their most recent report.

We have included some questions you may like to ask, add your own as well!

1. **How long have staff been working in the provision?**

Children need to develop stable relationships with the adults caring for them. That is more likely to happen where staff are not continually coming and going.

2. **What training have staff undertaken? What qualifications do they have?**

Well-trained staff will provide high quality care and education for young children. Ask how many staff have childcare qualifications. The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage outline the minimum qualification requirements for day care settings but staff training often is extended beyond the minimum requirements. Further information about the Statutory Framework can be found in the Early Years Foundation Stage pack. Copies of these can be obtained from DCSF publications by calling **0845 60 222 60**.

3. Do you enjoy being with children and why?

It is important that adults providing childcare and early education enjoy their work. They have the job of supporting parents in providing young children with a variety of stimulating and exciting opportunities to learn and develop to the best of their abilities.

4. Can I look around the building to see the rooms and outside play space? If there is no outside play space – how will you make sure my child gets the chance to play outside?

Settings need to be safe, welcoming and stimulating. Look for; a variety of toys and materials - stored so that children can get to them easily; clean toilets with hand dryers or disposable paper towels; and enough space so children can move around freely.

5. Where will my child rest?

Some young children need to rest during the day. Rest areas should be quiet, dimly lit, and have soft furnishings.

6. What kind of food and drink will you give?

Look for evidence that children get some fresh fruit and vegetables, and have plenty to drink. Ask if the setting caters for special dietary and cultural requirements.

7. What will my child do all day?

Daily activities should be varied, and give children some opportunities to choose what they want to do.

8. How do you deal with difficult and challenging behaviour?

Challenging behaviour needs to be dealt with sensitively. Strategies for understanding rather than reprimanding children are effective behaviour policies. Settings should have a written policy on how they deal with difficult behaviour you should ask to see this.

9. Will my child be with a regular group of children? How old are they? How will their timetable fit in with my child?

Being part of a regular group is important for children. However children can also benefit from having some opportunities to be with others who are older or younger than them. Timetables need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the whole group.

10. How will you make sure I know how my child is getting on?

You should expect regular meetings with your child's carer. In group settings, like nurseries, you should be in regular contact with your child's key worker, the member of staff with responsibility for collecting and coordinating information on their development.

11. Do you have a complaints policy?

Settings should have procedures in place to deal with complaints and concerns. Ask to see a copy of this policy.

12. What insurance do you have?

Ask to have a copy of what the policy costs.

Help with childcare costs

The financial costs of using childcare can be high, but you may be eligible for the following help.

Help from employers - Childcare Vouchers

If you are working you may be able to get help from your employer by sacrificing a portion of your salary (maximum £55 per week) in exchange for childcare vouchers, which can be used to pay for registered or approved childcare. The vouchers are exempt from National Insurance (NI) and Income Tax (IT) so you only pay NI and IT on the reduced level of your salary.

They may not be a suitable option if you earn below the lower earnings limit as you won't pay NI, or if your income is above the upper earning limit for NI as the saving will only be 1%.

Speak to your employer to find out if a scheme is available at your workplace, your employer will need to be registered with a childcare voucher company first in order to offer this subsidy.

Tax Credits

You may be eligible for Tax Credits. There are two types of tax credit you may be entitled to: Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. To check your entitlement and to make a claim, contact HM Revenue and Customs on **0845 300 3900** or visit www.hmrc.gov.uk/Taxcredits

Child Tax Credit

- Paid to families in recognition of costs associated with bringing up children
- Paid into bank account of main childcarer
- Amount awarded is based on family income but you do not have to be working to claim
- Eligible if you are responsible for children aged 0-16 and if you have an annual family income of less than £58000 (£66000 if there is a child under one year old)

Working Tax Credit

- Paid to families who work but earn a low wage
- Includes a childcare element to pay for up to 80% of the costs of registered or approved childcare
- Lone parent element is also included which may increase your entitlement
- Amount awarded is income based and you must be working to claim
- Eligible if you are over 16 and work for at least 16 hours per week

New Deal from Jobcentre Plus

The New Deal programmes from Jobcentre Plus offer lots of different initiatives to help unemployed people back into work. As well as helping to calculate tax credits and offering advice on benefits to parents, you may find that you are eligible for a discretionary fund to help cover the costs of going to work, including help towards the costs of childcare.

To book an advisor appointment, contact your local Jobcentre Plus office or visit www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/

Care to Learn (for parents under 20)

This scheme can support young parents by helping to pay for their childcare costs while they are studying. To find out more, contact:

The learner support helpline: **0800 121 8989** or visit www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/14To19/MoneyToLearn/Caretolearn

Further Help with Childcare Costs for Students and Learners

Childcare Grant

If you're a full-time higher education student, with dependent children under 15 years of age (17 if the child has a disability or a special need) you can apply for the Childcare Grant which could cover as much as 85% of your childcare costs. For more information, contact Student Finance England on **0845 300 50 90**.

Sixth Form College Childcare Scheme

If you're a parent aged 20 or over and studying at a school sixth form or sixth form college you could get help with your childcare costs through this scheme. For more information, call the Learner Support helpline on **0800 121 8989**.

NHS Childcare Allowance

If you are studying to be a health care professional you can apply for help towards your childcare costs through the NHS Childcare Allowance. The allowance can cover up to 85% of registered or approved childcare costs for children up to 15 (17 if the child has a disability or a special need). For more information call the NHS Students Helpline on **0845 358 6655** or visit www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk

Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work scheme

This scheme is aimed at out of work parents with a partner who is in work. If you are looking to do a course that's classed as developing new skills that could lead to a job and you are 20 or over and have one or more children, the scheme could help with the cost of childcare while you learn or train. For more information, call the Learner Support helpline on **0800 121 8989**.

Don't Forget

- Always take up references and ask to see the childcare provider's Ofsted reports and registration certificates. Good childcare providers will be happy to provide this information to you
- Listen to your child and find out more if he or she seems unhappy
- Always trust your own feelings about your childcare
- Remember that you know your child best

Further Help

If you would like further information on any of the subjects you have read about in this leaflet, please contact the Family Information Service. Our contact details can be found on the back cover.

If you find this information difficult to understand, we can provide it to you in another format. For example, we can provide information in large print, via audiotape, in another language or by talking to you. Contact us on 0845 090 8044 or 01926 742274 for more details.

Other titles in this series include:

Choosing a Secondary School 7 – 11
Dealing with Bullying – A Parents' Guide
Dealing with Separation and Divorce
Encouraging Good Behaviour
Life with a Teenager
Surfing Safely – Your Family's Guide to Internet Safety
Tackling Homework and Revision
Talking to Your Child about Relationships and Sex
Teens in Trouble
Why Dads Matter
Your Child's Learning – Getting Involved

If you are looking for any further information or advice for your family, the Family Information Service can help you. We offer a free and impartial information and signposting service for parents and carers of children and young people aged 0-20 on a range of topics such as: childcare, benefits, health, leisure, disability support and much more. If you don't know who to ask, ask the Family Information Service!

Tel: 0845 090 8044 or 01926 742274

Email: fis@warwickshire.gov.uk

Web: www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis

