

Finding a nursery

Your Employee Wellbeing is dedicated to helping families find the best advice, support and care for their family members from babies to grandparents and all the years in between. Expert services include childcare and eldercare advice and searches, nanny recruitment and employment support through contracts and payroll.

Is a nursery the right choice?

If you're reading this, you are probably considering enrolling your child in nursery school. But is placing your child in nursery the right choice? The research says yes.

The first major study into the impact of preschool education in the UK was conducted in 2004 by the University of London. Research demonstrated that pre-schoolers who spent three years or more in nursery education were 10 to 12 months ahead of their peers who were kept at home prior to compulsory schooling.

The research also indicated that the longer the child was in preschool education, the further ahead they would be. Findings showed that even as far ahead as age, the nursery attendees were still ahead in reading, writing and mathematics testing. The study also found that the quality of the nursery mattered. Centres with qualified nursery teachers did better than those staffed by care workers. In addition, those children who attended five half days were at the same level as those who were in a full-time programme.



Whether you put your child into nursery full-time, or part-time, is up to you and your circumstances. Time at nursery can be mixed with other childcare options allowing you to work, or to get on with your daily life, whilst giving your children the social interaction that they need.

Research has discovered that out-of-home environments for babies and children under the age of two can be very stressful, so the quality of any childcare provision for such children is very important. The better the quality of care, the better the social and emotional development.

How do you find a nursery?

So how do you go about getting a place in a good nursery in this uber competitive world we are living in?

A good starting point when looking for nurseries is the Ofsted website, or your local authority's website. The internet, in general, is clearly another option but this can be hugely time consuming. You will also have to do your research very carefully as not all nurseries offer the same range and level of service.

What should you look for when selecting a nursery?

It is mind boggling how many things you have to consider when selecting a nursery for your child. There are so many different types available and although most nurseries will follow the standard Early Years Foundation stages as set by the Government, many will have their own philosophies and way of functioning. Only you will know what might suit your child best.

A popular option outside of the ordinary structured environment, for example, is the Montessori method. Developed by Maria Montessori in the early 1900s, it is characterised by an emphasis on independence and freedom of choice within prescribed limits. Another interesting model are forest nurseries, where children spend most of the time outside, in all weather – playing, learning, building, exploring and generally foregoing the usual structured classroom environment.



To make the decision easier you should also consider the following things

- What professional qualifications and experience do the staff and management have, and how do they manage ongoing professional development?
- Does the nursery meet safety and hygiene standards?
- What is the adult:child ratio?
- Are they sensitive to matters relating to gender, religion etc?
- How does the learning environment look and feel?
- Are there fun learning activities planned on a daily basis?
- Are you and your child welcomed warmly?
- Are you able to view and understand the policies and procedures?
- How will you be involved in planning your child's care?
- How will your child be encouraged to feel happy and confident whatever his/her abilities?

- How will your child's special needs be met such as diet, naptime etc?
- How is discipline managed and will your preferences be met?
- Do they provide nappies?
- What is their policy on helping with potty training?
- How do they manage mealtimes? Are the children seated for a communal mealtime and is food provided? If so, is it good quality and well prepared?
- Are the staff willing to assist in teaching your child good manners and other social skills?
- Does the nursery offer care throughout the year or just in term time, and what hours are they open?
- Are they flexible about sessions?
- Are they registered for Nursery Education Grant Funding?
- Do they have an outdoor play area that the children can use daily?
- How do the children relate to each other and the staff?
- Can you view their latest Ofsted report?
- Can you pay with Childcare Vouchers?

Most importantly are the children happy?

You should always visit a nursery during the day when it is fully in session so you can see how happy the children are and how the staff manage things. Another great resource is the local "mummy network". Tap into your friends' experiences and research. A great barometer of a nursery is the opinion of the parents who use it.

Ofsted inspections

All nurseries and preschools deliver, and are inspected against, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This framework runs from birth until the end of the Reception year (i.e. at the age of five). Each school should have their Ofsted inspection certificate on display and you can get further information here: www.reports.ofsted.gov.uk.

How frequently a nursery is inspected depends on how well it did at its last inspection. One of the major functions of Ofsted is to register and inspect settings to ensure that they comply with their statutory requirements as laid out in the EYFS. At the present time these are set out in the Welfare Requirements of the EYFS under the headings:

- Safeguarding and promoting children's welfare
- Suitable people

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- Suitable premises, environment and equipment
- Organisation
- Documentation

A setting is inspected against the five 'every child matters' outcomes of:

- Staying safe
- Keeping healthy
- Enjoying and achieving
- Achieving economic well-being
- Making a positive contribution

These are then used to judge the setting with one of the following outcomes:

- Inadequate - this aspect of the provision is not good enough
- Requires Improvement - this aspect of the provision is sound
- Good - this aspect of the provision is strong
- Outstanding - this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Ofsted makes a huge contribution in helping parents select schools for their children. However, like anything, things can sometimes be a little subjective and occasionally a nursery is just having a bad day when the inspector shows up. Similarly, a nursery may not achieve as highly as it may otherwise have done due to a bureaucratic administrative reason rather than the standard of care it provides. If a nursery feels good to you but the Ofsted report is not glowing you should listen to your gut instinct and investigate further. Talking to the management and other parents may help you to establish a clearer picture.

When should you apply?

Realistically you should start looking for a nursery or preschool place as soon as you can. In some areas, competition is fierce and registering whilst still pregnant is not as ridiculous as it might sound. Once you have obtained a list of nurseries in your area you should contact them individually and find out their admission procedures. For most state nurseries you cannot enrol your child until he/she turns two, but private nurseries will be very different and will take children at different ages.

What are the costs?

The cost of a nursery place can vary greatly depending on location, facilities and many other factors. You should contact each nursery you are interested in for this information. In addition, it is worth noting that many nurseries will offer a 'twins and multiples' discount.

Is there any government funding?

Yes, but what you are entitled to will depend on your personal circumstances.

15 hours childcare

All children aged three and four are entitled to 15 hours free nursery education per week. This is available for 38 weeks per year, i.e. school term time. Individual nurseries have some scope to decide when and how this time can be used so it's important to check their exact offering regarding this. Your child is entitled to free hours the term following their third birthday. Terms are from January, April and September.

30 hours childcare

The government offers an additional 15 hours free childcare (hence the title 30 hours free) to those that meet the eligibility criteria. Both parents must be working and must each expect to earn (on average) at least £120 a week and below £100,000 per annum. If you, or your partner, are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave, or you're unable to work because you are disabled or have caring responsibilities, you could still be eligible. It is only applicable to those in England. Confirmation is required every three months to ensure you still meet the criteria.

Funding for two-year olds

In some cases, two-year olds may be eligible for this funding. Eligibility is based on income and the list below indicates who might be included in the scheme. Families receiving:

- Income support
- Income based job seekers allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit - if you and your partner have a combined income from work of £15,400 or less a year, after tax
- Tax credits and you have an income of £16,190 or less, before tax
- The guaranteed element of the State Pension Credit
- Support through part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act
- The Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

Please note that additional criteria may be used, and you should contact your local council for further details. For more information as to what is available and to register for funding available to you visit www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

Tax credits

There are two tax credits: Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. They depend entirely on income levels. For more up to date information on tax credits and whether you are entitled to them, please go to <https://www.gov.uk/child-tax-credit/overview> or <https://www.gov.uk/working-tax-credit>.

Moving on to school

All children are legally required to attend school from the age of five, however the UK education system starts at age four with reception year. For information on the British Education System click [here](#).

Your Employee Wellbeing has been making a difference to working parents and carers since 2011. If you would like to find out more about our bespoke childcare search services, to help you employ a nanny or find another form of childcare, please get in touch.

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Updated September 2021