

Guide to Childcare

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.

What is childcare?

Childcare can refer to anything from formal day-care arrangements to ad-hoc babysitting. The point is that the children are looked after and cared for by someone who is not their parent, legal guardian or primary caregiver. This can either be in the child's home or in an alternative setting.



Why might you need childcare?

As a parent there may come a time when you choose to have your child cared for by others. The most common reason for this is so both parents can work, either part or full-time. You may also choose childcare to enable your little one to experience more social environments, enter a learning atmosphere or even to give you some time to run errands or just get 'stuff' done.

Maternity nurse

When a family welcomes a new baby into the world, especially multiple births, they may look for advice, support and extra help settling the newborn into a routine.

A maternity nurse, who may or may not be medically trained, will help a family in the home with feeding and caring for a baby from birth to four weeks, or beyond if required. Parents may choose to have the nurse during the day, at night or live-in. Employing a maternity nurse at night or to live-in may allow a mother better rest and sleep which helps with post-partum healing, and ensures she has the energy to cope should the baby have siblings.

Nanny

A nanny is a popular choice of childcare if you are looking for a flexible arrangement with early starts in the morning and/or later evenings.

As the nanny is an employee of the family, children will be taken care of in your own home, and they can be live-in or live-out depending on your personal circumstances and preferences.

A family may choose a nanny for several reasons which can include wanting their child looked after in their own home, wanting the child to develop a trusting relationship with their carer, requiring an extra degree of flexibility; and finally cost, which can be less than multiple places at a nursery.

You may also consider a nanny share with a like-minded family if you do not require full-time care. A nanny share is when two (or occasionally more) families share one nanny over the week. Each family has its own commitments to the nanny as an employer, but the hours and location of care is split across the families. Nanny shares work best when the families have the same parenting styles and the kids get on. They can work especially well when one family has very young children and the other requires wraparound school care.



When employing a nanny, it is important to fully understand the implications of negotiating their salary and paying their PAYE obligations along with your own National Insurance contributions as an employer. You may also have to enrol them into a pension scheme, and you must provide them with a legal employment contract.

Childminder

A registered childminder works from their own home, looking after multiple children (from one to six years old). They all need to be registered with their local council and will be inspected by Ofsted.

Childminders are popular with families who are looking for a home from home environment, but do not want to employ a nanny. The mix of children encourages socialising and childminders tend to have a wide network with whom they meet up with during the week.

A childminder may not be as flexible as a nanny in terms of hours, but many will accept childcare vouchers which assist in reducing the costs. Childminders are often open to changing hours as your child grows and maybe available for wraparound care to incorporate school drop offs and pickups.

Nursery

Day nurseries will care for babies from birth, but most often, around three months to the time your child goes to school.

There will be different playrooms dependent on the age or stage of development of your little one. Babies are kept together and will move through the nursery when they reach the age or development threshold for that space.

Day nurseries will probably follow a standard routine which include three meals, snacks and naps, according to the children's needs. They will help with weaning if necessary, potty training and will prepare them for school.

Nurseries are popular with families who are looking for a stimulating environment with lots of socialising and daily activities. Staff tend to be continually training and must hold or be working towards childcare qualifications.

Their hours tend to be fixed, with fees charged for late pick-ups, which should be considered when negotiating going back to work. A key benefit with a day nursery is they tend to be open all year round.

Preschools and state nurseries do not accommodate babies. Children can attend from around the age of three until they go to school. Depending on the setting, they can be very academic in their outlook or, at the other end of the scale, be more like a daily play group. They tend to follow school hours, terms and holidays, so if you are working you will need to consider holiday care.

All nurseries will be following the Early Years Foundation Stage and will be Ofsted inspected.

Au pair

An au pair is a young person from overseas who comes to the UK to immerse themselves in the culture of our country, while learning at a local college/language school. They will live and work in your house in return for a small amount of salary/expenses.

There are rules around the hours an au pair can work, and they should not look after babies. Due to the limited hours they are allowed to work, au pairs are most popular with families who have school-aged children. The au pair would provide wraparound care for the children, including occasional babysitting.

One of the benefits to a family employing an au pair is the minimal costs incurred compared to a nanny, childminder or other after-school care. Additionally, they may cook for the children and help out around the house.

It is important to remember an au pair is not a nanny and therefore their experience with children may not be formalised and they will live in your house for the duration of their stay in the country. Most au pairs will commit to around a year, so there is no longevity guarantee with an au pair either.

Next steps

Which form of childcare you choose is a very personal decision and will be dependent upon your own circumstances. It is also something that has a habit of evolving and changing as your child develops or your family expands.

What is very important though, is that you visit all potential nurseries, you interview nannies and childminders and ensure you are 100% happy to be leaving your baby or child. It will be stressful and emotional, but long-term dependable childcare is essential if working parents are going to have successful careers and a happy family.

Many outstanding and good nurseries and childminders can have very long waiting lists, so we advise families to consider applying as early as possible. Nannies should be secured one or two months before you need them, so start your search in good time.

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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