

# 5 1/2 YEARS

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE  
TO **CHILDCARE** FOR  
YOU AND YOUR FAMILY



department for  
children, schools and families

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As a parent, you are your child's **most important carer**, and it's what you and your child do together at home that is most important. Care from friends, grandparents and other relatives often plays a vital role too.

But choosing childcare outside school hours, that's right for your child, is another crucial decision that you have to make.

There are lots of **options**, from out of school clubs and schools' extended services to childminders, offering **benefits for your children** and **reassurance and flexibility to you**.

This booklet is designed to help you by giving you details of what's available and the range of support you can get. **Whatever your circumstances**, you can be confident that your child will be **learning and developing** in a **safe environment**.

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By 2010 we expect **all primary schools** to offer **access to regular and reliable childcare**.  
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# How childcare can help



Childcare isn't just good for your child, it can also help you to manage all your family and other commitments - whether you're in a job, studying for qualifications or training for new skills.

## Good for you and your child

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Mums and dads are the most important influence on a child, but childcare outside school hours can be vital too. Spending time with others at out of school clubs, doing drama or playing sports for example, or doing homework during extended school hours, can really help your child's learning and development.

And it can be great for you too. As a mum or dad, there are almost certainly lots of pressures on your time, so childcare outside school hours can give you more freedom to manage your family and other commitments in the best way possible – whatever your circumstances.

There are lots of options and you'll need to work out the best arrangement for your child, your lifestyle and your pocket, but childcare of all kinds is good for families.

You can get financial help with the costs, too. From tax credits to vouchers and other entitlements, there's lots of support to make your life easier (see page 18).



Childcare gives you choices. There's not just one type of childcare but lots, so you can find an arrangement that meets your needs (see page 6).

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### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Contact your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346** for help and advice.

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# Your options



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When your child reaches school age you may still need childcare, particularly if you're working or studying. Your choice will depend on many things, including your budget, but the first step is to know what the options are.

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## Making choices

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There's no single type of childcare that best suits every family, and it may be that a mix of childcare plus support from friends and relatives will be the best solution for you. Grandparents often play an important role in helping different elements of childcare fit together, for example by looking after children after school until their parents come home from work.

There are lots of childcare options, so you can make the choices that help balance your commitments. Talk to your local Families Information Service (0800 2 346 346) to find out what's available near you.

### Out of school clubs

Out of school clubs provide a safe place for your child to play, study and socialise. They're based in schools, youth clubs, community halls and play centres, and some will collect your child from school. They're usually open from 3.30pm to 6pm in term time only, though many provide a holiday scheme.

### Holiday playschemes and clubs

These are based in schools, youth clubs, community halls and play centres, and provide activities for your child during the school holidays. They are usually open from 8am to 6pm during the summer break, and some also open over Easter and at half terms.



## Extended services

Many schools provide extended services for children, families and the local community. This means things like homework clubs and drama clubs for children, and family learning and parenting support for parents. They are usually open from 8am to 6pm, but some also open in the evenings and at weekends.

**Well over 80% of all schools in England** now offer the full range of extended services. The Government wants **ALL** schools to do so by **2010**.

Your local Families Information Service (FIS) can give you up-to-date information on local school-based care, out of school clubs and holiday and breakfast clubs, along with costs. Call on **0800 2 346 346**. And don't forget to ask your school what they offer.



## FIND OUT MORE...

For more information on the extended services your local school provides, visit **[www.schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk](http://www.schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk)**, or call your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346**.

## Breakfast clubs

Breakfast clubs provide a safe place for children – plus a healthy meal – from 7.30am. If they're not based at the school they will take your child there in time for registration.

*"Because the breakfast and after-school clubs are attached to the school, I can drop the children off any time from 7.30am, which is excellent. The community club is on the same premises. They run all sorts of activities for adults and children, including karate, salsa dancing, accountancy classes and bingo. It's fab. It really brings the school into the community and brings us together as families."*

Hayley, Mum

## WHAT'S IN YOUR AREA...?

Find out by calling your local Families Information Service on **0800 2 346 346**.

## Childminders

Childminders usually look after children in the childminder's own home. Most will work early mornings, evenings and weekends – and in the holidays.

## Nannies

Nannies come to your home, and will often fit in with non-typical working hours. They may choose to register with Ofsted (see page 16).



## Childcare: What does it cost?

The cost of childcare varies widely, so it's important to check out what's available near you. Your local Families Information Service (**0800 2 346 346**) can advise you, and don't forget you may be able to get financial help (see page 11 for more details).

Here's a very rough guide to help put you in the picture:

- **Out of school clubs:** Costs vary, but may be about £7 per session.
- **Holiday playschemes and clubs:** Again, costs vary, but average at around £20 per day.
- **Extended services:** Some services are free, but there is

usually a charge for childcare and some activities such as music clubs and museum visits.

- **Breakfast clubs:** Costs average at about £2 per day.
- **Childminders:** Costs may start at around £2.50 an hour.
- **Nannies:** Costs vary, and you may have to pay your nanny's tax and National Insurance.



## REMEMBER...

- Families can get help with the costs of childcare, so costs indicated here may not be what you actually have to pay (see page 19).
- If you're on a low income you may be able to get financial help from your school, local authority or through the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit (see page 19).

# Help with finding and choosing childcare

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## Finding childcare in your area

The most common question mums and dads ask is: how can I find out what's available near me? Well, the easiest way to get accurate and up-to-date information is to contact your local Families Information Service.

*"Excellent service. Helped our member of staff who was looking for emergency care. Your adviser was extremely helpful and offered additional help above information requested. Our member of staff was delighted with response."*

Employer of parent of 10-year-old child

## What is the Families Information Service?

It is a free service for mums, dads and carers of babies and children aged 0-19.

It provides quality information that will help you discover and choose early learning, childcare and fun activities near to you and your child.

Additional service and support information for you and your family may include:

- Local schools, as well as courses and training opportunities for parents and families
- Health and welfare services including hospitals and smoking helplines
- Local sports and play facilities
- Parenting and relationship services, including support for disabled parents.

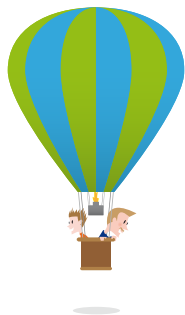
## Where is my nearest Families Information Service?

There's one in every local authority. Call **0800 2 346 346** (lines open 8am-8pm weekdays, 9am-12pm Saturdays) to find yours. Or you can go to **www.direct.gov.uk**. Ask your school what extended services are available or visit **www.schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk**

## Five essentials when choosing childcare

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- 1** Research your options. Contact your local Families Information Service to find out the full range in your area (see page 11).
- 2** Make sure that the childcare is high-quality. Take a list of questions with you and don't be afraid to ask them.
- 3** If the provider is registered by Ofsted (see page 16), look out for the most recent Ofsted inspection.
- 4** Ask other mums and dads about what's worked for them. And go with what you think best - you know your child.
- 5** Think about what would suit your child's personality. What environment would they thrive in? Take your child with you to see how they get on with the staff and surroundings.



## What to look out for

When you're choosing childcare, find out if the provider you're considering is registered with Ofsted. If it is, then a check will have been made on their suitability to care for children (see page 16).

In many cases the provider you're considering will be a school. This means it doesn't have to be registered, but it will already be inspected as part of the Ofsted schools inspection process.



### GETTING IT IN WRITING

If you're signing a written agreement, check all the details. Examples of contracts for childminders are available from the National Childminding Association (NCMA). Call **0800 169 4486**.

As well as registration, think about the following:

- Is the atmosphere friendly?
- Is there plenty of space inside and outside?
- Is there an area where children can do homework/play/chill out? What about safety? - ask about their plans for an emergency.
- What are the staff's views on discipline?
- Is there a separate section for younger children?
- Is the food good? What about any special requirements?
- What support can staff give to help your child to keep learning at home?

# Best for your child outside school hours



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Your child needs safe, stimulating, enjoyable care outside school, and there are lots of things you can do to make sure they get it.  
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## Feedback on how your child is getting on

Talk to your child – you might be surprised what you can learn about the care they're receiving.

Talk to your childcare provider or teacher too, and ask for feedback. They should be happy to discuss your child's progress with you.

### FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346** or visit **[www.direct.gov.uk/en/parents/schoolslearninganddevelopment](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/parents/schoolslearninganddevelopment)**



## How you can support your child's learning

Whatever extra support you choose outside school, most of your child's learning will actually take place at home. And there are some really simple ways that you can help your child's development when they're at home with you.

- Show an interest in what they've done with their day. And help them pursue their interests in any way that you can.
- Allow your child to have space and quiet sometimes. It helps them to use their imagination and learn to think for themselves.
- Take advantage of the support that extended services offer you, such as computer courses. The more you know, the more confident you'll be at helping your child.
- If your child is still learning to read, take time to read with them. Ask them what they think about the story and characters.

# Knowing they're safe

Many childcare providers have to be registered by Ofsted. There are also some that don't have to register, but which may choose to do so – this includes nannies, those providing activities such as sports coaching, and short-term care such as crèches.

It's best to choose a provider that's registered because you can then be sure that a check has been made on their suitability to care for children. Another reason is that you'll only be able to claim the childcare element of Tax Credits (see page 19) if your childcare provider is registered.

Staff in registered settings will have to have had Criminal Records Bureau checks carried out on them to make sure they're safe to work with children.

As well as the childcare providers that **must** be registered, Ofsted also checks those that **choose** to do so.

As well as being confident that your child is safe, having Ofsted-registered care means you may be eligible to claim towards the cost through tax credits or childcare vouchers (see page 19).

## Some childcare tips

- Tell the childcare provider about your child's likes and dislikes – this will help them get to know them quickly.
- Take the time to visit the premises, both before your child starts and a few weeks later.
- Don't dismiss any sign that your child is unhappy or reluctant to go.



If you're worried about any aspect of child safety or child protection you should raise your concerns with the childcare provider. If you're still concerned you should then contact Ofsted, who will investigate. Contact Ofsted on **08456 404040**.

# What if my child has a disability or special educational needs (SEN)?

All childcare providers are under a legal duty to consider how best to offer extra support to meet the child's needs. The **Special Educational Needs Code of Practice** (you can find this on [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)) gives guidance on the different levels of support that are available.

Local councils and all schools will have an SEN Co-ordinator who will be able to discuss your child's particular needs and ensure that your child can enjoy all the activities on offer. Talk to the Co-ordinator if you want to discuss your specific issues and concerns.



## Help with costs

Disability Living Allowance can help you with the day-to-day costs of looking after a child with a disability. Call the Disability Benefits Helpline on **0845 7123 456**.

## Time away from work...

If your child is disabled, and you've been in the same job for a year or more (and qualify in other ways), then you're entitled to 18 weeks unpaid parental leave before their 18th birthday. Call **0800 2 346 346** for more information.

## FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346**, or visit: [www.direct.gov.uk/en/parents/moneyandworkentitlements](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/parents/moneyandworkentitlements)

# Financial and other help



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The cost of childcare can seem daunting, but there's help available. This section is about boosting your childcare budget by taking advantage of the tax credits, vouchers and benefits on offer.

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## Help with costs

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### Tax credits

Families who are in work and who pay for Ofsted-registered childcare can get financial help with those costs through tax credits. Depending on your household income, tax credits can give you back up to 80 percent of your childcare costs, up to a maximum £140 a week for one child and £240 a week for two or more children. It's worth checking out with HMRC or your local Families Information Service.

### Childcare vouchers

Some employers offer childcare vouchers or 'salary sacrifice', where you offer up part of your salary in return for help with the cost of childcare. These schemes give you the first £55 a week of vouchers free from tax and National Insurance. Some families will be able to get tax credits as well as vouchers. Check it out and see how much you could get.



### FIND OUT MORE...

For information on all the financial help you might be able to get contact your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346**, or log on to **[www.direct.gov.uk/workandfamilies](http://www.direct.gov.uk/workandfamilies)**

## A few examples of help for families...

### ONE

Tariq and Amy both work full-time, and have three children. They earn **£21,000** a year altogether. Their childcare costs are £90 a week and they receive around **£67\*** a week to help with childcare costs.

\*This average amount is paid for 52 weeks of the year

### TWO

Anya works part time and earns **£11,000**. Anya has childcare costs of £150 a week. She receives an average of **£111\*** a week to help with childcare costs.



### How do I claim tax credits?

Call the **HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)** Tax Credit Helpline on **0845 300 3900** (open 8am-8pm seven days a week) or visit **[www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)** for a claim form. A special web-calculator on **[www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits/calculator](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits/calculator)** can help you find out how much you may be able to claim.

# Counting the benefits

## Don't miss out on your other entitlements:

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### Child Benefit

All mums and dads are entitled to this until their child is 16, or 19 if they are in full-time education.

### Help if you are in training or learning

There are a number of different schemes on offer to help you with the cost of childcare while you are in training or at college learning new skills. It's definitely worth picking up the phone to find out more, as there is lots of help out there, such as:

#### New Deal

If you are registered on Jobcentre Plus New Deal programmes you may be entitled to help with childcare costs to support you back into work. Talk to your adviser.

#### Learner Support Funds

If you are aged 20 or over, you could get help towards early learning and childcare costs through your college or school.

### For students in higher education

Students with children using registered early learning and childcare can also get means-tested grants. Check it out when you apply for your course.

### Free Childcare for Training and Learning For Work

This helps pay for childcare while you learn new skills that could lead to a job. It's for parents aged 20 or over whose partner is in work.



## Help from your employer

As well as all the high-quality childcare arrangements that are on offer, if your child is 16 or under (17 or under if disabled) and you've worked for your employer for at least 26 weeks, then you're entitled to ask for flexible working.

Flexible working is designed to help you cope with your family responsibilities. It can include options such as flexi-time, homeworking, job-sharing and compressed hours, and is built around your own needs.

If you're entitled to make the request then your boss will have to consider it, and can only say no if there's a clear business reason, which must be given in writing. These days most employers recognise that flexible working for staff makes good business sense.



### EMERGENCY!

It happens sometimes: your childcare provider falls ill, or there's a problem at the provider, so you've got no childcare. All employees have the right to take unpaid emergency leave (sometimes called compassionate leave) at very short notice when there's a crisis.

### FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346**, or visit **[www.direct.gov.uk/workandfamilies](http://www.direct.gov.uk/workandfamilies)**. You can also get help from the Advisory and Arbitration Service (ACAS) helpline, on **08457 474747**.

## Want to work or volunteer in childcare?

Raising your child in a safe, happy environment is of utmost importance to you as a mum or dad. But did you know there are also opportunities for you to work or volunteer in childcare yourself?

This is a great time to do it. A major drive by the Children's Workforce Development Council is under way to improve the quality of early learning and childcare, giving you an opportunity to take your skills and experience further. There are also lots of ways you can volunteer too, at pre-school, playgroups, nurseries and Sure Start Children's Centres, from reading to kids to helping out on trips.

*"There's a lot more to working with children than just playing all day long (although I'm a big kid myself and really enjoy that side of the job too). The best thing is the enjoyment you get from seeing their progress and knowing you've made a real difference to them."*

Danny, Play Leader Nursery Assistant

It's rewarding, you can fit it around working hours and the skills and experience you've developed through being a mum or dad yourself will be highly valued. Employers welcome people with a range of qualifications and experiences, and from all backgrounds.

### FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346**, visit **[www.childcarecareers.gov.uk](http://www.childcarecareers.gov.uk)**, or call Childcare Recruitment on **0800 996 600**.

**Remember** – the extra care and support you need may change once your child starts secondary school. Contact your local Families Information Service (FIS) for a copy of **11-16 Years: The Essential Guide to Out of School Hours and Holiday Activities**.



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