

0⁵ YEARS

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



department for
children, schools and families

Contents

Contents	02
Introduction	03
How early learning and childcare can help	04
Your options	08
Your child's day	16
Financial and other help	22
Want to work or volunteer in early learning and childcare	31

The Government's new strategy, **Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare**, sets out how the Government intends to help every family with support including:

- a Sure Start Children's Centre for every community by 2010 (see page 09)
- every school offering a full range of extended services – activities for children from 8.00am until 6.00pm throughout the year, plus other support – by 2010
- 15 hours free early education a week for all three- and four-year-olds for 38 weeks a year from 2010, with the possibility of 'stretching' it over the whole year
- an increasing number of free early education places for two-year-olds
- free childcare for people training for work – available now (see page 27)
- accessible, affordable, good quality childcare in all areas of the country
- a national website and helpline giving information about the cost and quality of childcare.

You know what's **best for your child**. As a parent or guardian you are your child's **most important carer**, and it's what you and your child do together at home that is most important in giving them the best start in life. Care from friends, grandparents and other relatives plays a vital role too.

But choosing **early learning and childcare** outside the home, that's right for your child, is another crucial decision that you have to make.

There's a huge amount of choice out there, from nursery schools to playgroups to childminders, all offering **benefits for your children** and **reassurance and flexibility to you**.

This booklet is designed to help by giving you information about what's on offer, including free entitlements, tax credits and lots of other support. **Whatever your circumstances**, you can be confident that your child will be happy and safe, **learning and developing through play**.

For more advice and information contact your local **Families Information Service** on **0800 2 346 346**.

How early learning and childcare can help



.....

The first few years are the most important in your child's life, and as a mum or dad you have the biggest influence of all on their learning and development. But as well as in the home, the learning and experiences that your child has when being cared for - whether in playgroups, nurseries, nursery schools, schools or with childminders - really help to shape them and their development.

.....

Good for families



Not only is early learning and childcare good for your child, it's good for you too. As a mum or dad your time is precious, so early learning or childcare increases your freedom to manage your work and family life 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 early learning and childcare is good for families.



Good for your child

→ Mums and dads are the most important influence on a child, but early learning and childcare is vital too. That's why we've created the Early Years Foundation Stage – a play-based framework for learning for every child from birth to five in all Ofsted-registered early learning or childcare (see page 17).

→ With good early learning and childcare your child will get a head start that will help prepare them not just for primary school but for the challenges that life will bring.

→ Standards under the framework are clear and consistent, with expectations about safety, welfare and learning clearly set out.



FIND OUT MORE...

You can get more information by visiting www.direct.gov.uk/childcare

Good for you

→ Early learning and childcare helps you with the decisions you need to make in balancing your work and family life, whether you're in a job, studying for qualifications or training for new skills.

→ If you are a working mum or dad there are many options that can help you. Flexible working will make it easier to balance work and home commitments, and taking parental leave at key stages will give you time at home with your child (see page 28).

→ You can get financial help with childcare costs. From tax credits to vouchers and other entitlements, there's lots of support to make your life easier (see pages 22–27).

→ You can be confident your child will be safe because the Early Years Foundation Stage has safeguards to make sure every child is in a secure environment with people who care for them.

CHILDCARE GIVES YOU CHOICES

There's not just one type of early learning and childcare but lots, so you can find an arrangement that meets your needs (see pages 08–15).



FIND OUT MORE...

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

Your options



.....
Finding childcare that's best both for you and for your child will depend on many things - including your budget. But the first step is to know what the options are.
.....

Making choices

There's no single type of childcare that best suits every family. Many young children have a mix of early learning and childcare from nurseries, childminders, playgroups and friends and relatives. Grandparents often play an important role in helping different elements of childcare fit together, for example by looking after children after nursery until their parents come home from work.

There are lots of options for childcare and early learning, so you can make the choices that help balance your commitments.



Sure Start Children's Centres

Sure Start Children's Centres are a one-stop shop for children and families. You can go there for childcare, play and early learning, expert advice, healthcare, parenting and family support, help with skills and getting qualifications, and links to training and work.

Sure Start Children's Centres

There are already around 3,000 Sure Start Children's Centres across the country. By 2010 there'll be 3,500 - one for every area.

FIND OUT MORE...

To find your nearest **Sure Start Children's Centre** call **0800 2 346 346**, or visit **www.direct.gov.uk/childrenscentres**

Other options

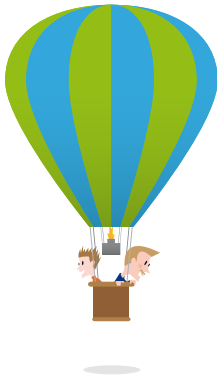
There are many providers of early learning and childcare for children up to the age of five, all around the country, so it makes sense to talk to your local **Families Information Service (0800 2 346 346)** to find out what's available near you.

Day nurseries

Opening hours can be from 7am to 7pm, though this varies. Your child can attend full- or part-time.

Nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools

Open during school hours, usually 9.00am to 3.30pm, offering full or half-day sessions. Some offer out-of-school and holiday care.



WHAT'S IN YOUR AREA?

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

Pre-schools and playgroups

Offer sessions of between 2.5 and 4 hours in term time. Many offer 12.5 hours a week free early learning for three- and four-year-olds (this is going up to 15 hours from 2010).

Childminders

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

Nannies

Come to your home, and will often fit in with non-typical working hours. May choose to register with Ofsted.

Childcare: what does it cost?

The cost of childcare varies widely, so it's important to check out what's available near you. **The Families Information Service (0800 2 346 346)** can advise you, and don't forget you may be able to get financial help (see pages 22–27 for more details).



REMEMBER

- Families can get help with the costs of childcare, so costs indicated here may not be what you actually have to pay.
- Three- and four-year-olds are entitled to a minimum of 12.5 hours of free learning per week for 38 weeks of the year in nurseries, pre-schools, schools, playgroups and with some childminders. **See page 23 for more information.**

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

→ **Sure Start Children's Centres:** Many services are free. You'll have to pay for childcare, but there's support through tax credits for those who are eligible.

→ **Day nurseries:** Costs per day can be in the region of £25 to £50.

→ **Private and independent nursery schools:** Costs are per term, and vary from school to school.

→ **Pre-schools and playgroups:** Costs tend to be charged per session, and may start at around £4.

→ **Childminders:** Costs may start from around £2.50 an hour.

→ **Nannies:** Costs vary, and you may have to pay your nanny's tax and National Insurance.

How will I know if the childcare is right for my child?

Your checklist...

- Visit before you choose
- Talk to your childminder or key person - who will watch your child's development and share ideas and experience with you - every day
- Look out for changes in your child's behaviour or mood such as using more words or talking about new friends
- Get involved in the service, and meet other mums and dads to share ideas and support
- Review things every two months or so, to ensure everything's going well

"Sending my daughter to my local Sure Start Children's Centre two days a week has enabled me to work part-time as a secretary. Otilia enjoys the fun, social and safe learning environment, and it's good for her development."

Debra, Mum



FIND OUT MORE...

Remember - your childcare may need to change once your child starts primary school. Contact your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346** for a copy of **5-11 Years: The Essential Guide to Childcare For You and Your Family.**

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

All early learning and 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) gives guidance on the different levels of support that are available.

Local Authorities and most nurseries and nursery schools will have an Early Years SEN Coordinator who will be able to discuss your child's particular needs and ensure that your child can enjoy all the activities the nursery has to offer. Talk to the Coordinator 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**.



FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local **Families Information Service** on **0800 2 346 346**, or visit www.direct.gov.uk/childcare

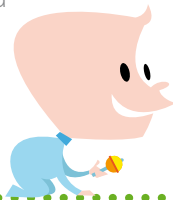
Help with finding and choosing childcare

Finding early learning and 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.

"Thank you so much for your help - again! It is great to know that with only one phone call I can get detailed, up-to-date information regarding childcare availability. You are invaluable!"

Parent of a five-year old



What is the Families Information Service?

The Families Information Service is free for mums and dads and carers of babies and children aged 0 to 19.

It provides quality information and advice that will help you find out about and choose early learning and childcare, and fun activities for you and your child near to where you live.

It may also be able to give you information about other children's services and support groups for mums and dads. For example:

- your rights as a working parent
- support for disabled parents
- career and volunteer opportunities in childcare.

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/childcare**

Five essentials when choosing childcare

.....

- 1 Research your options. Contact your local Families Information Service to find out the full range in your area (see page 07).
- 2 Make sure that the childcare is high-quality. Take a list of questions with you (see box) and don't be afraid to ask them.
- 3 Find out if the provider is registered with Ofsted (see page 19) and whether they've been inspected recently.
- 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 best suits your child; where would they thrive? Take your child with you to see how they get on with the staff and surroundings.

What to look for on a visit

- Is the atmosphere friendly?
- Is there a key person (someone to watch your child's development and share ideas with you)?
- Is it clean?
- Are the staff and children talking and playing happily together?
- How many staff are there? (there should be at least one for every eight 3-5 year olds)
- Is the food good? Any special requirements?
- What about safety - ask about their plans for an emergency

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.**

Your child's day



.....

Through play your baby or child will learn and grow. Singing songs, playing games with letters and numbers and having fun with other children all help to prepare them for school and for life ahead.

.....

Improved learning for your child



Every provider registered with Ofsted now follows a plan of structured, high-quality play called the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. This has been developed with parents and experts to make sure that each child can learn at a pace that's right for them, in a safe environment.

Under the framework, your child's key person – the person who will watch your child's development and share ideas and experiences with you – will help them become familiar with their surroundings from the day they arrive. They will ensure your child gets support

that will encourage learning and development.

This will enable you to know how your child is getting on and what they've been doing, and will be an opportunity for you to hear about activities you can do at home.

FIND OUT MORE...

For more information about the **Early Years Foundation Stage** framework contact your local Families Information Service on **0800 2 346 346**, or visit **www.direct.gov.uk/eyfs**

Tips for settling your child into early learning and childcare

- Take your child along before leaving them. Then, if you can, start by leaving your child for, say, half an hour, and build up to longer periods.
- Even when you're there, let the childminder or key worker take charge so your child gets used to them.
- When you leave, reassure your child that you'll be coming back and then say goodbye rather than slipping away or looking sad – go with a smile and a wave.
- With older children, tell them when you'll be back.
- Let your child take a special toy or blanket so they'll feel more comfortable.
- Always be happy about the day ahead: your child will pick up on your mood.
- It's usual to feel nervous. But remember that babies and young children are never confused about who their parents are, and outside influences can be very positive.



Getting involved

- Talk to your childcare provider about your child – they can use what you tell them in what they do together
 - Most providers will give you written information about how your child is doing – a diary or a folder, perhaps – and will tell you about progress each day.
-

A safe environment for your child

Most childcare providers looking after children under five 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.

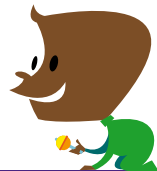
It's best to choose a provider that's registered because you can then be sure that a check has been made on their suitability to care for children. Another reason is that you'll only be able to claim the childcare element of Tax Credits (see page 24) if your childcare provider is registered.

As part of the registration process Ofsted also carries out a Criminal Records Bureau check on all staff, 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 an only child, Mollie was very shy and didn't really have a chance to play with other children her age. Now that she's had the opportunity to make friends at nursery and take part in activities she finds fun, she has really learned to express herself."

Kevin, Dad



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**.

Learning at home

Whatever childcare you choose, the learning your child gets at home will always be crucial. Most learning actually takes place in the home, and there are some really simple things you can do to help the learning experience.

For instance, talking to your child and asking their opinions, reading together, helping to make a cake, painting a picture or counting things they see around them can help them – even at a very young age – to develop the skills and the confidence they'll need in later life.

"The nursery has given my daughter skills through activities I'd never be able to offer at home. Most of all, at nursery, they let them play!

We get copies of the work plans and things they're doing so we can do the same with the girls at home, continuing their learning by using the same games or songs. It works really well."

Hayley, Mum



IDEAS FOR PLAY

You can support your child's development by:

- teaching them songs and nursery rhymes
- playing with letters and numbers (for example with building blocks)
- painting and drawing
- reading storybooks and talking about the pictures
- taking them to a toy library
- going to your local library and children's centre – they have lots of activities, including Rhyme Time sessions.



FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local **Families Information Service** on **0800 2 346 346**, or visit **www.direct.gov.uk/childcare**

Financial and other help



.....

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 free childcare places, tax credits, vouchers and benefits on offer.

.....

FREE childcare places

Every three- and four-year-old is entitled to 12.5 hours of free early learning per week, for at least 38 weeks of the year. (From September 2010 this will go up to 15 hours per week.)

These sessions are available in Ofsted-registered Sure Start Children's Centres, nurseries, pre-schools and with some registered childminders as well as at some private nursery schools. You can use these places to take a break, even if you are not working or training.

From September 2009, there will also be some free targeted early education places for two-year-olds in all parts of the country. To see what places are available in your area, contact your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346**.



"Sometimes the cost of raising three children can add up. The free 12.5 hours of weekly provision has really helped reduced my childcare costs, allowing me to continue working full-time."

Kim, mum



Help with costs

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 cost of £175 a week for one child and £300 a week for two or more children. It's worth checking out with HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) or with 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 with HMRC and see how much you could get.



A few examples of help for families...

ONE

Carl and Alison both work and between them earn about **£20,000** a year. They pay out £100 a week in childcare costs. They get about **£62** each week to help with the cost of childcare.

TWO

Nina and Sanjeev have an income of **£10,000** and childcare costs of £50 a week for their 18-month baby. They would get back around **£40** 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 online at **www.hmrc.gov.uk** for a claim form. A special web-calculator on **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 any of your other entitlements

.....


Child Benefit

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

Sure Start Maternity Grant

If you're a new mum or dad on a low income or tax credit, you may be able to claim this one-off payment of £500. Contact your local Jobcentre Plus office or download the claim form on www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk.

Your local Families Information Service (**0800 2 346 346**) will be able to help you.



If you're in work, go to page 30 for your leave entitlements - which include maternity and paternity pay.

FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local Families Information Service (FIS) on **0800 2 346 346**, or go to [www.direct.gov.uk/childcare](http://www.direct.gov.uk/) and click on 'money, tax and benefits'.

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 is 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.

Care To Learn

If you are a mum or dad or carer under 20 continuing your education or training, you can get help to pay for registered childcare and travel costs. Also ask them about Sixth Form College Childcare if you're 20 or over studying at a sixth form college or school sixth form.

Learner Support Funds

If you are 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 early learning and childcare while you train. It's for couples aged 20 and over where one parent is working and the other is in training.



Help from your employer

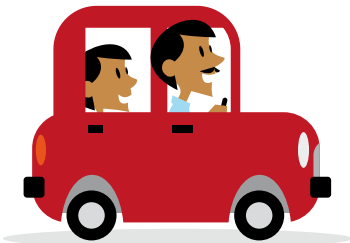
As well as all the high-quality childcare arrangements that are on offer, if your child is 16 or under (17 or under if disabled) and you've worked for your employer for at least 26 weeks, then you're entitled to ask for flexible working.

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.

AT WORK

- Talk to your boss about your work and your family needs
- Think flexible working - why not see if you qualify?
- Don't be embarrassed about saying: "I've got to go home now to collect the kids" - everyone has commitments outside work.





EMERGENCY!

It happens sometimes: your childcare provider falls ill, or there's a problem at the nursery, 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**. You can also get help from the Advisory and Arbitration Service (ACAS) helpline, on **08457 474747**.

Time away from work

As a working mum or dad you may be entitled to take leave from work...

.....

...when the baby's born

- As a mum you may qualify for 52 weeks' maternity leave, and you may be entitled to receive Statutory Maternity Pay for up to 39 weeks of that time. If you don't qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay (perhaps you're self-employed, or have changed employers since becoming pregnant) you may still be able to claim Maternity Allowance, through Jobcentre Plus.
- As a dad you're entitled to be paid paternity leave following the birth of your baby – either one or two weeks

– and to receive Statutory Paternity Pay during that time. You must have been in the job for six months – and told your boss that you want the leave – by the 15th week before your baby's due date.

...as your child grows up

- As a mum or dad in the same job for a year or more (and who qualifies in other ways) you're entitled to thirteen weeks' unpaid parental leave before your child's fifth birthday (eighteen weeks up to the 18th birthday of a disabled child).



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

Want to work or volunteer in early learning and 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.

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.

"I found myself suddenly a one-parent family bringing up three young children, so a job helping in their playgroup was a logical solution. But over the years it has developed into a flourishing career."

Josie, Nursery Assistant

FIND OUT MORE...

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



ISBN 978-1-84775-396-0

You can download this publication at:

publications.dcsf.gov.uk

Search using the ref: 00126-2009BKT-EN

Copies of this publication can also be obtained from:

Department for Children, Schools and Families Publications

PO Box 5050

Sherwood Park, Annesley

Nottingham NG15 0DJ

Tel 0845 60 222 60

Fax 0845 60 333 60

Textphone 0845 60 555 60

Please quote ref 00126-2009BKT-EN

PPMRP/D34 0409/16

© Crown Copyright 2009

Published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial research, education or training purposes on the condition that the source is acknowledged. For any other use please contact hmsolicensing@opsi.x.gsi.gov.uk



When you have finished with this leaflet please recycle it

80% recycled

This leaflet is printed on 75% recycled paper