



The facts

- Pre-schools or playgroups provide care and most also provide early education for children between three and five years old.
- A pre-school or playgroup is a group organised by the community or voluntary groups on a not-for-profit basis, often with help from parents.
- They offer sessions from two-and-a-half hours to four hours, during term time, either every day or on several days a week.
- Your child should experience learning and development activities suitable for their age which are based on the Birth to Three Framework and Foundation Stage (see 'Learning as they grow' on page 46).
- Pre-schools are a good way of extending your childcare and some are developing their services to offer longer sessions or full-time daycare.

HOW CAN I BE SURE OF GOOD QUALITY CARE?

A registered pre-school or playgroup is regularly inspected by Ofsted (see page 50), to check on the quality of the care and free part-time early education (if provided) is satisfactory.

Most pre-schools or playgroups will provide places for between twenty four and twenty eight children. There should be one member of staff for every eight children aged three to five.

Most staff are trained to work with children or are mid-training.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME?

£3 to £5 per session, but kept to a minimum. Some may ask you to pay for a block booking of half a term in advance. Costs will vary across the country. Your local Children's Information Service will be able to give you up-to-date local costs.

Is it for me?

- ▶ My childminder can take my child to pre-school (they can supplement existing childcare arrangements)
- ▶ I think it's great that they'll mix and make friends with other children
- ▶ I don't want to leave my child for longer than I need to
- ▶ I've got the spare time, and want to get involved with the playgroup and help out
- ▶ I want my child to have access to different toys, equipment and stimulation
- ▶ My hours fit around opening and closing times
- ▶ I feel happy leaving my child in a place where there are trained professionals
- ▶ I need to know that there will always be someone to look after my child; if one carer is sick, another can cover



QUESTIONS TO ASK THE PRE-SCHOOL/PLAYGROUP

- ? What qualifications do staff hold?
- ? Can you talk me through the learning and developmental activities my child will take part in?
- ? How will I find out how well my child is settling in?
- ? Can I stay and join in at least two sessions to be sure this type of care is right for my child?
- ? How many children do you care for?
- ? Is the building/room safe and well kept (especially if it is used for other purposes e.g. a church hall)?
- ? Are there lots of toys and equipment?
- ? How much emphasis is on parental involvement and how can I get involved?
- ? How will outings be supervised?
- ? Will you keep a daily record of what they've done?
- ? Are the children well supervised?



Also remember...

- Put your child's name down on a pre-school list ASAP to avoid delays – and disappointment. They are extremely popular.
- Make sure that the leader is suitably qualified. The National Standards state they should have a level three qualification in early years care and education, plus trained assistant staff.
- Check facilities are of a high standard. There should be a quiet time area for sitting-down activities (such as playing with construction toys, puzzles, drawing and story times), an area for free play, and an area for more physical play like pram pushing.

Find out more...

Contact your Children's Information Service (CIS) via ChildcareLink (freephone **0800 096 02 96**) for a list of local pre-schools or playgroups

Call Pre-School Learning Alliance: **020 7833 0991** or visit www.pre-school.org.uk

