



Choosing Childcare

Dear Parent,

Making the right childcare choice for you and your children can be a difficult task. This booklet aims to provide you with basic information on the types of childcare available, how to identify good quality childcare, and questions you might wish to ask when you are choosing childcare. This is only a starting point and further information and guidance is available from key organisations whose contact details are included within the booklet - please feel free to contact them at any time. This booklet has been funded by the Eastern Childcare Partnership (ECP) and has been designed by member of the ECP and 4 Local Childcare Partnerships. I hope it assists you in finding a childcare setting where your child will be happy, safe and stimulated.



Yours faithfully,

Theresa Nixon

(Chairperson, Eastern Childcare Partnership)

4 - 6	Looking for Childcare	16 - 18	Some Indicators of Quality Childcare
7 - 8	What is Registration?	19 - 21	Some Questions to Ask
9 - 12	Types of Registered Childcare Provision	22 - 27	Contact Details
13 - 15	Types of Unregistered Childcare Provision		

Contents



Looking for Childcare

Begin looking for childcare early. You will have more time to explore options and more choice of carers. Always use registered providers who have undergone the necessary child protection checks. It is recommended that you use a provider who has insurance cover.

Find out what childcare options are available locally by contacting:

- Your Local Social Services Early Years Team
- Your Local Childcare Partnership
- Your Health Visitor
- NIPPA - The Early Years Organisation
- NICMA - The Northern Ireland Childminding Association
- PlayBoard
- Your appropriate Education & Library Board - The Belfast Education and Library Board (*BELB*) or the South Eastern Education and Library Board (*SEELB*).

Contact Details are on pages 22-26

Visit the childcare facilities you are interested in and ask set questions (*see page 19-21 for sample questions*). Take your child with you to see how the carers relate to him/her.

Ask to see registration and insurance certificates and Social Services Inspection Reports. For services in the Pre-School Expansion Programme (*PEEP*)*, Department of Education Inspection Reports can also be made available to you.

- * **Pre-school Education Expansion Programme**
This is a government funded scheme which entitles all children in their pre-school year a place in funded Early Years centres including: Playgroups, Day Nurseries or Statutory Nurseries. These providers offer an early years curriculum as recommended by the Department of Education and are inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

06 Looking for Childcare

Talk to other parents, Early Years Social Workers, NIPPA, NICMA, PlayBoard and Childcare Partnership Development Workers for further guidance and information. After gathering more information on the facilities, arrange a second visit at a different time of day to your first visit. Apply early for a place for your child as most facilities operate waiting lists. Aim for stability and continuity of care that will suit your child long-term - do not rush into a short-term solution.

Trust your instincts about what facilities and carers you feel are best for you and your child. Do not settle for a childcare arrangement you are not completely happy with. When you have decided on childcare, agree hours, pay and conditions and how to apply for/secure a place. Get this agreement in writing/a contract. Gradually introduce your child to the carer/childcare setting and for increasingly long periods of time so that they are settled in, especially if you are returning to work.

Prices may vary depending on the type of childcare setting you choose. You may be entitled to some help in meeting childcare costs. For more information on Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit you can contact the...

Inland Revenue Helpline 0845 609 7000
Monday - Friday, 7.30am - 6.30pm
...or your local Social Security Office.

If you are worried that your child may have special needs or a learning disability, contact your GP, Health Visitor or Social Worker. Whoever you speak to will be able to get you specialist advice and support. If required, your Social Services Early Years Team, Disability Teams, NIPPA, NICMA and PlayBoard may also be able to advise you of specialised or appropriate childcare facilities in your area.



What is Registration

08 What is Registration

Any childcare facility or childminder providing care for more than 2 hours in any one day is required to be registered by law. Social Services Early Years Teams assess the suitability of the provider in 3 key areas:

- 1 Premises - for Healthy & Safety
- 2 Staff - via police, medical and Social Services checks to ensure individuals are suitable to care for children.
- 3 Equipment and play environment - to ensure that it is age appropriate, safe and stimulating.





Types of Registered Childcare Provision

10 Types of Registered Childcare Provision

1 Day Nurseries

Day nurseries provide care, play and educational opportunities for children under compulsory school age. Some also provide separate after-school care. They are normally open all year and can provide care on a full or part-time basis. These nurseries are usually privately owned and operate on a fee paying basis. Some day nurseries have funded pre-school places under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (*PEEP*). Regulation and guidance recommend that group sizes for 3-4 year olds should not exceed 6-8 children and that groups of school age children should not exceed 10**.

** Regulations and Guidance recommend appropriate group sizes for good practice but you may find group sizes vary from this recommendation.

Group sizes for babies and toddlers are not specified but small groups are recommended for good practice.

It is expected that there are a minimum of 2 staff per group at all times and that the following staff ratios should be adhered to. A minimum of 50% of staff must have Early Years qualifications.

0-2 years - 1 staff member to every 3 children
2-3 years - 1 staff member to every 4 children
3+ years - 1 staff member to every 8 children



Further information is available from your local Social Services Early Years Team, NIPPA and the Education and Library Boards (*for PEEP funded day nurseries*).
For contact details see pages 22-27

2 Creche

Creches can operate all day but provide flexible short-term care for children for up to 4 hours at any one time. Children are usually under compulsory school age.

Staff must have appropriate Early Years qualifications and the same staff ratios apply as for a day nursery.

- 1 Further information is available from your local Social Services Early Years Team and NIPPA. For contact details see pages 22-27



3 Childminders

Childminders provide care for children in their own home for periods of more than 2 hours per day. They are self-employed and negotiate fees and terms and conditions of their service with the childrens' parents. These should be formalised in a written agreement or contract.

There should be no more than 3 children under the age of 5 years or 6 children under the age of 12 (*including the childminder's own children*) cared for at any one time. It is advisable that childminders have Public Liability Insurance.

- 1 Further information is available from your local Social Services Early Years Team and the Northern Ireland Childminding Association. For contact details see pages 22-27

12 Types of Registered Childcare Provision

4 Playgroups

Playgroups offer part-time care and educational opportunities through play. This is either during a morning or afternoon session of no more than 4 hours at any one time.

Children attend usually between 3 years and compulsory school age. Playgroups are staffed by a minimum of 50% qualified Early Years staff and provide a ratio of 1 member of staff to 8 children.

Some playgroups offer free pre-school places under the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme (*PEEP*).

i Further information is available from your local Social Services Early Years Team, NIPPA and the Education & Library Boards (*for PEEP funded playgroups*).
For contact details see pages 22-27

5 After/Out of School Clubs

After/Out of School Clubs offer care and play opportunities normally for 2 to 3 hours after school and in some cases for 1 hour before school. A minimum of 50% staff must have Early Years or Playwork qualifications. Staff ratios should be 1 member of staff to every 8 children. It is recommended that group sizes not exceed 10 children under 10 years.

i Further information is available from your local Social Services Early Years Team and from Playboard.
For contact details see pages 22-27



Types of Unregistered Childcare Provision

14 Types of Unregistered Childcare Provision

Statutory (School) Nursery Provision

Statutory nursery provision varies and may take the form of a nursery school, a nursery unit or a nursery class within a school. They provide part or full time education for children aged 2-4 years and are run by Education & Library Boards. They deliver the Early Years curriculum as outlined by the Department of Education and are regulated by the Education & Training Inspectorate. Nursery schools are staffed by a minimum of 1 qualified teacher and 1 classroom assistant providing a ratio of 1 member of staff to 13 children.

I Further information on statutory nursery provision is available from the Education & Library Boards.
For contact details see pages 22-27

Nannies

A nanny is someone you employ to care for your children in your own home. You are responsible for carrying out interviews and checking references regarding the suitability of the individual and, as their employer, for paying their NIC and PAYE contributions. Unless a nanny is caring for more than 2 families in one home at any one time there is no registration or inspection required. It is not necessary, but preferable, that they have suitable Childcare qualifications.

I Information on nanny services is available from independent nanny agencies.

Parent and Toddler Groups

Parent and Toddler (*P&T*) groups provide informal opportunities for parents and their young children to socialise and share experiences through collective activities.

- i** Information on P&T groups is available from your local Social Services Early Years Team and NIPPA. *For contact details see pages 22-27*



Family Support Projects

There are a number of organisations providing advice and support to families with young children on health, social and educational matters. Support is also available to families and parents under stress or having difficulty coping with their young family.

- i** Contact details for services such as: Barnardos, Bryson House, Lifestart and Sure Start available in your local area can be sought from your District Childcare Partnership. *For contact details see page 22-27*



Some Indicators of Quality Childcare

Make sure you choose the best quality childcare provision for your child. Look for the following signs of good quality:

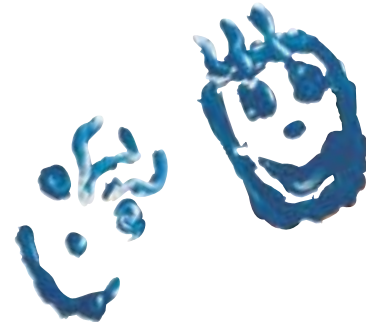
- Premises should be registered with Social Services and be pleasant, clean, safe and welcoming.
- With the exception of childminders and nannies, 50% of staff/carers must be qualified and have had recent appropriate training. They should be friendly, and greet both you and your children personally.
- Children should be welcomed irrespective of culture, ethnicity, disability or special needs.
- Carers/staff should have a warm relationship with the children, listening and talking to them with sensitivity and understanding.
- There should be a range of age appropriate toys, equipment, books, displays and evidence of a well organised programme of activities for the children
- Staff/carers should welcome your concerns/views on how to care for your child and opportunities should be available to receive regular feedback on your child's progress and general development.

18 Some Indicators of Quality Childcare

- Children should appear happy, relaxed and 'busy'/occupied.
- There should be clear routines and a calm atmosphere.
- There should be a child-centred atmosphere where all children are valued and given positive encouragement for effort and acceptable behaviour.
- There should be arrangements in place to contact the parents/carer in an emergency.
- Opportunities for safe physical play should be provided regularly, preferably in an outdoor environment.

TIP

Some childcare facilities have been endorsed by quality assurance schemes. Contact NIPPA, NICMA, PlayBoard and/or the Social Services Early Years Team for further information on accredited providers. Early years providers in the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme (*PEEP*) are subject to inspection by the Department of Education (*DE*). Contact DE on (028) 9127 9279 for details of how to access inspection reports.






Some questions to ask...

20 Some Questions to Ask

- 1 How long have you been operating?
- 2 How many children do you care for and what are their ages?
- 3 What is the daily routine?
e.g. babies - sleep/feeding routine
toddlers - potty training/nappy changing
all ages - opportunities for safe physical play and this should be provided regularly preferably in an outdoor environment.
- 4 What arrangements are in place for an emergency situation?
- 5 What is their attitude to, or policy on, sleeping arrangements, potty training, acceptable behaviour, dealing with difficult behaviour and television viewing?
- 6 If food is provided does the facility or carer offer healthy eating options?
- 7 Ask for information and assurances on any other adults who have regular contact with the children being cared for but have not undergone Child Protection checks.
- 8 In a day nursery are opportunities made available for sibling contact throughout the day?

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- 9 Do day nurseries and playgroups operate a keyworker system? (*ie. a named individual is ultimately responsible for the care of your child*).
 - 10 What systems and opportunities are in place to provide feedback on your child's daily activities and general progress and development?
 - 11 Ask to see copies of policies and procedures? (*some childminders may not have these*).
 - 12 How does the facility or carer plan to settle in the child and what is their view on the parents involvement in the settling in process?
 - 13 Can the pre-school facility give you information on their curriculum and programme of activities?
 - 14 Can they provide a reference or contacts for other parents who have used the facility or carer?
- I** Further questions specific to different types of early years facilities are available from NICMA for childminders, NIPPA for playgroups/creches/day nurseries or Playboard for after/out of schools clubs.



Contact Details



Eastern Area Childcare Partnership

Champion House

12-22 Linenhall Street

Belfast, BT2 8BS

(028) 9055 3965 ecurran@ehssb.n-i.nhs.uk

www.childrensservicesnorthernireland.com

Down Lisburn Childcare Partnership

Windmill Hill Clinic

Windmill Lane

Ballynahinch, BT24 8EX

(028) 9756 5649 linda_mcconnell@dltrust.n-i.nhs.uk

North Down & Ards Childcare Partnership

39 Regent Street

Newtownards, BY23 4AD

(028) 9181 6666 judith.mclaughlin@ucht.n-i.nhs.uk

North & West Belfast Childcare Partnership

124 Stewartstown Road

Belfast, BT11 9JQ

(028) 9060 4208 marymurphy@nwb.n-i.nhs.uk

**South & East Belfast District
Childcare Partnership**

Glen Villa, Knockbracken Healthcare Park

Saintfield Road

Belfast, BT8 8BH

(028) 9056 4909 lorraine.brennan@sebt.n-i.nhs.uk



Early Years Teams

Down Lisburn Trust Early Years Team (Lisburn sector)

Warren Children's Centre
61 Woodland Park
Lisburn, BT28 1LQ
(028) 9260 7528

Down Lisburn Trust Early Years Team (Down sector)

Lecale House
Downshire Estate
Ardglass Road
Downpatrick, BT30 6RA
(028) 4461 3311

Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust Early Years Team

Units 57 & 58, Dunlop Commercial Park
4 Balloo Drive
Bangor, BT19 2QY
(028) 9127 0672

North & West H&SS Trust Early Years Team

124 Stewartstown Road
Belfast, BT11 9JQ
(028) 9060 4208

South & East Belfast H&SS Trust Early Years Team

Glen Villa, Knockbracken Healthcare Park
Saintfield Road
Belfast, BT8 8BH
(028) 9056 4977



Disability Services

Down Lisburn Trust Children & Disability Services

81 Market Street
Downpatrick, BT30 6LZ
(028) 4461 3511 or,
Warren Children's Centre
61 Woodland Park
Lisburn, BT28 1LQ
(028) 9260 7528

South & East Belfast Disability Team

Invervilla
Knockbracken Healthcare Park
Saintfield Road
Belfast, BT8 8BH
(028) 9056 5791

North & West Belfast Disability Teams

Everton Complex
2 Ardoyne Road
Belfast, BT14 7HY
(028) 9056 6000

Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust Learning Disability Team

Ballyholme Road
Bangor, BT20 5JH
(028) 9147 9657



Contact for Health Visiting...

North & West Belfast Trust Community Nursing

89 Durham Street
Belfast, BT12 4GE
(028) 9027 8822 or
Lincoln Avenue Health Centre
5-13 Lincoln Avenue
Belfast, BT14 6AZ
(028) 9074 8363

South & East Belfast Trustline Freephone 0800 228844

Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust

Donaghadee Health Centre
3 Killoughy Road
Donaghadee, BT21 0BI
(028) 9188 3775



NIPPA - The Early Years Organisation

The Early Years Organisation have early years specialists working in your local area. Their contact details are available from NIPPA Head Office:

6c Wildflower Way
Apollo Road
Belfast, BT12 6TA
(028) 9066 2825
www.nippa.org

NICMA - The Northern Ireland Childminding Association

16-18 Mill Street
Newtownards, BT23 4LU
(028) 9181 1015

PlayBoard

59-65 York Street
Belfast, BT15 1AA
(028) 9080 3380
info@plybrd.dnet.co.uk

Belfast Education & Library Board (BELB)

40 Academy Street
Belfast, BT1 2NQ
(028) 9056 4000

South Eastern Education & Library Board (SEELB)

Grahamsbridge Road
Dundonald
Belfast, BT16 0HS
(028) 9056 6200

