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## Factsheet for parents in England

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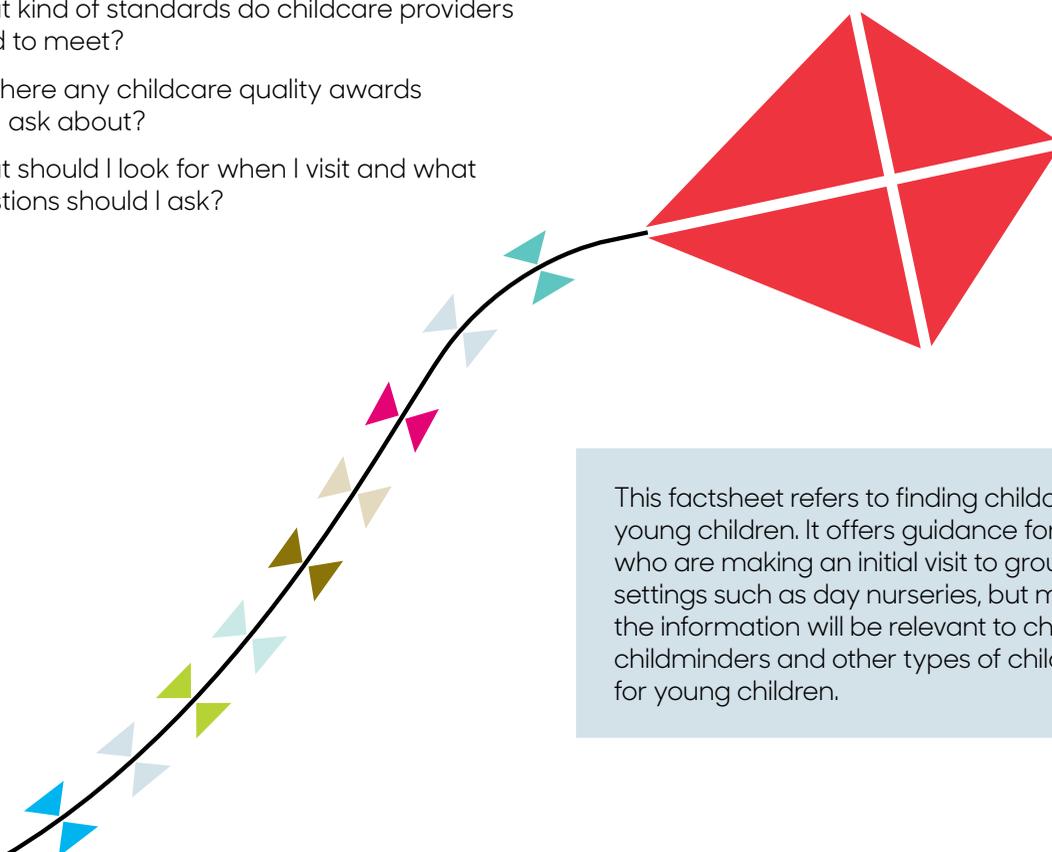
# Visiting childcare settings

When choosing childcare it is important that you visit different settings to help you make your decision. Recommendations from other parents can be helpful, but it's important to remember that everyone is different and what suits their child will not necessarily suit yours.

You can use this factsheet to help you decide if the childcare providers you visit are providing high-quality care and it will answer questions:

- What does registered childcare mean?
- What can Ofsted reports tell me?
- What kind of standards do childcare providers need to meet?
- Are there any childcare quality awards I can ask about?
- What should I look for when I visit and what questions should I ask?

To find out about local childcare contact your local Family Information Service (FIS). They will be able to provide contact details for all registered childcare providers in your area. You can find contact details for your FIS by searching in your local phone book, or by visiting: [www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis)



This factsheet refers to finding childcare for young children. It offers guidance for parents who are making an initial visit to group settings such as day nurseries, but much of the information will be relevant to choosing childminders and other types of childcare for young children.



## What does registered childcare mean?

By choosing childcare which is registered with Ofsted you know that the childcare provider has been approved to care for children and has met certain national standards.

Most childcare providers working with children aged five and under must join Ofsted's Early Years Register. Some childcare providers, such as nannies, are not required to register, but can choose to join the voluntary part of the Ofsted Childcare Register. They do this so that parents know that they have met basic standards to protect children and also to allow eligible parents to claim help with their childcare costs.

Registration requirements for different types of childcare are listed on the inside.

For more information about different types of childcare, visit our website, [www.familyandchildcaretrust.org](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org)

\*Nurseries attached to schools that provide education for children age three and over, where at least one child is a pupil of the school, cannot be registered on Ofsted's Early Years Register. However, these nurseries have school inspections from Ofsted, and must still deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to children age five and under. (See 'What kind of standards do childcare providers need to meet?' below for more information about the EYFS.)

### Types of registered childcare include:

- childminders;
- children's centres;
- day nurseries;
- playgroups/preschools;
- crèches (open more than 2 hours per day and more than 14 days per year); and
- nursery schools\*.

### Types of childcare not required to register, but can choose to join the voluntary part of the register include:

- crèches (open less than 2 hours per day and less than 14 days per year);
- nannies or other care provided in your child's home; and
- activity based care for children aged three and over, for four hours or less per day.

### Types of unregistered childcare include:

- childcare provided by a family member;
- babysitting in the child's home; and
- childcare provided by a friend (who is not receiving payment of any kind for caring for your child).



## What can Ofsted reports tell me?

Ofsted inspection reports can give you an impartial view of a childcare provider and can help provide information about how well they are meeting health and safety requirements and also how they are meeting standards as set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage (explained below). You can view the latest inspection reports by visiting the Ofsted website, [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

It is important to keep in mind that Ofsted assesses childcare providers on how well they support children's development according to their individual needs. The assessment is not just about education, but includes how well they meet the social and emotional needs of children in their care.

## What are inspection report grades and what do they mean?

Ofsted will inspect and grade childcare under various headings before making a judgement on the overall grade they award: see green table below.

## How are childcare providers on the Early Years Register inspected?

Childcare providers on the Early Years Register will be inspected at least once every three to four years. Inspections are undertaken with little or no notice, with the exception of childcare which takes place in the child's home.

Ofsted publishes complaints made about registered childcare providers, so that you have up-to-date relevant information to help you make your decision. Details about complaints can be found alongside inspection reports on Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Remember, Ofsted inspections and other quality accreditations are no substitute for your own judgement. You know your child better than anyone else and it is important that you do your own research and trust your instincts.

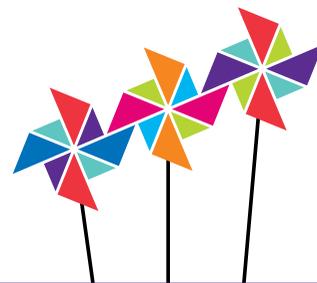
### Inspection Report Grades

**Outstanding:** provision is of exceptionally high quality

**Good:** provision is strong

**Satisfactory:** provision is sound

**Inadequate:** provision is not good enough



## What kind of standards do childcare providers need to meet?

Every registered childcare provider in England who cares for children age five and under is required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The EYFS is a framework which describes what the childcare provider should be doing as they care for young children. It describes what level of development children can be expected to reach at certain stages, and how to support them in their development.

The EYFS ensures that all children have access to high-quality care, which is consistent across different types of childcare, including childminders and nurseries. The importance of play and having fun is central to the EYFS. Your child's progress and development will be based purely on encouraging them to learn through play activities. According to the EYFS, childcare providers should ensure that children are never pressured or measured against others in any way.

When you visit a new childcare provider, ask how they plan to use the EYFS to support your child's development. There is a list of suggested questions at the end of this factsheet that you may want to take along with you.

The EYFS is based on four principles, which are stated below. Each of these themes should shape the care and education opportunities that childcare providers offer:

1. Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.
2. Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.
3. Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
4. Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates. The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Every child has a 'learning journey' which is the common name for their record of achievement. There should be two-way exchanges of information between you and your child's key person contributing to your child's 'learning journey.'



The EYFS also outlines seven areas of learning and development, which help childcare providers plan activities for each child.

Children should mostly develop the 3 prime areas first. These are:

1. Communication and language.
2. Physical development.
3. Personal, social and emotional development.

As children grow, the prime areas will help them to develop skills in 4 specific areas. These are:

4. Literacy.
5. Mathematics.
6. Understanding the world.
7. Expressive arts and design.

### Who will I speak to about how my child is doing?

A key person will be assigned a small group of children so each child has one member of staff who helps them to feel safe and cared for.

You should be able to speak to your child's key person about their learning and development at any time. In addition to this, your child's key person must give you written notes about how your child is doing at age two and five.

### Are there any childcare quality awards I can ask about?

In addition to being registered with Ofsted, different types of childcare providers may also choose to follow a quality assurance scheme, such as the National Day Nursery Association's 'E-Quality Counts', Pre-School Learning Alliance's 'Reflecting on Quality' or one run by the local authority.

Quality assurance schemes require childcare providers to work towards high standards of care, as described by the scheme they choose to follow. Some schemes may be judged by the childcare staff themselves (self-assessment) and others will be judged by an external professional.

To find out more about the Early Years Foundation Stage visit:  
[www.foundationyears.org.uk](http://www.foundationyears.org.uk)

There should be one staff member for every three babies under two-years-old, and one staff member for every four toddlers aged two-years-old.

Staff ratios for children aged three and over depend on a number of factors. Ask the childcare provider what ratios they have under Ofsted regulations.



Although quality schemes are not a legal requirement, they do demonstrate that the childcare provider strives to meet high standards. You may want to ask if they are working towards or have achieved any quality schemes.

## How do I find childcare providers in my area?

You can get a list of childcare providers from your local Family Information Service. Their details can be found by visiting: [www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis) or should be listed in your phone book.

When you've made a short list of the childcare providers that broadly suit your family needs, it's worth visiting as many as possible.

## What should I look for when I visit and what questions should I ask?

The following questions will help you to remember some of the key things you should be asking childcare providers when deciding on whether the care they provide will be suitable for your child.

### When you arrive first impressions count:

- Do you get a warm welcome when you arrive?
- Are they willing to show you around?
- Is there plenty of outdoor space?
- Do the staff interact with your child?
- Are you able to meet other staff members?
- Do the children there seem to be happy and content?

Your local Family Information Service (FIS) may be able to tell you which childcare providers in your area have completed a quality assurance scheme. Find contact details for your FIS by visiting: [www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis)



### Vacancies and costs

- Are there vacancies – is there a waiting list and, if so, how long is this?
- Do you have to pay a deposit? If so, what's it for? Is it returnable?
- How much do they charge per hour/day? Do you have to pay for holidays/meals/nappies/other activities?
- Can you take up the free 15 hours for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds? If you want additional hours how much extra will it cost?
- Do they accept childcare vouchers (if this is an option from your employer)?
- Do they offer a settling in period? If so, how long for?

### Staffing and premises

- What is the ratio of staff to children? How many children do they care for?
- Do they operate a key (named) person system?
- What is staff turnover like? How well qualified are the staff? Are all the criminal records checks up to date?
- Can you see a copy of the registration certificates and inspection reports?

### Activities and support

- What are the daily routines and how can they incorporate your child's routines and special needs?
- Where can your child sleep or rest?
- What if your child is unhappy? How would they be looked after?
- What are their policies on discipline and how do they manage children's behaviour?
- How will your child's dietary requirements be accommodated? What systems do they have in place if a child has a severe food allergy?
- How will your child's cultural background be reflected and respected? Are there staff members from different backgrounds? Do they have books and activities representing all cultures? What about food/music/religious festivals?
- What opportunities are there for you to be involved?
- How will they update you about your child's progress? Do they provide a record book or learning journey?
- Can they describe examples of how they develop activities to meet individual children's interests and developmental needs?

### Emergencies

- What happens if your child is sick?
- What happens if you are delayed picking your child up at the end of the day?
- How will they contact you in an emergency?

For information about choosing childcare for children with special educational needs and disabilities, see our website: [www.familyandchildcaretrust.org](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org)



Use this space to make notes when you visit a childcare provider and to write down some questions of your own.

The Family and Childcare Trust is the charity created from a merger of Daycare Trust and the Family and Parenting Institute. Together we bring over 40 years of experience in campaigning and research into family life and childcare.

The information in this factsheet refers to childcare in England only. For information about childcare options in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, contact your local Family Information Service (FIS). Find details of your local FIS by visiting: [www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/findyourfis) or by searching in your phone book.

This factsheet provides general information only and was accurate at the time of publication. The information is not to be taken as legal advice. You are advised to seek independent advice if you need further assistance

[www.familyandchildcaretrust.org](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org)

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October 2013