

Childcare Options

Are you looking for childcare?

Even if you are not yet ready to leave your child in childcare but you are considering going back to work or college, it makes sense to start thinking about it now. There are plenty of options out there, but which one is right for you? How do you go about choosing and moving forward?

How childcare and early education can help you and your child

Nowadays there are so many different kinds of family set ups, all with a variety of needs and demands on their time and income. You will need to work out which is the best childcare arrangement for you – from a personal point of view and to be informed of childcare funding.

Benefits for your child

- ☺ High quality childcare and early education gives your child a head start in primary school, as research shows that it improves their educational, emotional and social development.
- ☺ Children who attend a good quality childcare setting are more likely to be more independent, better able to concentrate and more sociable at the start of primary school.
- ☺ The benefits of part-time attendance are just as good as full-time attendance.

Benefits for you

- ☺ There are lots of different good quality childcare arrangements on offer which you can mix and match to suit your daily schedule, working hours, study or training. Do remember that funded childcare hours can be used across more than one setting with a maximum of 2 settings.
- ☺ Financial help from the Government to help make childcare more affordable.

Affordable Childcare

All 3 and 4-year-olds are currently entitled to 15 hours a week of free early education. From September 2017, eligible working parents can claim an additional 15 hours of free early education and childcare per week, for 38 weeks of the year.

If you are eligible, you can use the full 30 hours every week for 38 weeks or some providers will offer stretched hours across the year. This means that you will use fewer hours each week, but it will cover more weeks in the year.

The entitlement starts from the term after your child's third birthday and can continue until your child starts in their reception class at school. If you are eligible and you wish your child to take up a place with a childcare provider between September 2018 and December 2018 you will need to apply for an eligibility code before 31 August 2018. You will need to reconfirm your eligibility every three months prior to the end date of your code. To ensure you have an eligible code from September 2018 please check that the dates between your start date and end date cover 1 September 2018.

Who is eligible for the additional 30 hours?

Your eligibility to claim the additional 30 hours is based upon you and your child meeting the following criteria:

- Your child must be over 3 years old when they take the place at a childcare provider
- Your child must be under compulsory school age
- Both parents must be working (or the sole parent in a lone parent family)
- Each parent aged 25 or over must earn, on average, at least £120 a week (the equivalent to 16 hours at National Living Wage)
- Each parent aged 24 or younger must earn, on average, at least the equivalent of 16 hours at National Minimum Wage.

This means as a 21-24 year old you will earn over £112.80 a week

As an 18-20 year old you will earn over £89.60 a week

For under 18s you will earn over £64.80 a week

Parents on an apprenticeship (age 19 or under) must earn at least £56 a week

Parents must earn less than £100,000 each per year.

Please note, eligibility is based on income earned, not the number of hours worked.

Exceptions to the eligibility criteria

Families where one parent does not work (or neither parent works) will not usually be eligible, **unless**:

- Both parents are employed, but one or both parents is temporarily away from the workplace on maternity, paternity, parental or adoption leave or on statutory sick pay
- One parent is employed and one parent either has substantial caring responsibilities, based on specific benefits received for caring
- One parent is employed and one parent is disabled or incapacitated, based on the receipt of specific benefits

How do I apply?

You can apply for 30 hours of free early education and childcare through the **Childcare Choices** website, <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>

What happens if I lose eligibility?

- If you lose your eligibility you will receive a 'grace period' – this means you will be able to keep your childcare for a short period
- Once the 'grace period' has lapsed, your child will still be entitled to the universal 15-hour entitlement, but will lose the extended entitlement.

For further information on help with the cost of childcare and participating providers contact the Family Information Service on 01634 332195 or email familyinfo@medway.gov.uk.

Tax-Free Childcare

Tax-free childcare is a new UK scheme to help working parents pay for childcare.

Any eligible working family can use the tax-free childcare scheme - it doesn't rely on employers offering it. For every £8 a parent pays, the government will pay an extra £2 towards their childcare costs – up to £2,000 per child, per year (or £4,000 for children who are disabled). Tax-free childcare is available for children up to the age of 12 (or 17 for disabled children).

You can use tax-free childcare to help pay:

- Registered childminders, nurseries and nannies
- Registered after-school clubs and playschemes
- Registered schools
- Home careworkers working for a registered home care agency

For further information visit [Childcare Choices](#) website where you can apply online.

Your choices

The first step is to find out what is available near you by visiting www.medwayfisd.com or by contacting the Medway Family Information Service (FIS) on 01634 332195. The FIS will provide you with useful information such as contact details, opening hours, age restrictions, parking facilities and costs.

Who Provides Childcare?

Childminder: Childminders offer professional home-from-home childcare and early education, looking after small groups of children of various ages and from different families in their own home. Childminders support the early learning and development for children of all ages, working closely with parents to provide bespoke childcare. All childminders are registered with Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) and are inspected periodically.

Some of the activities offered could be:

- Creative play, arts and crafts, reading and storytelling, supporting early language development and helping children develop their creativity and imagination
- Cooking with and for the children, providing valuable real-life learning experiences and healthy, nutritious meals and snacks
- Taking children to and from nursery, school or their other activities and clubs, working with other childcare professionals and parents to provide a coordinated approach to supporting each individual child
- Observing children's progress, working with parents to support their child's ongoing learning and development.

Childminders can offer a variety of hours during the working week with varied starting and finishing times and some of them work during the weekends.

Nanny: Employed by families to care for children in their own home. They can live in or out and may have qualifications in childcare. They do not have to register with Ofsted, but may choose to do so.

Day Nursery: They offer part time places through to full daycare, eg. Monday - Friday, 8am to 6pm, from babies to 5 year olds. They must be inspected and registered by Ofsted.

Preschool/playgroup: Offers early learning and childcare aims to encourage children aged between 2 and 5 years old to learn and develop in a caring and nurturing setting. They help children to socialise and meet other children and adults and to learn through play and games. Usually part time, either mornings or afternoons. They must be inspected and registered by Ofsted.

Crèches: Places where children can be cared for, usually for a short space of time while their parents do other things. They must be inspected and registered by Ofsted if they offer care for more than 2 hours.

Holiday playschemes: Care and play for children and young people during the school holidays. Playschemes caring for children under the age of 8 years must be inspected and registered by Ofsted. Playschemes caring for children over the age of 8 years may be part of the Ofsted Voluntary Register.

Out of school clubs: Care and play for children and young people before and/or after school hours. They must be inspected and registered by Ofsted if they care for children under the age of 8 years.

School nursery class: Classes for children over the age of 3 during school hours and term time only. They are part time and they are usually attached to schools. They will be regularly inspected by Ofsted school inspectors.

Which type of childcare do I want?

The childcare you choose depends on the age and development of your child and what type and length of care is needed to fit in with your daily life. Parents/carers should seek information about all of the types of provision available to them locally, and decide which option is best for them and their child. It takes time to find suitable care and you should also be prepared to spend time settling your child in with your chosen carer.

Many childcare providers have waiting lists for places so it is always useful to think ahead about what type of care and provision you want and need.

Childcare Checklist:

- Visit the childcare provider to get a feel for the day-to-day routine and take your child with you to see whether they like it too. Visit when it is in full flow and if possible, make a return visit so that you can see the setting at different times during the day and week.
- Check the equipment and facilities on offer. Is there a variety of creative equipment such as painting stations, sand pits and play areas? It is important your child is offered a number of creative and stimulating experiences throughout the day, within a friendly environment.
- Ask about safety. What happens in an emergency? What precautions have been put in place? Do they have finger guards on doors? Is it secure? Do they have visitor control systems in use? Your child's safety should be top priority.
- Ask about the latest Ofsted inspection or view it online at www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports
- There should be Parent Policies in place and you can ask to see those. Talk to staff about their flexibility. Can they provide childcare that fits in with your work hours? Ask about costs and contracts. Is there a charge for late pick-up?
- Check what food is provided. Is there a healthy balanced diet on offer? Is water available whenever children want it?
- Remember, not every childcare provider will match your child's personality, so be prepared to look around. Do not get disheartened – there is a suitable childcare setting out there for you and your child. Take time to choose carefully and visit as many different providers as possible. When you leave your child in the care of others you must feel secure in the knowledge that your child will thrive and that you can depend on the carer. Think ahead, children need continuity in their care so aim to stay with a particular carer for the foreseeable future.

If you encounter any problem whilst looking for childcare or are finding it difficult to find childcare please contact us and our team will do their best to help you.

Medway Family Information Service cannot recommend or endorse any childcare providers.

**This information is available in different formats and languages.
Contact Medway Family Information Service on 01634 332195 for details.**