

Childcare Options for Parents and Carers

You can search [Sheffield Directory's childcare listings](#) to find different types of childcare provider.

To decide which one is best for you and your child this document provides a guide to what each type of provider offers and some advice on what to look for when choosing a childcare provider.

Childminders

Child-minders are self-employed carers who look after children of all ages. They must be registered with Ofsted or an Ofsted registered Childminder Agency.

Childminders work from domestic premises, normally their own home. They can also work up to half of their time from suitable non-domestic premises, so they have the option of working with other childminders at a school or community hall.

The number of children a childminder can look after varies depending on their age. They can look after up to 6 children under the age of 8, including a maximum of 3 children under 5.

Childminders can also employ up to two assistants. Assistants can be left in sole charge of your child for up to 2 hours, as long as they have the required paediatric first aid training.

Childminders can deliver [Funded Early Learning](#) for 2, 3 and 4 year olds if they're registered with the Council, although they cannot be funded for children they are related to.

You can [search for a Childminder](#) using the Sheffield Directory listings.

Nurseries

There are different types of nursery setting available for children under school age. You may see names that include day nursery, nursery school, pre-school, play-group or children's centre. They will all offer a similar service but with a slightly different focus.

Day nurseries focus on providing a safe environment to look after your child and let them learn through play. They are likely to open for longer hours and take children from age 0 until ready for school.

Pre-schools are likely to focus more on education, providing more structured environment with morning and afternoon sessions similar to a school day although the learning will still be through play activities. They normally take children from the age of 2.

Play-groups are likely to provide a more informal environment, focusing on group interaction and developing social skills. They are likely to be more community based and involve parents in activities. They are less likely to open long hours.

Some nurseries also provide breakfast clubs, after school clubs and/or holiday clubs. The hours they provide can be full and part-time.

They can be privately run on a commercial basis; some are based in a workplace or college for employees or students; others are non-profit making usually serving a local community.

You can search for a nursery using the Sheffield Directory listings:

- [Day nurseries](#)
- [Pre-schools and Playgroups](#)

Most nurseries provide [Funded Early Learning for 2 to 4 year olds](#).

School Nursery Class

The majority of primary schools in Sheffield also have a nursery class. They will normally be staffed with a qualified nursery teacher. Some do take 2 year olds but most are less likely to take a child under 3 and will be more education focussed than a traditional nursery. Opening hours are likely to be the same as the school day, with morning and afternoon sessions either side of a lunch break.

School nursery classes provide [Funded Early Learning](#) but check if they offer the Extended FEL for 3 and 4 year olds.

You can [search for a School Nursery Class](#) using the Sheffield Directory listings.

Breakfast and After School Clubs

Childcare for all ages, they extend the school day to better suit the needs of working parents.

They are also referred to as Out of School Clubs or Wrap-around Care. They are often run by or in association with the school, but some nurseries also offer this service.

Because the clubs are based around the school day they will only operate during school term time, but some clubs run or link to Holiday Clubs.

Out of school clubs can offer [Funded Early Learning](#) for pre-school children if they are registered.

You can search for [Breakfast clubs](#) and [After School clubs](#) using the Sheffield Directory listings.

Holiday Clubs

Group care and play care for children of all ages during the school holidays.

You can [search for Holiday clubs](#) using the Sheffield Directory listings.

Crèche

Group care for occasional or limited amounts of time, normally 2 hours or less.

They are often in a permanent premises attached to sports centres, shopping centres or colleges. The focus is on providing a comfortable place for your child rather than the education that a nursery setting provides.

You can [search for a Crèche](#) using the Sheffield Directory listings.

Home Childcarers: Nannies and Au Pairs

A Home Childcarer is employed by you to provide childcare, usually in your own home, for children from birth up to the age of 18 years. Home Childcarers normally fall into two types: Nannies or Au Pairs.

While the two terms are often used without making a distinction there are official differences between the two.

A Nanny is a professional with formal qualifications and will be paid a salary under UK employment law. They may or may not live with the family. Working hours will be more flexible as part of the contract between the family and the nanny.

An Au Pair is a young person from another country, living with the family as a family member rather than an employee and paid “pocket money” rather than a salary. They are in the UK as part of a cultural exchange, so their responsibilities at the home are limited accordingly.

Home Childcarers cannot deliver Funded Early Learning.

More information on Home Childcarers is available on [our dedicated page](#).

You can [search for a Nanny or an Au Pair](#) using the Sheffield Directory listings.

Choosing childcare: things to consider and questions to ask

Before you decide on a childcare setting, make a shortlist of several providers that have a vacancy at a time that suits you and arrange to visit them.

Try and visit when childcare is being delivered, so you can see how the children are looked after. Try and take your child with you so you can see how the provider interacts with them.

Take a written list of questions with you so you don't forget to ask what you want to know. Below are some suggested questions, but you may have your own.

Some of these are things for you to consider as you look around, others you need to ask the provider.

The Environment

Consider:

- Do the children look happy, settled and busy?
- Are they playing well together?
- Do they have a good variety of things to do and play with?
- Are the toys and activities appropriate for your child's age and culture?

- Is it a clean, secure and safe place for them to play?
- Is it warm, clean, light and well ventilated?
- Is it laid out well (with things at the right height for children)?
- Can children get to places or things they shouldn't be able to?

- Are the staff friendly?
- Do they listen and respond to the children?
- Do they consider what the children are interested in?
- Are they joining in with games and activities?
- Do they look like they enjoy their work?

Ask:

- What is the outside area like?
- How much time do they spend outside?

- Is there a place for children to sleep, if they need to?
- Is there somewhere secure to keep personal things?
- Is there a place where children can be on their own, if they want to?

- What activities are planned to help play and learn?
- How do they encourage good behaviour and deal with difficult behaviour?

Formal Requirements

Anyone providing more than 2 hours of childcare for children up to 8 years old must be on Ofsted's Compulsory Childcare Register. Childminders can be registered with an Ofsted registered agency instead.

For children over 8, many providers choose to be on Ofsted's Voluntary Childcare Register. Some crèches or school clubs may not need to be registered.

Ask:

- What Ofsted rating do they have?
- When was their last Ofsted inspection?
- Can you see their latest Ofsted report?
- You can look this up on the Ofsted website – see our guide to Ofsted.
- Can you see their Certificate of Public Liability Insurance?
- Does it cover outings away from the nursery?
- If they transport children, can you see their Business Use car insurance?
- How many children are there per member of staff?
Ofsted set limits for different ages – see our guide to Ofsted.
- Are all staff DBS checked?
DBS is the Disclosure and Barring Service that replaced the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check in 2012.

Qualifications

By law, at least half the staff in a childcare setting need to hold a valid childcare qualification.

You should ask what qualifications staff have and be satisfied that it is appropriate for the service being provided – staff in a school nursery will have different requirements than those working in a crèche.

Types of qualification include CACHE (Council for Awards in Care Health and Education), QCF awards (vocational training that replaced the NVQ), VRQ awards (mixing vocational and classroom training), City & Guilds, Montessori and BA(hons).

The qualification types have different levels ranging from 1 to 7. **Staff need to be at Level 3 or above to be qualified to look after your child unsupervised.** Staff at Level 4 or above are suitable for managerial roles. Degree qualified nursery teachers are at level 6.

Newly qualified staff should also all be trained in paediatric first aid.

Ask:

- What qualifications do staff hold?
- How are unqualified staff supervised?
- Are staff working towards qualifications? – ongoing training indicates that the setting wants to raise its standards above the basic requirements.

Accessibility and Flexibility

Consider:

- Is the setting convenient for your home or work?
- What can you afford to pay?
 - if it's a Government funded place, can you afford to pay for any extras?
- What level of support does your child need?

ASK:

- Are parents encouraged to be involved (especially if it's a community group)?
- How would they let you know how your child is doing?
 - On a day to day basis.
 - As part of their early education.
- What are you expected to pay?
 - As well as the provider's hourly rate, this can include extras for Funded Early Learning (FEL), deposits for reserving a place and retainers for keeping a place open.
- How are charges invoiced?
- Do they take Childcare Vouchers, or are they set up for Tax Free Childcare?
- Is there a discount for more than one child?
- What if your child is sick or on holiday?
- What arrangements are there for food?
 - This includes main meals and snacks.
 - If your child has a special diet, how is this catered for?
- If your child has additional support needs:
 - How will those needs be met?
 - What training or experience do they have?
- Is there a settling in period when your child starts?
- What is their complaints policy?

Safety and Security

As well as the questions about the environment above, there are some additional considerations about safety.

Ask:

- Do they carry out fire drills and check fire safety equipment regularly?
- How will they let you know about fire drills, medical emergencies or outings?
- If your child needs medication, what is needed to administer it?
- What's their procedure for First Aid?

- What process do they have for people picking up your child?
 - At a crèche, how will they identify your child and how will they confirm the identity of the person collecting?
 - At a school or nursery, how is handover to a childminder arranged?

Additional questions for Childminders

Because childminders normally work alone in their own home, there are some additional things to consider.

Ask:

- Is there any cover if the childminder is sick or on holiday?
- Do you need to provide any additional equipment (e.g. a car seat)?
- How do they supervise multiple children if one is toilet training?
- If they look after school age children, how many children do they do this for and how many schools do they go to?
- What ages are the other children they look after?
- Are there other adults in the house when your child is there?
- Can you get references from other parents?

Childcare for a child with special needs or a disability

All registered childcare is required to ensure that it is accessible and inclusive.

This means childcare should not be refused, or a child treated less favourably, because of any disability or learning difficulty.

All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that the needs of each child are met and that children with disabilities have access to the premises.

Specialist services can provide support and advice to parents and childcarers about children's play, learning and development. They include:

- [Early Years Inclusion Team](#) for 0 to 5 year olds (SEN Early Years).
- [Special Needs Inclusion Playcare Service \(SNIPS\)](#) for children attending mainstream out of school and holiday clubs.
- There are also specialist support teams for children with a diagnosis of Autism, Hearing Impairment or Visual Impairment.

Find childcare for children and more information using the [Local Offer web pages](#). You can also filter the childcare listings by the support you need.