

Choosing Childcare

Types of childcare

Childminders - provide full/part time childcare within the childminder's home for all ages up to 18. Childminders offer a home-from-home setting. This means that children will have the freedom and comforts they are used to in their own homes but with the added benefit of a structured routine that has its roots in delivering a core educational curriculum. Childminders are more formally regulated than nannies who provide childcare in your home. Childminders require OFSTED registration and are inspected to determine the standard of childcare provision on offer.

Childminders tend to charge less per hour than a Nanny or Nursery so this may be a more attractive option for some families. Childminders may also offer a greater degree of flexibility. This can be particularly useful for families who have to deal with shift patterns that do not follow mainstream work hours. However, some childminders only work term time. Others may have days where they take leave and you'll need to find alternative childcare. If they become ill or they're caring for their own ill child, you may again need to find alternative childcare at the last minute. Your child may only socialise with a small number of children particularly where a childminder does not attend local play or activity groups although many do realise the importance of visiting groups like this. Only some childminders offer funded education and not all accept childcare vouchers.

Day Nurseries - provide full/part time childcare in a setting for children aged up to 5 years all year round and are usually open from 8.00am – 6.00 pm but some open earlier and close later.

Some nurseries take babies from six weeks and will provide care for them until they are of school age. Nurseries are usually privately run in Croydon or operated by organizations such as schools, churches or similar. They can be fairly expensive however, many parents choose this option as it provides a steady and reliable form of childcare.

If you choose a day nursery, your childcare is not affected by staff illness in the same way it would be with a Nanny, Au Pair or Childminder for example. Most day nurseries offer care all year round meaning that you are not restricted over the holiday periods. You also have more flexibility for family holiday's as you are free to take your child out of nursery when you wish. However, if your child is ill or you take your child out of nursery for a family holiday, you will still need to cover the cost of the nursery place. Start and finish times are usually not flexible and late pick-ups or early drop offs are not always available on an ad hoc basis.

Pre-schools

Provide part time sessional childcare in a setting for children aged 2-5 years.

Pre-schools can offer sessional care in the mornings and/or afternoons and are a good preparation for school as the sessions are shorter than full daycare. However, pre-schools are usually only open term time so maybe not suitable for working parents who need full time childcare. Again group setting childcare minimises the effect of staff illness on your childcare.

Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes

A nursery school is a facility which usually accepts children for a period of 3 hours per day for five days per week. Some nursery schools offer a full-time session (6 hours).

Nursery classes are part of primary school. They accept children for a period 3 hours per day for five days per week. Some nursery classes offer a full-time session (6 hours)

Application should be made direct to the nursery schools/early years' centres and/or classes.

Out of school clubs/Holiday play schemes

These provide full/part time childcare in a setting, before (breakfast), after and during school holidays for children of primary school age although some may cater for younger or older children.

A Breakfast club is a place where children can be dropped off before school, usually from 7.30 am or 8.00 am, and enjoy breakfast together.

An after-school club is a place for children to go after the school day is finished usually from 2.00pm to 6.00pm. The club may be in your child's school, another local school or different premises.

A holiday scheme is a place where children can attend during school holidays, usually from 8.00am – 6.00pm

Choosing quality provision and arranging childcare

- Try to arrange your childcare in good time
- Look at all available options and visit a range of providers
- Think about combining different sorts of childcare e.g. pre-school and childminder
- Think about your child's needs when making your choice and ensure that the childcare meets your requirements
- You can ask to visit a setting more than once if you wish and take someone with you

When viewing childcare settings, consider:

Buildings and environment

- Is it safe and secure but accessible for those with additional needs?
- Is it clean, bright and welcoming?
- Is there outdoor space or arrangements for outdoor play?
- Are there suitable changing and toilet facilities and sleeping arrangements?
- Where will your child eat and are there varied menus and arrangements for special diets?

Equipment and activities

- Is the equipment creative and varied and age appropriate?
- Do the activities and equipment reflect cultural diversity?
- Do the children have free choice and access to activities and do the activities support your child's learning and development?
- Is there a quiet area?

Staffing

- How many children are cared for at the setting
- How stable is the staff team i.e. low turnover?
- Are there regular training days when the children cannot attend?
- How many qualified paediatric first aiders are there?

Documentation

- Ask to see the OFSTED registration certificate, inspection reports and any relevant insurance documents e.g. public liability and/or car insurance
- Ask about policies and procedures on safeguarding, behaviour and administration of medicines
- Ask about terms and conditions of the contract e.g. notice period, payment for holidays and sickness, retainer fees, deposits **before** signing anything
- Ask what is included in your fees and when they will be reviewed and whether a deposit is needed and if this is returnable or used to offset fees

How to find childcare?

The website below can help you to find local childcare and whether or not they have availability.

<http://www.familyspacecroydon.co.uk>