

Childcare Choices

Information on:

- *different types of childcare*
- *what to look for*
- *questions to ask*



Education &
Children's Services



Choosing childcare is an important step for any parent or carer. Finding the 'right' option - the one that is right for you, your child and that fits in with your work, study or family life - can be challenging.

Whatever type of childcare arrangement you choose, you want to be confident that your child will be well looked after, happy and safe, in a stimulating environment where they can learn and develop through play.

There are a number of different forms of childcare, all of which offer inclusive child centred services, which can be used by parents and carers depending on their individual needs and circumstances.

- *Formal childcare is where an individual, agency or service is paid by a parent or carer to look after their child. This includes childminders, nurseries, crèches, out of school care and playgroups. These services are registered with and regulated by the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care (Care Commission) and are subject to regular inspections to ensure minimum standards of care are being provided. Contact the Care Commission on **01382 207100** or look at their website www.carecommission.com for information on the Care Standards, the regulation process and to check Inspection Reports.*
- *Informal childcare includes care offered by extended family or friends for which no financial reward is offered.*
- *Babysitting is an occasional activity, normally taking place in the child's own home, for which a small financial reward is often made.*
- *Home-based care is childcare which takes place in the child's own home and can be delivered by nannies or au pairs.*

Most families will use a number of different types of childcare to meet their needs and will access various types of care as their child grows. Perth & Kinross Council's Childcare and Family Information Service can give details of the options available.

Parents may be able to get help with the cost of registered childcare through the Childcare element of Working Tax Credits or through the use of Childcare Vouchers which can be made available through an employer. Further information is available in the 'Financial Support for Families' booklet, available from the Childcare and Family Information Service.

Childminders

A childminder looks after children in the childminder's own home and can often provide very flexible care. As they work with small groups of children, they may be able to provide more individualised care.

When arranging care you need to discuss required hours, holiday pay and other terms and conditions and ensure that details are included in a written contract.

Childminders are self-employed, so they set their own charges, there are no standard rates. The average hourly rate in Perth and Kinross is £3.45 per child per hour but charges range from £2.50 to £6.00 and can vary depending on the age of the child.

Age Range - Each individual childminder decides what ages of children they want to look after. Most take babies of a few months old while others will only take children over the age of five. Most take children up to the age of ten or twelve, but some only take children under the age of five. The Childcare and Family Information Service can give you details of the service offered by childminders in your area.

Main Benefits

- *Community based, home environment.*
- *Some work early mornings, evenings and weekends.*
- *Can make the most of local facilities including parks, playgrounds and libraries.*
- *Can look after siblings of different ages and support families as children grow up.*
- *Can take your child to playgroup, pre-school class or school.*

Nurseries

Nurseries are run by a team of staff and activities are planned to help children enjoy learning. At nursery, children are involved in activities such as playing, learning new skills and making friends.

There are different types of nurseries with different ways of operating so look around for one that suits you and your child.

- *Private nursery - designed to cater for the children of parents who are working or training and the type you are most likely to find in your area.*
- *Local authority nursery - run by the local authority for children in the local community; most only offer pre-school education sessions.*
- *Community nursery - a non-profit nursery run for children in the local community.*
- *Workplace nursery - some employers run childcare schemes for the children of their employees.*

The cost of a full-time nursery place for a child over two is around £130 per week and around £150 for a child under the age of two, but prices can vary quite a lot.

Age Range - Most take from birth to age five, though some only take children over one year old. Nurseries may also offer out of school care for Primary School age children.

Main Benefits

- *Opportunities for children to learn and play with friends.*
- *Usually geared to the needs of children with working parents.*
- *Most nurseries have places for babies and toddlers.*
- *Some also provide childcare for older children.*

Playgroups

Playgroups provide sessions of play and learning for children aged between two and five. Sessions usually last between two and three hours, and run from one to five days a week. Some playgroups also work in partnership with the local authority to provide funded, part-time pre-school education places for three and four year olds. Costs for playgroup sessions will vary, check with the Childcare and Family Information Service for details.

There are playgroups in most areas of Perth and Kinross, set up and run by parents or voluntary groups. Parents help the staff, normally on a rota basis, and many parents learn about child development through their involvement. Although playgroups are not usually geared to the schedules of working parents some parents combine a childminder with a playgroup to give their child a range of experiences.

Age Range - Between two and five years old.

Main Benefits

- *Your child can enjoy learning and playing in a small group.*
- *You can meet and get to know parents in your area.*
- *Good preparation for more formal experiences at pre-school education or primary school.*

Out of School Clubs

Out of school clubs offer a range of high quality play and learning experiences for children of school age. They are run outside school hours by a team of qualified staff, sometimes called playworkers. Activities are planned to help children learn, play and relax with their friends, reflecting the individual needs and interests of those attending.

Playworkers will often pick children up from local schools where the club is separate from the school.

Most out of school clubs provide places for between 20 and 32 children. Some clubs provide Wraparound Care places for three and four year olds to fit around pre-school education sessions.

Age Range - Primary School age up to fourteen years old in Out of School Clubs, age three to P7 for Wraparound Care.

Main Benefits

- *Children can learn, relax after school and have fun with their friends.*
- *Variety of activities and resources.*
- *Meets the needs of working parents.*
- *Many offer full day care during holidays.*
- *Most are situated in school grounds or will pick children up from certain schools.*

Pre-School Education

Pre-school education is an important stage in a child's development and helps children to learn as they play. A good quality pre-school experience builds on the valuable learning that takes place in and around the home, before children start primary school. It also develops essential skills they will rely on in later life.

Children aged three and four are entitled to 12 ½ hours of Pre-School Education per week. This can be in a nursery class based in a primary school or in a private nursery, playgroup or independent school which is in partnership with Perth & Kinross Council to provide pre-school places.

Some local authority nurseries have full-time places which are allocated on a support for children and families basis. Information on eligibility is available from the Council's Pre-School Helpline, details as given below.

Parents are entitled to apply to any local authority managed nursery or partner provider centre for their child's pre-school place. Applications for local authority places should be submitted in February for any part of the school year starting in August. All applications are made directly to the individual school or partner provider centre.

Further information on entitlement to pre-school education and starting school is available from the Council's Pre-School Helpline -

Tel **01738 476343** email nursery-educ@pkc.gov.uk on the local authority website www.pkc.gov.uk and on the Parentzone website www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk

Age Range - Three and four year olds.

Main Benefits

- *Pre-school education will give your child the chance to learn and play with friends.*
- *Research has shown that good quality pre-school education helps children's development.*
- *You may be able to arrange childcare to fit around your funded part-time place.*

Crèche

Crèches offer part-time sessions of care, usually run alongside adult activities such as education, leisure and support groups.

Age Range - Varies.

Main Benefits

- *Gives parents an opportunity to attend events or activities.*

Wraparound Care

Wraparound Care services offer extended care for three and four year olds before and after pre-school education sessions at some Council nursery schools and classes.

Age Range - Three and four year olds.

Main Benefits

- *Care is fitted round the pre-school session to make up full day care.*
- *Helps meet the needs of working parents.*
- *Children don't have to be transported to another childcare service.*

Holiday Playschemes

Holiday playschemes offer similar services to out of school clubs, but only run during the Easter, Summer and October school holidays.

Demand for places can be high in some areas, so it is best to book places in advance.

Age Range - Primary School age.

Main Benefits

- *Can offer a wide variety of activities, crafts and sports.*
- *Helps meet the needs of working parents.*

Childcare Agencies

Childcare Agencies supply or introduce parents to a child carer who looks after children or young people up to the age of sixteen, wholly or mainly in a parent's own home. Agencies are registered with the Care Commission, so care is eligible for financial support, unlike nannies sourced independently or au pairs.

The childcare services they offer can be flexible, offering childcare at hours to suit each circumstance and in areas not so well served by other facilities. Child carers can take part in activities with children and escort them to and from school, nursery, clubs etc.

Age Range - Birth to sixteen years old.

Main Benefits

- *Care is provided in the child's own home.*
- *Can offer flexible hours, including weekends and may be available in rural areas.*
- *May be able to put you in touch with other parents so that childcare can be shared.*

Parent and Toddler Groups

Parent and toddler groups provide social opportunities for babies, toddlers, parents and carers to meet in an informal atmosphere. Most groups meet once a week for between one and two hours. Children learn songs, how to share toys and how to socialise with others. For adults it can be a chance to talk with others about the joys and anxieties of bringing up children. Groups are run by members themselves on a voluntary basis. Parent and toddler groups are not regulated by the Care Commission as parents and carers remain with, and are responsible for, their children throughout the session.

Age Range - Birth to five.

Main Benefits

- *Your child can enjoy playing with others their own age.*
- *You can meet and get to know parents in your area.*

Questions to Ask When Choosing Care

Childcare services are all different. Try to give yourself enough time to visit several possible options in your area to get a good idea of what could suit your child. You are the expert on your child - trust your feelings.

It can be a good idea to take your child with you when you visit a setting to see how staff talk to them. Try to visit when children are there so that you can see if they are calm, happy and busy.

Good childcare staff will expect you to ask questions and will be happy to answer them. Here are some suggested questions, you should add some of your own as well, especially if you want to make sure particular cultural or dietary requirements can be met or if your child has additional support needs.

How long have staff been working in the setting?

Children need to develop stable relationships with the adults caring for them. That is more likely to happen in settings where staff are not continually coming and going.

What training have staff had for the job? What qualifications do they have?

Better-trained staff provide better quality care and education for young children. Ask how many staff have Level 3 qualifications or above. The National Standards outline minimum qualification requirements for day care settings, but staff training in many settings will go beyond minimum requirements.

Why do you enjoy working with children?

It is important that adults providing childcare enjoy their work. Theirs is the job of supporting parents in providing young children with a variety of stimulating and exciting opportunities to learn, play and develop to the best of their abilities.

Can I look around the building to see the rooms and outside play space?

Settings need to be safe, welcoming and stimulating. Look for a variety of toys and materials, stored so that children can get at them easily, clean toilets with hand dryers or disposable paper towels; and enough space so that children can move around without falling over each other. Look for a safe outside play space or find out if your child will get the chance to play outside.

Where can my child rest?

Some young children need to rest during the day. Rest areas should be quiet, dimly lit, and have soft furnishings.

What kind of food and drink will you give?

Look for evidence that children get some fresh fruit and vegetables, and are able to access water when they need it.

What will my child do all day?

Children need access to interesting activities, both quiet and active. Daily activities should be varied, and give children some opportunities to choose what they want to do.

How do you deal with difficult and challenging behaviour?

Challenging behaviour needs to be dealt with sensitively. Settings should have a written policy on how they deal with difficult behaviour. Strategies for understanding rather than reprimanding children are a feature of effective behaviour policies.

Will my child be with a regular group of children of the same age?

Friendships are very important to children. Being part of a regular group can help. However children can also benefit from having some opportunities to be with others older or younger than themselves.

What are the daily routines and how can they incorporate your child's and other children's routines?

Timetables need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the whole group.

How will you make sure I know how my child is getting on?

You should expect regular meetings with your child's carer. In group settings like nurseries you should be in regular contact with your child's key worker, this is the member of staff with responsibility for collecting and co-ordinating information on their development.

What to look for when choosing childcare - Top ten quality pointers

When you visit possible childcare options, look for these quality pointers. You could add your own as well:

- 1 *Children appear happy, content and actively engaged with what they are doing.*
- 2 *Childcare providers have a genuinely caring and friendly relationship with the children; a calm atmosphere with no raised voices.*
- 3 *The setting is safe, adequately lit and maintained to a good standard of hygiene.*

- 4 *A broad range of toys and equipment, which are easily accessible to children.*
- 5 *Adequate personal space for children to play.*
- 6 *Calm area with subdued lighting where very young children can rest and sleep.*
- 7 *Comfortable area where children can relax.*
- 8 *Toys, books and displays that represent and promote different cultures in a positive way.*
- 9 *Clean, appropriately sized toilets and hand basins with hand dryers or disposable towels provided.*
- 10 *A secure and safe outdoor recreation area.*

Top Tips

Start looking early

Many parents are able to find suitable childcare as soon as they need it, but for others it may take several months of searching before they can find somewhere that accommodates both their own and their child's needs. Give yourself enough time to research, seek advice from other parents, visit as many options as possible and check registration certificates and references.

Trust your own judgement

Recommendations from other parents can be helpful, but it's really important to remember that everyone is different and what suits their child will not necessarily suit yours. Similarly, inspections are no substitute for your own parental judgement. You know your child better than anyone else and it is important that you do your own research and trust your instincts.

Check whether you can get help with childcare costs

Make sure you are getting all the financial assistance available to you to help you pay for your childcare costs. If you are a working parent you may get help through Working Tax Credit or employer-supported childcare, or if you are studying there may be help available from your college or training provider. See the 'Financial Support for Families' booklet for more details, available from the Childcare and Family Information Service.

Useful Contacts

Childcare and Family Information Service

Tel 0845 601 4477 Email childcare@pkc.gov.uk
www.scottishchildcare.gov.uk

Perth & Kinross Council's Pre-5s Unit

Provides information on entitlement to pre-school education places.
Tel 01738 476343 Email nursery-educ@pkc.gov.uk
www.pkc.gov.uk

Day Care Trust

A national childcare charity, promoting high quality, affordable childcare for all.
Tel 020 7840 3350 www.DaycareTrust.org.uk

Parentzone

Information about education in Scotland for parents of children aged three to 18, including ideas on how to support children's learning.
www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk

Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care

Responsible for regulation and registration of childcare services.
Tel 01382 207100 www.carecommission.com

Scottish Childminding Association

SCMA promotes childminding as a quality childcare service.
Tel 01786 445377 www.childminding.org

Scottish Out of School Care Network

SOSCN is the lead organisation representing out of school care and school-aged childcare in Scotland.
Tel 0141 564 1284 www.soscn.org

Scottish Pre-School Play Association

SPPA is a Scottish charity which aims to develop quality care and education in pre-school groups.
Tel 01592 641642 www.sppa.org.uk

Perth & Kinross Childcare and Family Information Service

Tel 0845 601 4477

Email childcare@pkc.gov.uk

www.scottishchildcare.gov.uk

If you or someone you know would like a copy of this document in another language or format, (on occasion, only a summary of the document will be provided in translation), this can be arranged by contacting Childcare and Family Information Service on 0845 601 4477.



Council Text Phone Number 01738 442573

All Council Services can offer a telephone translation facility

Disclaimer

Whilst we have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information in this booklet, we disclaim any warranty or representation, express or implied about its accuracy, completeness or appropriateness for a particular purpose.

Neither Perth & Kinross Council nor any of its employees is responsible or liable for any claim, loss or damage resulting from its use.

Perth & Kinross Council is not responsible for the contents or reliability of the websites listed and does not necessarily endorse the views expressed within them.