

# 0<sup>5</sup> YEARS

**THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE  
TO EARLY LEARNING  
AND CHILDCARE FOR  
YOU AND YOUR FAMILY**



department for  
children, schools and families

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The Government's new strategy, **Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare**, sets out how the Government intends to help every family with support including:

- a Sure Start Children's Centre for every community by 2010 (see page 09)

- every school offering a full range of extended services – activities for children from 8.00am until 6.00pm throughout the year, plus other support – by 2010

- 15 hours free early education a week for all three- and four-year olds for

- 38 weeks a year from 2010, with the possibility of 'stretching' it over the whole year

- an increasing number of free early education places for two-year olds

- free childcare for people training for work – available now (see page 27)

- accessible, affordable, good quality childcare in all areas of the country

- a national website and helpline giving information about the cost and quality of childcare.

You know what's **best for your child**. As a parent or guardian you are your child's **most important carer**, and it's what you and your child do together at home that is most important in giving them the best start in life. Care from friends, grandparents and other relatives plays a vital role too.

But choosing **early learning and childcare** outside the home, that's right for your child, is another crucial decision that you have to make.

There's a huge amount of choice out there, from nursery schools to playgroups to childminders, all offering **benefits for your children** and **reassurance and flexibility to you**.

This booklet is designed to help by giving you information about what's on offer, including free entitlements, tax credits and lots of other support. **Whatever your circumstances**, you can be confident that your child will be happy and safe, **learning and developing through play**.

For more advice and information contact your local **Families Information Service** on **0800 2 346 346**.

# How early learning and childcare can help



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The first few years are the most important in your child's life, and as a mum or dad you have the biggest influence of all on their learning and development. But as well as in the home, the learning and experiences that your child has when being cared for - whether in playgroups, nurseries, nursery schools, schools or with childminders - really help to shape them and their development.

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## Good for your child

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→ Mums and dads are the most important influence on a child, but early learning and childcare is vital too. That's why we've created the Early Years Foundation Stage – a play-based framework for learning for every child from birth to five in all Ofsted-registered early learning or childcare (see page 17).

→ With good early learning and childcare your child will get a head start that will help prepare them not just for primary school but for the challenges that life will bring.

→ Standards under the framework are clear and consistent, with expectations about safety, welfare and learning clearly set out.



### FIND OUT MORE...

You can get more information by visiting [www.direct.gov.uk/childcare](http://www.direct.gov.uk/childcare)



# Your options



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Finding childcare that's best both for you and for your child will depend on many things - including your budget. But the first step is to know what the options are.

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## Other options

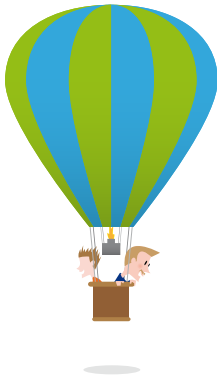
There are many providers of early learning and childcare for children up to the age of five, all around the country, so it makes sense to talk to your local **Families Information Service (0800 2 346 346)** to find out what's available near you.

### Day nurseries

Opening hours can be from 7am to 7pm, though this varies. Your child can attend full- or part-time.

### Nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools

Open during school hours, usually 9.00am to 3.30pm, offering full or half-day sessions. Some offer out-of-school and holiday care.



## WHAT'S IN YOUR AREA?

Find out by calling your local **Families Information Service** on **0800 2 346 346**

### Pre-schools and playgroups

Offer sessions of between 2.5 and 4 hours in term time. Many offer 12.5 hours a week free early learning for three- and four-year-olds (this is going up to 15 hours from 2010).

### Childminders

Usually look after children in the childminder's own home. Most will work early mornings, evenings and weekends – and in the holidays.

### Nannies

Come to your home, and will often fit in with non-typical working hours. May choose to register with Ofsted.



## How will I know if the childcare is right for my child?

### Your checklist...

- Visit before you choose
- Talk to your childminder or key person - who will watch your child's development and share ideas and experience with you - every day
- Look out for changes in your child's behaviour or mood such as using more words or talking about new friends
- Get involved in the service, and meet other mums and dads to share ideas and support
- Review things every two months or so, to ensure everything's going well

"Sending my daughter to my local Sure Start Children's Centre two days a week has enabled me to work part-time as a secretary. Otilia enjoys the fun, social and safe learning environment, and it's good for her development."

Debra, Mum



### FIND OUT MORE...

**Remember** - your childcare may need to change once your child starts primary school. Contact your local **Families Information Service (FIS)** on **0800 2 346 346** for a copy of **5-11 Years: The Essential Guide to Childcare For You and Your Family.**



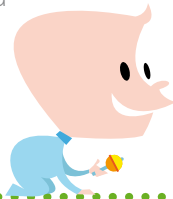
# Help with finding and choosing childcare

## Finding early learning and childcare in your area

The most common question mums and dads ask is: how can I find out what's available near me? Well, the easiest way to get accurate and up-to-date information is to contact your local Families Information Service.

*"Thank you so much for your help - again! It is great to know that with only one phone call I can get detailed, up-to-date information regarding childcare availability. You are invaluable!"*

Parent of a five-year old



## What is the Families Information Service?

The Families Information Service is free for mums and dads and carers of babies and children aged 0 to 19.

It provides quality information and advice that will help you find out about and choose early learning and childcare, and fun activities for you and your child near to where you live.

It may also be able to give you information about other children's services and support groups for mums and dads. For example:

- your rights as a working parent
- support for disabled parents
- career and volunteer opportunities in childcare.

## Where is my nearest Families Information Service?

There's one in every local authority. Call **0800 2 346 346** (lines open 8am-8pm weekdays, 9am-12pm Saturdays) to find yours. Or you can go to **[www.direct.gov.uk/childcare](http://www.direct.gov.uk/childcare)**



# Your child's day



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Through play your baby or child will learn and grow. Singing songs, playing games with letters and numbers and having fun with other children all help to prepare them for school and for life ahead.

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## Tips for settling your child into early learning and childcare

- Take your child along before leaving them. Then, if you can, start by leaving your child for, say, half an hour, and build up to longer periods.
- Even when you're there, let the childminder or key worker take charge so your child gets used to them.
- When you leave, reassure your child that you'll be coming back and then say goodbye rather than slipping away or looking sad – go with a smile and a wave.
- With older children, tell them when you'll be back.
- Let your child take a special toy or blanket so they'll feel more comfortable.
- Always be happy about the day ahead: your child will pick up on your mood.
- It's usual to feel nervous. But remember that babies and young children are never confused about who their parents are, and outside influences can be very positive.




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### Getting involved

- Talk to your childcare provider about your child – they can use what you tell them in what they do together
  - Most providers will give you written information about how your child is doing – a diary or a folder, perhaps – and will tell you about progress each day.
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## Learning at home

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Whatever childcare you choose, the learning your child gets at home will always be crucial. Most learning actually takes place in the home, and there are some really simple things you can do to help the learning experience.

For instance, talking to your child and asking their opinions, reading together, helping to make a cake, painting a picture or counting things they see around them can help them – even at a very young age – to develop the skills and the confidence they'll need in later life.

"The nursery has given my daughter skills through activities I'd never be able to offer at home. Most of all, at nursery, they let them play!

We get copies of the work plans and things they're doing so we can do the same with the girls at home, continuing their learning by using the same games or songs. It works really well."

Hayley, Mum





# Financial and other help



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The cost of childcare can seem daunting, but there's help available. This section is about boosting your childcare budget by taking advantage of the free childcare places, tax credits, vouchers and benefits on offer.

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# Help with costs

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## Tax credits

Families who are in work and who pay for Ofsted-registered childcare can get financial help with those costs through tax credits. Depending on your household income, tax credits can give you back up to 80 percent of your childcare costs, up to a maximum cost of £175 a week for one child and £300 a week for two or more children. It's worth checking out with HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) or with your local Families Information Service.

## Childcare vouchers

Some employers offer childcare vouchers or 'salary sacrifice', where you offer up part of your salary in return for help with the cost of childcare. These schemes give you the first £55 a week of vouchers free from tax and National Insurance. Some families will be able to get tax credits as well as vouchers. Check it out with HMRC and see how much you could get.





## Counting the benefits

Don't miss out on any of your other entitlements

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### Child Benefit

All mums and dads are entitled to this until their child is 16, or 19 if they are in full-time education.

### Sure Start Maternity Grant

If you're a new mum or dad on a low income or tax credit, you may be able to claim this one-off payment of £500. Contact your local Jobcentre Plus office or download the claim form on [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk).

Your local Families Information Service (**0800 2 346 346**) will be able to help you.



If you're in work, go to page 30 for your leave entitlements - which include maternity and paternity pay.

## FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local Families Information Service (FIS) on **0800 2 346 346**, or go to [www.direct.gov.uk/childcare](http://www.direct.gov.uk/) and click on 'money, tax and benefits'.



## Help from your employer

As well as all the high-quality childcare arrangements that are on offer, if your child is 16 or under (17 or under if disabled) and you've worked for your employer for at least 26 weeks, then you're entitled to ask for flexible working.

Flexible working is designed to help you cope with your family responsibilities. It can include options such as flexi-time, homeworking, job-sharing and compressed hours, and is built around your own needs.

If you're entitled to make the request then your boss will have to consider it, and can only say no if there's a clear business reason, which must be given in writing. These days most employers recognise that flexible working for staff makes good business sense.

### AT WORK

- Talk to your boss about your work and your family needs
- Think flexible working - why not see if you qualify?
- Don't be embarrassed about saying: "I've got to go home now to collect the kids" - everyone has commitments outside work.





## Time away from work

As a working mum or dad you may be entitled to take leave from work...

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### ...when the baby's born

- As a mum you may qualify for 52 weeks' maternity leave, and you may be entitled to receive Statutory Maternity Pay for up to 39 weeks of that time. If you don't qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay (perhaps you're self-employed, or have changed employers since becoming pregnant) you may still be able to claim Maternity Allowance, through Jobcentre Plus.
- As a dad you're entitled to be paid paternity leave following the birth of your baby – either one or two weeks

– and to receive Statutory Paternity Pay during that time. You must have been in the job for six months – and told your boss that you want the leave – by the 15th week before your baby's due date.

### ...as your child grows up

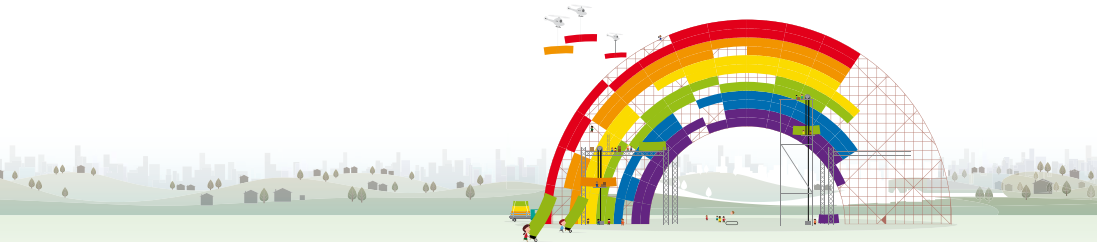
- As a mum or dad in the same job for a year or more (and who qualifies in other ways) you're entitled to thirteen weeks' unpaid parental leave before your child's fifth birthday (eighteen weeks up to the 18th birthday of a disabled child).



## FIND OUT MORE...

For more information contact your local Families Information Service (FIS) on **0800 2 346 346** or visit [www.direct.gov.uk/en/parents/moneyandworkentitlements](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/parents/moneyandworkentitlements)





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