



**What to look for
when choosing
childcare**



What should I look for when choosing a childcare provider?

Ofsted reports

You should always visit the childcare provider to make sure they are suitable for your child. When you do so, ask to see a copy of their Ofsted report and registration certificate. Or you can view these online at the Ofsted website or at www.lancashire.gov.uk/childcare through the childcare search facility.

The report shows the Ofsted inspector's findings together with basic information about the childcare provider. It's an important source of information to help you assess the quality of childcare. It tells you:

- how effective they are;
- what they do well;
- what recommendations have been made to help them improve further; and
- any actions they must carry out by law to raise the standard of their care.

The Ofsted inspector gives each childcare provider a grade from 1 to 4.

- grade 1 - Outstanding
- grade 2 - Good
- grade 3 - Satisfactory
- grade 4 - Inadequate

There are two categories for grade 4 (inadequate):

Category 1

The childcare has been judged as weak. In this case, Ofsted will send the childcare provider a 'notice to improve' letter that contains actions that must be taken, and by what date, to deal with the most significant weaknesses.

Category 2

The childcare has been judged as poor and needs urgent attention. In this case Ofsted may take enforcement action. That could mean they give the childcare provider a 'welfare requirements notice' explaining which requirements are not being met, including what must be done to improve and by when. In some rare cases where Ofsted believe children are at risk, they may suspend or cancel the childcare provider's registration with immediate effect.



Ofsted do not publish all childminders' names or addresses in order to safeguard the welfare of children and protect their privacy. Childminders must individually request to publish their personal details. If you want to look at Ofsted registered childminder reports online, you will need their Unique Registration Number (URN). You can get this from the childcare provider or give us a call on **0800 195 0137**.

The childcare available in your area

It's easy to find out what childcare is available near you. You can get this information direct from www.lancashire.gov.uk/childcare using the online childcare search. Or if you want to give us a call on **0300 123 6712**, one of our helpful staff will be happy to discuss your options and provide you with a childcare list tailored to meet your needs.

The information we supply for each childcare provider has been given to us by them. Some of them give us more details than others. To protect the safety of the children, most childminders do not provide full address details.

Prices tend to vary depending on your family's specific childcare requirements; therefore the prices listed should only be used as a guideline for shortlisting purposes.

Most childcare providers offer a flexible service and will try their best to meet your needs. If there's a service you're looking for which isn't on their listing, it may still be worth giving them a call. For example, a childminder may not have included the school your child attends in their drop-off and collection service, but it could easily be built into their daily routine.





Quality assurance schemes

Many childcare providers work towards gaining a quality award. This shows they are committed to continuously improving their service. Feel free to ask childcare providers for details of any quality awards they have or are working towards.

Visiting childcare providers

Once you've chosen the childcare providers you're most interested in, make an appointment to visit them. This will give you a feel for their abilities and how they'll get on with your child.

We have listed some questions below you may want to ask while you're there.

1. How long have you been childminding? How long have your staff been working here?

Children need to develop stable relationships with the adults caring for them. This is more likely to happen if staff turnover is low.

2. What training have your staff completed? What qualifications do they have?

Childminders need to have completed a training course approved by their local authority. They should also have an up-to-date paediatric first aid and safeguarding qualification. Some childminders also take more advanced childcare qualifications such as an NVQ Level 3 in Childcare as part of their professional development.

Well-trained staff should provide high-quality care and education for young children. Ask how many staff have childcare qualifications and at what levels.

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage outlines the minimum qualification requirements for childcare settings, but staff training is often extended beyond the minimum requirements. Further information about the Statutory Framework can be found at www.lancashire.gov.uk/childcare



3. Do you enjoy being with children? Why?

It's important that adults providing childcare and early education enjoy their work. They have the job of supporting parents in providing young children with a variety of stimulating and exciting opportunities to learn and develop to the best of their abilities.

4. Can I look around the building to see the rooms and outside play space? If there is no outside play space, how will you make sure my child gets the chance to play outside?

The environment needs to be safe, clean, welcoming and stimulating. Look for:

- a variety of toys and materials - stored so that children can get to them easily; and
- enough space so children can move around freely.

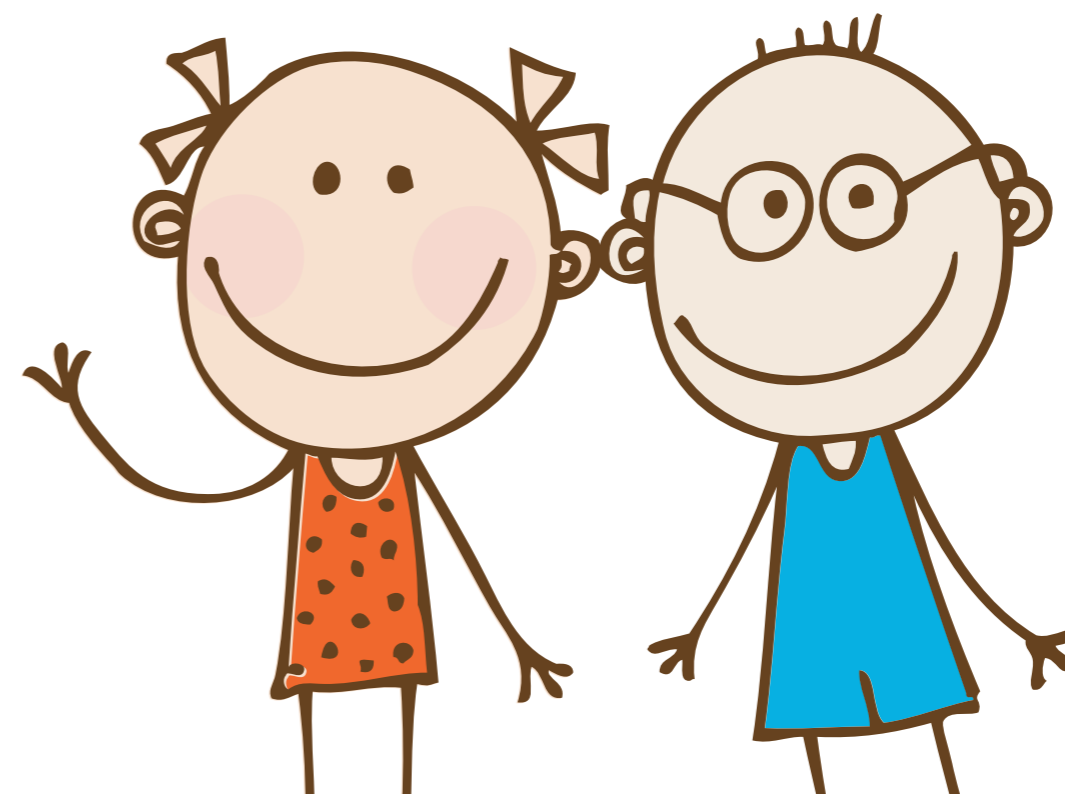
Children should have access to an outdoor play area, or there should be arrangements in place to regularly take them somewhere they can play safely outside.

5. Where will my child rest?

Some young children need to rest during the day, so there should be a suitable place for this. Rest areas should be quiet, dimly lit and have soft furnishings.

6. What kind of food and drink will you give?

Look for evidence that children get some fresh fruit and vegetables and have plenty to drink. Ask how the childcare provider caters for special dietary and cultural requirements.





7. What will my child do all day?

Daily activities should be varied, flexible and provide children with opportunities to choose what they want to do.

8. How do you encourage positive behaviour?

Challenging behaviour needs to be dealt with sensitively, and childcare providers should try to understand rather than reprimand. They should have a written policy on how they deal with difficult behaviour – ask to see it!

9. Will my child be with a regular group of children? How old are they?

Being part of a regular group is important for children. However, they can also benefit from the opportunity to be with children of a different age. Routines need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the whole group.

10. 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 person – the member of staff responsible for collecting and coordinating information on their development.

11. I have a complaint about my child's childcare. Who do I need to speak to?

It's best to speak first to a member of staff at the childcare setting or with the childminder. If you're still not happy with the care provided, you should contact Ofsted by phoning 0300 123 4666.

12. How will you provide feedback on my child's daily activities, progress and development?

Every Ofsted registered childcare provider will have systems in place to communicate with you effectively. This is usually through a daily diary or learning journey that:

- records your child's progress;
- helps plan their future progress; and
- supports them to meet their learning goals.

13. Can you give me references or contact details for other parents who've used your services?

Most Ofsted registered childcare providers will have references from families that have used their services. Follow up these references as it will give you the opportunity to ask questions and gain another parent's point of view on the service.



14. What if my child has a specific need?

If your child has specific needs (for example, a special diet or cultural requirements), discuss them with the childminder or manager of the childcare provider. They will be able to tell you the type of support they can offer. All Ofsted registered childcare providers must make reasonable allowances to support the needs of your child.

Contracts

Once you've chosen your childcare provider or combination of providers, you should be asked to sign a contract. A contract is important and you should make sure you understand what you're agreeing to before you sign it. Remember that it's a legally binding document and if your childcare arrangement breaks down in the future it will be used to show what has been agreed.

The contract should cover things like:

- charges - hourly, daily, weekly or monthly;
- what will happen and whether there will be charges if you, your child or the childminder are ill or on holiday (including public holidays);
- extra costs – for example, for meals, drinks, snacks, nappies or outings;
- extra availability and related charges – for example, for early mornings, late evenings or overnight;
- what will happen if you are late picking up your child and who can pick them up in your place; and
- how much notice you and the provider must give to cancel or change the terms of the contract.

Contracts should be renewed every six to twelve months. This gives you a chance to discuss your child's needs and progress.

Settling-in period

Every child is different and your child may struggle to settle into a particular childcare setting. Ask what procedures the staff have in place to welcome new children. Most will offer settling-in sessions.

Finally please remember that, whichever childcare option you choose, what you do at home can also make a real difference to your child's development. Everyday fun activities such as painting and drawing, singing songs and nursery rhymes, reading to your child and playing with letters and numbers are all extremely important to your child's progress and wellbeing.

If you would like more information on your childcare options, please contact us on **0300 123 6712** or visit our website at www.lancashire.gov.uk/childcare





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