

Choosing childcare checklist





Leaving your child with someone for the first time can be daunting, however choosing good quality childcare can help to give them a better start in life. It can also give you the opportunity to return to work or education or simply take a break from your everyday routine.

If you are unsure of where to start, we've put together a checklist to help you find the right childcare for you and your child.

1. Search for what childcare is available in your area - Unsure whether to go for a nursery or child minder? Full or part time place? We can help you explore all the options available to you. If you are struggling to find childcare, you can call our family information service on **0300 123 6712** or visit www.lancashire.gov.uk/family

Our childcare lists provide you with a guideline cost, the location, the latest Ofsted grade, and a description of the service and facilities available.

If you have a child with special or additional needs we can provide you with a range of extra support via our brokerage service.

2. Do your research – look into the different types of childcare and ask around to find out what other parents think of your preferred nurseries or childminders. You can also find out about what to expect from quality childcare and check their Ofsted reports. If you want help understanding the jargon give us a call.
3. How will you pay for the childcare? We can help you find out if you are entitled to free hours or if you are entitled to help towards childcare costs.
4. Make a shortlist – once you've done your research chose a selection and arrange to visit them to help you make your decision. Check out their latest Ofsted inspection reports before to help you decide.
5. Arrange a visit – asking lots of questions and knowing what to look out for will give you a feel for the environment and help assess whether your child will be happy there. It will also give you the opportunity to find out about the settling in process and what contract you would be expected to sign.

There are a list of sample questions in our 'what to look for when choosing childcare' guide. Make sure that you allow yourself time to look around to see the facilities, to observe the childminder or staff interacting with children and to sit down and discuss your requirements.



Some things to look out for when you visit...

Learning through play

High quality childcare providers should offer a structured learning and development programme that includes physical activity, play, quiet time, group and individual activities, creative activities, meals, snack time and free play time.

Children of all ages learn through play, so look out for childcare providers that place high value on children simply doing activities they enjoy. The programme offered by the setting should be flexible enough to respond to your child's needs and there should be some activities through the year that include you as a parent.

What you should see:

- Activities that children can participate in.
- The evidence of creative work, group work or outings displayed.
- Both child-led activities and play supported by the childcare professionals.



The atmosphere



What you should see:

- A warm and loving, fun atmosphere where you feel your child will flourish and grow.
- Children looking comfortable and relaxed.
- Friendly, welcoming and attentive staff.- Is there a warm and genuine welcome for your child?

The environment

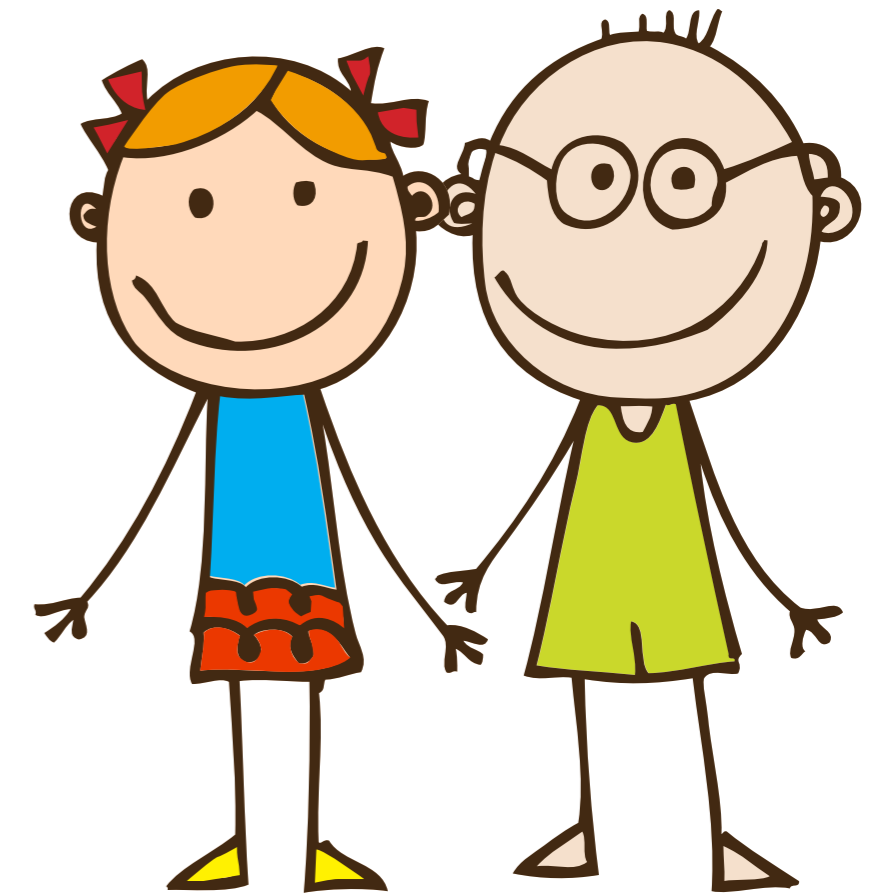
What you should see:

- A safe, clean, welcoming and stimulating environment with a variety of toys and materials - stored so that children can get to them easily.
- 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.

The childminder/staff

What you should see:

- Experienced and trained childcare professionals, that are attentive to the children.
- Communication with the children at the child's level.
- A friendly and helpful attitude by all.
- An acceptable level of staff turnover.



Communications/parental involvement

You can expect childcare professionals to:

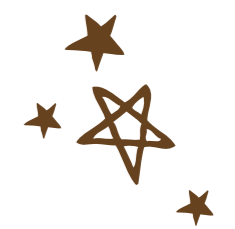
- Have a regular arrangement for discussing your child's development with advice on how you can help continue learning at home.
- Respect you and your family – families come in all shapes and sizes with different cultural traditions and there is no one right way to bring up children.
- Discuss concerns about your child's health and development and let you know how to access any specialist help you may need.

Ask if you can speak with other parents that have used the setting before, however, remember that what can work for one family may not be suitable for you.

Arrange a second or third visit, and double-check that the options meet all your requirements - suitability, cost, availability, location. You could even try a few dummy runs to check it's really going to fit into a tight schedule possibly during times when traffic is heavy.

Discuss the settling in process, how will the childcare provider get to know your child?

Check the contents of your contract before you formalise your agreement and pay any fees.





Quality Pointer

When you visit childcare providers, you may want to look for these Quality Pointers:

- Are the children calm, safe and happy?
- Are the children given support to learn at their own pace, and learn about things they are interested in?
- Do children play and talk together?
- Are the staff/childminder listening to the children and answering them carefully?
- Are the staff/childminder friendly and proud of their work?
- Are there high expectations made of the children. For example are children challenged to take their learning further?
- Are the staff/childminder joining in with what the children are doing?



- Are there lots of activities planned to help children learn and play? Can the children plan some of these themselves?
- Do the activities at the setting appear to cater for all of the children's needs?
- Are there a range of appropriate clean toys and equipment for children to use?
- Are the premises clean, well-kept and safe for children with a fun outside play area (or will children go to parks and other places regularly)?
- Is the children's play valued and recorded, for example, through Learning Journals etc?
- Are parents/carers encouraged to share their own observations of what their children say and do at home, in order to plan future learning experiences.
- Does the setting appear to actively encourage children's language and literacy skills?

If you have any questions about finding or choosing childcare you can give our friendly team a call on

0300 123 6712

or visit

lancashire.gov.uk/family





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