

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.

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 & Family Information Service can give details of the options available. For further information see www.families.scot email childcare@pkc.gov.uk or phone **0345 601 4477**.

There are a number of different forms of childcare 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 Care Inspectorate and are subject to regular inspections to ensure minimum standards of care are being provided. You can look at the Care Inspectorate website www.careinspectorate.com for information on the Care Standards, the regulation process and to check Inspection Reports, or contact them on **0345 600 9527**.
- **Informal childcare** is care for which no reward is offered, for example this may include care provided by extended family.
- **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. Registered Childcare Agencies can give assistance with sourcing home-based care.

Please note:

Throughout this document, the word 'parent' should be read as including carer and significant adult.

Parents may be able to get help with the cost of registered childcare through the Childcare element of Working Tax Credit and Universal Credit or through the use of Childcare Vouchers which can be made available through an employer. In 2017 the government introduced tax-free childcare accounts which allow more families to access financial support. Further information is available from www.childcarechoices.gov.uk and on the Council website www.pkc.gov.uk/childcarecosts

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. Based on details given to the Childcare & Family Information Service, the average rate in Perth and Kinross at August 2017 was just over £4 per child per hour but charges ranged from £3 to £5 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 & Family Information Service can give you details of the service offered by childminders in your area.

Benefits include

- *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 toddler group, playgroup, nursery class or school.*

Day 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.*
- *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.*

Based on details given to the Childcare & Family Information Service, the cost of a full-time nursery place for a child over two is around £185 per week and around £200 for a child under the age of two as at August 2016, but prices can vary quite a lot. You should check what charges cover as they may include the provision of meals, nappies, wipes etc.

Most day nurseries in Perth and Kinross are in partnership with the Local Authority to offer funded Early Learning and Childcare places for three and four year olds, and can offer additional hours to suit parents' working pattern. This is referred to locally in Perth and Kinross as a Partner Provider Centre.

Age Range

Most take children from birth to age five, though some only take children over a year old. Nurseries may also offer out of school care for primary school age children.

Benefits include

- *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.*
- *Extra sessions can often be purchased at short notice where there is capacity.*

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 part-time funded places for three and four year olds (Partner Providers). Costs for playgroup sessions will vary, check with the Childcare & 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.

Benefits include

- *Your child can enjoy learning and playing with children of the same age, usually in a smaller group setting.*
- *Can help children develop self-esteem, confidence and socialisation skills.*
- *You can meet and get to know parents in your area.*
- *Opportunity to attend shorter sessions and on fewer days can offer good preparation for attending Early Learning and Childcare sessions.*



Funded Early Learning and Childcare (previously known as Pre-School Education)

The pre-school years are an important stage in a child's development and help children to learn as they play. A good quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) experience builds on the valuable learning that takes place in and around the home, before children start primary school. It also develops essential skills children will rely on in later life.

Perth & Kinross Council recognises that families have a variety of different needs and preferences with regard to ELC and is committed to providing high-quality experiences for all eligible children. All ELC services are regulated and inspected by the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland.

Children aged three and four are entitled* to an ELC place starting in the term after their third birthday. Dates for eligibility for ELC places and information regarding the allocation of places within Perth and Kinross are both available from the Council website: www.pkc.gov.uk/preschool

Local authority nursery classes based in primary or all through schools offer part-time ELC sessions for three and four year olds, with some also offering wraparound care. The option of taking two part-time ELC sessions in one day including lunch provision means a child may attend for two full days and one half day; one full day and three half days or five half days per week.

There are full-time places available across the full nursery week, Monday-Friday, in 16 school nursery classes as at August 2016 and in the City of Perth Early Childhood Centre (COPECC). All of these full-time places are allocated under Support for Children and Families criteria. There are also a number of part-time places available for children from the age of two at COPECC in accordance with this criteria.

The Council is also in partnership with more than 35 Partner Provider centres to provide funded ELC places for three and four year olds. These include private nurseries, playgroups and nursery classes within the private, voluntary and independent sectors. Parents are entitled to apply to any local authority managed nursery or Partner Provider centre for their child's funded ELC place. Application for places takes place directly at the school or Partner Provider centre. Parents can apply for a place in more than one setting. The allocation of split funding places will be dependent on both settings being able to offer the hours required.

Strong Start 2 places for eligible two year old children are available in 21 Perth and Kinross nurseries. The option of two part-time ELC sessions in one day including lunch is available for almost all Strong Start 2 placements. A free school meal is provided with this option. The entitlement* to 600 hours of ELC is set by Scottish Government criteria and information is available on the Council website: www.pkc.gov.uk/strongstart

Details of schools which currently offer Strong Start places are given on the Council website www.pkc.gov.uk/preschool and available from the Nursery Helpline, tel 01738 476200, or email nursery-educ@pkc.gov.uk It is planned that some more schools will begin to offer places during the 2017/18 school session.

Specific information about ELC, including answers to queries around entitlement, can be obtained from the Nursery Helpline (details as above). The Childcare & Family Information Service can also assist you by providing details of the full range of ELC options in your local area.

**600 hours of Early Learning and Childcare is an entitlement for eligible children under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. From 2020, the Scottish Government has committed to increasing this to 1,140 hours per year.*

Benefits include

- *An Early Learning and Childcare place will give your child the chance to learn and play with friends.*
- *Research has shown that good quality ELC helps children's development.*
- *You may be able to arrange additional hours to fit with your working pattern.*
- *Transition to Primary School is an important feature planned by all settings, whether they are attached to a school or not.*
- *Increasing flexibility and choice is being offered following the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.*

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. The majority of 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 twelve years old and above can be accommodated in Out of School Clubs depending on the registration of the setting, age three to P7 for Wraparound Care.

Benefits include

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

Breakfast Clubs and Safe Start Services

Breakfast Clubs and Safe Start Services offer care for children on school premises before the start of school each morning. Most Breakfast Clubs are run by the Local Authority and offer a healthy breakfast as well as supervised activities.

Safe Start services are run by groups of local parents to provide a safe place for children to be dropped off before school, breakfast is not provided.

Age Range

Primary School age children.

Benefits include

- *Safe place for children to start their school day.*
- *Variety of activities and resources.*
- *Meets the needs of working parents.*

Wraparound Care

Wraparound Care services offer extended care for three and four year olds before and after nursery class sessions and after school for Primary aged children. Services, which are based at Primary Schools in Crieff, Luncarty and Inch View in Perth, also operate during school holidays.

Age Range

Three and four year olds and Primary School age.

Benefits include

- *For three and four year olds, care extends round the nursery class 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 opening is available, including for children who don't attend during term time.*

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.

Benefits include

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

Crèche

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

Age Range

Varies.

Benefits include

- *Gives parents an opportunity to attend events or activities.*
- *Provides support to parents attending parenting programmes such as Incredible Years and Strengthening Families and courses such as childminder pre-registration training.*
- *Responsive to needs of communities and schools.*

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 Inspectorate, 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.

Benefits include

- *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 Inspectorate as parents and carers remain with, and are responsible for, their children throughout the session.

Age Range

Birth to five.

Benefits include

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

The National Care Standards outline minimum qualification requirements for day care of children settings and staff must register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), see www.sssc.uk.com for further details. However, staff training in many settings will go beyond minimum requirements. Evidence shows that better trained staff provide better quality early learning and childcare for young children.

Why do you enjoy working with children?

It is important that adults providing childcare enjoy their work. This 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 a balanced diet, including some fresh fruit and vegetables, and are able to access water when they need it. The provision of food and drink should follow the current National Nutritional Guidance document 'Setting the Table'.

What will my child do all day?

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

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 promote positive behaviour, which will

include how to deal with difficult behaviour on the occasions it arises. Strategies for understanding rather than reprimanding children are an essential 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 quality 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 toilets and hand basins with hand dryers or individual/ disposable towels provided, with resources which promote self-help skills.*
- 10 *A secure and safe outdoor play area.*

It is also useful to read the service's most recent Care Inspectorate report, and review the service history of inspections, before you visit. See www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/care-services

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 is 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, Universal Credit, employer-supported childcare, childcare vouchers or tax free childcare. If you are studying there may be help available from your college or training provider. Check options on www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

Useful Contacts

Childcare & Family Information Service

Tel 0345 601 4477 • Email childcare@pkc.gov.uk
www.families.scot

Perth & Kinross Council's Nursery Helpline

Provides information on funded Early Learning and Childcare places for two, three and four year olds including queries around entitlement and available spaces.

Tel 01738 476343 • Email nursery-educ@pkc.gov.uk
www.pkc.gov.uk/preschool

Care Inspectorate

Responsible for regulation and registration of childcare services.

Tel 0345 600 9527 • www.careinspectorate.com

Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)

Registers social service workers, including staff in daycare of children services, setting standards for their practice, conduct, training and education and supporting their professional development.

Tel 0345 603 0891 • www.sssc.uk.com

Day Care Trust

National childcare charity, promoting high-quality, affordable childcare for all.

www.DaycareTrust.org.uk

Early Years Scotland

Provides support to community-led early learning and childcare groups and families.

Tel 0141 221 4148 • www.earlyyearsscotland.org

Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA)

Promotes childminding as a quality childcare service.

Tel 01786 445377 • www.childminding.org

Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN)

Represents out of school care and school-aged childcare in Scotland.

Tel 0141 564 1284 • www.soscn.org

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