

# Choosing a suitable childcare provider

Most parents wonder what to look out for when they start looking for childcare. Here are some tips.

## Five steps to choosing childcare:

1. Draw up a shortlist using information from the Family Information Service - check the following in particular
  - hours that childcare is provided for
  - the hourly/daily/weekly cost
  - Are there places available for your child (you might need to ring them)
2. Visit several settings and ask questions about the childcare provided (some questions are below).
3. Make the big decision - it might help to take a friend and/or your child on the visits to help you decide.
4. Take up references from other parents who have used that service.
5. Book your child's place (you may need to pay a retainer fee to keep the place open) and arrange details like hours, start date and who is allowed to pick up your child.

## Visiting childcare settings - what to look for:

- A big welcome for you and your child.
- Trained and experienced staff, ready to learn and respond to your child's individual needs.
- Busy, but relaxed, children who seem happy and purposeful.
- Safe and clean premises - welcoming and friendly with outside play space.
- Cultural sensitivity and responsiveness to children's home life.
- A staff team and group of children who reflect local ethnic and cultural groups.
- Fun activities planned each day - childminders, nurseries and out-of-school clubs all need to plan their days with children's interests and enthusiasms in mind. Exercise and quiet times to relax are important.

### **Visiting childcare settings - what to ask:**

- How many children do you care for?
- What is the ratio of staff to children?
- What qualifications and/or experience do the staff have?
- What curriculum do teach?
- Do you operate a key worker scheme (whereby one member of staff has main responsibility for your child)?
- How will you keep me informed of my child's progress and news from your setting?
- What are your policies on discipline and how do you manage children's behaviour?
- Do you provide meals, snacks, nappies etc or will I need to provide them?
- Where will my child sleep or rest?
- What are your procedures if there is any emergency involving my child?
- Can I see a copy of your registration certificates and inspection reports?

### **Take up references**

We advise that you take up at least two references. Childcare providers should be happy to give you names of other parents to speak to about the service they provide.

### **Children's views**

It is important that you try and get the opinions of your child. Below are just a small set of examples but will give you an idea of the types of questions that you should ask.

- Is your child part of a group of friends?
- Does your child like being there?
- Are mealtimes relaxed and fun? Do children help themselves to drinks and snacks?
- Do they like the facilities, indoors and out doors? Ask your child what they enjoy and what else might they like.
- Do your children have a positive relationship with staff? Check that the staff are able to respond to individual children's needs, to comfort and encourage them and to keep them safe.