

Parents' Guide to Choosing Childcare



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Choosing the right kind of childcare for your child is a big and important decision for parents, making the right choice can feel overwhelming when there are so many options available to you. It involves practical considerations such as the age of your child, along with their age related needs, the hours that you require care for, the location of the childcare setting, the most cost effective measures for your family as well as decisions on the kind of care and learning environment you want your child to be in.

This booklet is intended to provide you with the information you need to know to help you make the most appropriate choice for your child.



Types of Childcare

There are various forms of childcare, which can be either a formal or informal arrangement. A formal arrangement is usually where there is a financial arrangement with a childcare provider to care for your child on a regular basis. Informal childcare is where a friend or family member looks after your child for no financial gain. If you are looking to access your child's free entitlement to help towards childcare costs you must use an Ofsted registered formal setting.

Day Nurseries

Day nurseries provide a safe and structured environment for children under five. Some also offer out-of-school care for five to eleven year olds. Generally, day nurseries are open throughout the week, for most weeks of the year. Part-time places are often available.

Registration - all childcare providers caring for children under the age of eight for more than two hours a day, for more than 14 days a year, must be registered on either the Ofsted Early Years register and/or the compulsory and voluntary part of the childcare register.

Staffing - All staff must be DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checked and meet the following staffing ratios, as a minimum:

Age of Child	Staff to child ratio
0 – 2 years	1:3
2 years	1:4
3 – 5 years	1:8 1:13 (if they have a Qualified Teacher running the provision)

Childminders

A registered childminder is a person who looks after one or more children under the age of eight for more than a total of two hours a day in their own home. Childminders usually cover 8:00am to 6:00pm but many will often work outside of these hours to meet the needs of parents. Some childminders may also work weekends, and some are also registered to care for children overnight. Childminders may offer to collect children from local schools.

In order to register, a childminder must complete an introductory training course on homebased childcare, pass a home inspection visit from an Ofsted inspector and they (plus anyone over the age of 16 living in the property) must be DBS checked. The childminder also needs to hold a current paediatric first aid certificate. Childminders can be registered on the Early Years, compulsory and voluntary part of the childcare Ofsted registers.

Childminders can care for up to six children at once, including their own child. Most childminders are registered to provide the following childcare places:

Age range	Maximum children of this age group at any one time
Under 1	1
Birth to 5 (including any under 1)	3
5 to 8 years	3
Maximum number of children at any one time	6

Home child carers

A home child carer (often known as a nanny or au pair) is a person (over 18 years old) who is employed by a parent/carer to look after their children in their family home. Home child carers can care for children of any age and can work flexible hours. They can choose to register with Ofsted on the voluntary part of the childcare register.

The parent/carer is the employer, therefore would need to agree hours, holiday pay, salary, sick pay and other terms and conditions with the home child carer. It is also worth noting that free entitlement hours cannot be used with a nanny/au pair.

Nursery School/School nursery class

A nursery school is a separate school that is only used by children under five years old. A nursery class is part of an existing primary school. Most nursery schools and nursery classes offer both full and part time places and operate during term-time only.

Nursery schools and nursery classes within a school will accept children from either 2 or 3 years of age. Children can either start the term after their second or third birthday or, in the case of some Nursery classes, the September following their third birthday. This differs from school to school so you would need to check the school admissions policy.

Both Nursery schools and classes are registered and inspected by Ofsted in the same way as schools.

Applying for a place in a nursery school or class is a different process from that of applying for a school place. Parents must apply directly to the school. For more information on the application process, deadlines and admissions procedure please visit www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrensservices/schoolsandlearning/lss/nursery/nursery15-16.asp

Staffing - School nursery classes and nursery schools have to be led by a qualified teacher so the 1:13 children ratio would apply to 3 and 4 year olds. If the school offers governor led nursery provision this can be led by a Level 3 qualified member of staff where the Adult:Child ratio is 1:8. If the school or nursery class offers provision for 2 year olds the Adult:Child ratio will be 1:4.

Preschools

Preschools tend to provide care and early education for children from 2 to 5 years, for specific sessions each day. They are usually term time only. Many provide extra services such as breakfast clubs, lunch clubs and holiday play schemes. Preschools have to be registered on the Ofsted Early Years Register.

Staff working in the setting and those who run the setting (depending on how they are established this may be committee members, directors, trustees etc.) have to be DBS checked.

Again the same adult to child ratio as in a nursery applies:

Age of child	Staff to child ratio
0 and 1 years	1:3
2 years	1:4
3 – 5 years	1:8 1:13 (if they have a Qualified Teacher running the provision)

Crèche

A crèche can take many forms, but they generally provide short-term occasional care for children under the age of eight. A crèche may be offered to you if you are attending training, visiting a leisure centre or may be provided in shopping centres. A crèche must be registered with Ofsted if it operates for more than 4 hours a day and for more than 14 days per year.

Staff must be qualified to work in childcare and have a current DBS check. Free entitlement hours cannot be claimed in a crèche.

How to find childcare

The Children and Families Information Service can give you details of early years providers in your area, they can be contacted on 03457 125 737 or via email childrens.information@cumbria.gov.uk the CFIS team can also offer a brokerage service where they can help to try and secure the childcare you need. In addition to this there is also a childcare directory on our webpage www.cumbria.gov.uk.

How to choose the right childcare for your child:

Considerations (and their priorities) differ for everyone when choosing the most appropriate place for your child. Research suggests that children make the most progress when they attend a high quality early years settings, the latest Ofsted inspection will give some indication as to the quality of the provision, reports can be found at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/> There are four outcomes that settings can be given following an inspection; Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate.

Although the settings Ofsted report will give you some information about the childcare provision, as will friends/family recommendations, the best way to find out about a setting is to go for a visit. The kind of childcare provider that will suit you and your child will depend on your family's needs, so trust your instincts, you know your child better than anyone and are the best person to choose where will be the most suitable place to meet his/her needs. You should take your child along on your visit/s and see how they react to the staff and the environment.

Some things you may want to look for when you visit:

- **Relationships** - are children happy, confident and settled? Do staff appear enthusiastic, engaged with the children whilst responding to their needs? Are the staff at the same level as the children playing, interacting and supporting children, or are they stood supervising? Are the children encouraged to be independent learners or do they rely on adults? Does there seem to be caring and friendly relationships between children and staff? Are you welcomed into the setting? Are staff members interacting with your child? Does your child seem confident to engage in activities? Do children appear to be enjoying themselves? If your child is a baby are the staff warm and caring? Are staff talking with and singing with the child/baby?
- **Environment** - is it a safe, clean, happy place to be? Is there enough space for children to play? Is there a safe, secure and interesting outdoor play area? Are there quiet and comfortable places where children can rest/sleep if they need to? How are children using the space and outdoor space? Is there a range of places to create, pretend, talk, explore and use their senses? How are children using the setting, i.e. how are they moving around?

- **Equipment** - is there a broad range of good quality toys and equipment which look clean, well organised, and easily accessible for the children to reach themselves? Are resources age appropriate? Do the toys, books and displays represent and promote different cultures and lifestyles in a positive way? Are the activities inspiring? Are activities planned and thought through?
- **Paperwork** - there are certain things that providers have to display, including details of their manager/deputy, their Ofsted registration certificate, first aid certificate and insurance certificate. All other policies and procedures should be available for you to view upon request; these policies will cover things like how they deal with child protection, illness, dress code, health and safety etc.

Some of the questions you may want to ask:

- How is a typical day organised?
- Who will greet my family each day?
- What sort of activities will the children do?
- How do you use your outdoor space, i.e. do children have free flow between the two spaces or can they just go out at certain times?
- How will you keep me informed about my child's day?
- How do you manage children's behaviour?
- How do you manage nappy changing (if appropriate for your child)?
- How do you manage babies feeding routine?
- What is your settling in procedure?
- If food is provided what type of food is available? How do they manage any dietary allergies?
- What happens if your child is ill or has an accident?
- How long have current staff been at the setting?
- What qualifications do staff have?
- What ratio of staff to children do you work to?
- What payment methods are accepted?

Choosing childcare for children with special educational needs or disability:

All registered childcare providers are expected to make provision for disabled children. You can find out more about how childcare providers in Cumbria can meet your child's needs by visiting the Local Offer Pages on our website or by speaking to the Children Families Information Team on **03457 125 737**.

As well as the above you may want to consider/ask:

- Have there been any physical adaptations to the building?
- How will they ensure your child has the same play and learning opportunities as the other children?
- Who has responsibility for SEND (Special Educational Needs) in the setting?
- What disability training has been undertaken?
- Are staff trained to administer medicines if required?

Paying for childcare

When your child is due to start at a setting they should give you a contract, in this contract it should tell you what you will be expected to pay for and when, for example, their fee rate per hour (and what this includes) whether you will be expected to pay for days when your child cannot attend (due to holiday/illness). Many settings will also charge an administration/registration fee; again all of this should be set out in the contract so make sure you read this prior to signing.

Help with childcare costs (correct at time of publication)

There are several ways in which financial help is provided towards childcare. In every case below, parents must be using 'formal' childcare, childcare which is registered with Ofsted. Each of the support systems has differing qualifying criteria which you can find out more information about at the Childcare Choices website www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/ :

- **Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit** - Eligibility is dependent upon household income. If you are entitled to Working Tax Credit and you and partner are working at least 16 hours a week each, you can claim back up to 70% of your eligible childcare costs for children under 16 (or under 17 for disabled children).
- **Universal Credits** - Eligibility is again dependent upon household income. If you, and partner, are working, or you're due to start work, and you're claiming Universal Credit, you can claim back up to 85% of your eligible childcare costs for children under 16.
- **Tax-free childcare** - If you're a working parent with children under 12 (or under 17 for disabled children), you can open an account to pay for registered childcare where the government will top-up the money you pay into the account, for every £8 you pay in, the government will add an extra £2. You can receive up to £2,000 per child, per year - that's up to £500 every three months. If you have a disabled child, you can receive up to £4,000 per child - that's up to £1,000 every three months.
- **Childcare Vouchers** - If your employer offers childcare vouchers or arranges your childcare, you can get up to £933 a year in tax and National Insurance savings. The amount you can get in childcare vouchers depends on how much you earn and when you joined the scheme. You pay for your childcare before tax and National Insurance deductions are made. This scheme is being phased out; however new applicants are accepted until 4 October 2018.

- Free Early Years Entitlement** - All three and four year olds are eligible to claim 15 hours of free childcare/education, some working families will now be eligible for 30 hours. Also some two year olds will be able to claim 15 hours free childcare. Childcare providers are paid for these hours directly by the Local Authority so your fees should be reduced accordingly. A much more in depth explanation of free entitlement hours can be found below.

Childcare choices (www.childcarechoices.org.uk) have developed this table which shows which financial support systems may be able to be used together:

With...	Can you get...					
	Tax-Free Childcare	15 hours	30 hours	Tax credits	Universal Credit	Childcare vouchers
Tax-Free Childcare		✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
15 hours	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
30 hours	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Tax credits	✗	✓	✓		✗	✓
Universal Credit	✗	✓	✓	✗		✓
Childcare vouchers	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	

(Source: Childcare Choices)

Free entitlement for 2, 3 and 4 year olds

Free entitlement hours can be claimed at any 'formal' childcare provider (i.e. day nurseries, preschools, nursery schools, nursery classes and some childminders) as long as they are Ofsted registered and included in our Local Authority list to provide the entitlement.

Providing families meet the eligibility criteria their child is able to start claiming their free entitlement the term after their qualifying birthday. More information below:

If your child's birthday falls between:	Your child will become eligible from:
1 January and 31 March	The start of the Summer Term (April)
1 April and 31 August	The start of the Autumn Term (September)
1 September and 31 December	The start of the Spring Term (January)

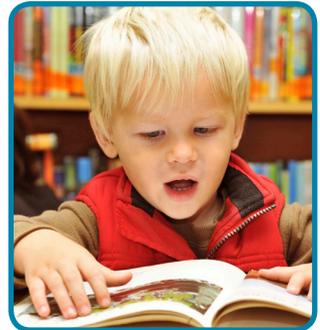
Benefits of Early Education - Early Year's research clearly shows that good quality early education benefits children in the long term, particularly for the most disadvantaged children. Research has also shown that high quality pre-school provision enhances children's social, physical and mental development, as well as helping them to prepare for school; giving them the best start in life.

Attending a childcare setting allows children to meet and play with other children; this will help them to build their confidence, as well as this your child will:

- Experience new and exciting activities
- Make new friends
- Build their confidence and social skills
- Improve their speech and language

As a parent free early education can help you:

- Save on childcare costs
- Have time to explore work and/or training opportunities
- Take on more paid work
- Support your child to play and learn
- Have more time to yourself



Free Early Education for 2 year olds

Approximately 40% of 2 year olds are eligible for 15 hours free funded education. Eligible children are entitled to 570 hours per academic year; this is the equivalent of 3 hours per day – term time (although this can be stretched over more weeks if agreed between family and childcare provider).

Eligibility

In order to apply, your family **MUST** be in receipt of one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
- The Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit and/or Working Tax Credit, provided the annual gross income is no more than £16,190 as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

If you are in receipt of the following criteria, supporting evidence would be required:

- Universal Credit – with an annual net earnings threshold of £15,400 (based on calculating earnings on a monthly basis)
- If the child is looked after by the Local Authority
- If the child has a current statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an education, health and care plan.
- If the child is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- If the child has left care through special guardianship or through an adoption or residence order

Application Process

To apply you need to go on to the following webpage <https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrensservices/childrenandfamilies/cfis/freechildcarefortwoyearolds.asp> where you can apply online. If you need help with this you can contact The Children and Families Information Service on 03457 125 737, alternatively your chosen childcare provider may be able to help with completing the application.

Free early education – for all 3 and 4 year olds

All 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to 570 hours of free early education/childcare per academic year. This is often taken as 15 hours per week over 38 weeks of the year (term time). Some childcare providers are able to offer flexibility; you would need to speak to your chosen provider about this. Providers are allowed to choose when they offer free entitlement hours as long as they offer them between 6am and 8pm and do not exceed more than a 10 hour session in one day.

Application Process

To apply for your 15 hour entitlement place at a day nursery, preschool or childminder please contact them direct. To apply for a place at a school nursery/nursery school please contact the school direct and they will advise of their application process.

Free Early Education – 30 hours for working parents

Some three and four year olds are now eligible to access an additional 15 hours free childcare per week (570 hours per academic year) meaning they are eligible to a total of 30 hours per week, 1140 hours per academic year.

Eligibility criteria

You will usually qualify for 30 hours free childcare if you (and your partner, if you have one) are:

- In work – or getting paternal leave, sick leave or annual leave.
- Each earning at least the National Minimum Wage or Living Wage for 16 hours per week, or the equivalent of. (This earning limit does not apply if you're self-employed and started your business less than 12 months ago)

If you cannot work - you may still be eligible if your partner is working, and you get Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Carer's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance

Families will not qualify for this entitlement if:

- Either parent has an income of more than £ 100,000
- Either parent is a non-EEA national and subject to immigration control (and has no recourse to public funds)
- Your child does not usually live with you

Application Process

Applying for 30 hours is slightly different you will need to create a 'Government gateway account'. To do this you will need your details (and if you have one, your partner's details), including your National Insurance number or Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR), if you're self-employed. You can apply here <https://childcare-support.tax.service.gov.uk/par/app/trialmessage> or by going to the childcare choices web site <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>

Once your eligibility has been confirmed you will be given an eligibility code, you will then need to take this code along with your National Insurance number and child's date of birth to your chosen childcare provider. Your chosen provider will then complete an electronic check through Cumbria County Council to verify eligibility.

All eligible parents will be expected to reconfirm their continued eligibility every three months with HMRC, if you do not continue to be eligible or do not reconfirm, the additional hours will cease at the end of the grace period, for more information <https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrensservices/childrenandfamilies/cfis/freeearlyyears.asp>

Early Years Pupil Premium

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) is extra government funding that supports children's development, learning and care. This funding is paid to the childcare provider (i.e. nursery/school etc.) and is used to assist the improvement of the child's early education. For example, by investing in additional staff training and resources to help enhance and further expertise in specialised areas, such as speech and language. In order for your child to qualify for Early Years Pupil Premium your family must be in receipt of one of the following:

- Income-based Jobseeker Allowance
- Income-related Income support
- Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross Income of no more than £ 16,190)
- *Working Tax Credit run-on, which is paid for 4 weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit (*If the family is in receipt of Working Tax Credit for more than the 4 weeks 'run-on', then the family do not meet the qualifying criteria)
- Universal Credit (net income threshold up to £ 7,400 per annum)
- Your child has been looked after by a local authority for one day or more
- Your child has been adopted from care
- Your child has left care under a special guardianship order or residence order

If any of the above applies to you please inform your childcare provider.

Free Entitlement - Frequently Asked Questions

- **Can I choose when my child takes their free provision, to fit in with my work times?** Providers are allowed to choose when they operate their free entitlement hours, the only restriction they have is they are not allowed to have sessions which exceed 10 hours per day, and free entitlement can only be offered between 6am and 8pm. It is worthwhile having a conversation with your preferred provider to see what hours they can offer.
- **Can my child have extra hours of childcare at the same setting?** Some providers are able to offer additional hours of childcare, including time before or after their "free" hours. You will have to pay for any extra hours which you take. The provider must show your free hours clearly on your bill.
- **Can I choose which provider my child goes to?** Yes, your child may go to any provider which has places available and is registered on the County Council's directory of providers for free places. Most (but not all) providers offer free places. Early Years providers will have a set of criteria which they use to decide who gets a place if there are more children than places available, usually called their admissions policy; they should be able to give you a copy of this on request. The same applies for a nursery school or school nursery class.
- **Do I have the right to a free early years place with a particular provider?** Unfortunately not! Early Years providers have very strict limits on the number of children they can accept, and so the most popular providers may not have enough places for everyone who wants to go there. You have the right to a free early years place, but a place at a particular provider cannot be guaranteed.
- **Does my child have to go to nursery?** No; your child is entitled to a free early years place but you can choose not to send them. The benefits of quality early education are listed above.
- **Do they have to go for the full 15/30 hours?** No; you can choose to send your child less, however as your child's provider will only be funded for the hours they attend, it's worth noting that the provider may not have capacity to increase their hours further down the line, this is something you may wish to discuss with your preferred provider.
- **Can I 'stretch' my child's entitlement over more weeks of the year than term time only?** Yes if your child is using less than their entitlement each week and the provider is able to accommodate your request, you may be able to use your unused hours over more than 38 weeks. You can use 570 hours of free entitlement each academic year/1140 hours per academic year if eligible for 30 hours.
- **Can my child attend more than one provider?** Yes you can take your free entitlement from multiple providers (maximum of two sites each day) however it's worth bearing in mind the child's learning, development and wellbeing when opting to split your entitlement.

- **Does the childcare setting that my child attends make a difference to whether they get a reception class place in the school we want?** No. Attending a particular setting does not guarantee a place in any specific school reception class. Admissions to reception classes are dealt with entirely separately and the early years setting a child attends is not taken into consideration.
- **What happens if my child is ill or if we go on holiday?** If your child is absent because they are ill or on holiday during normal school terms, the County Council will continue to fund your child's early years place as if they were attending. Your child cannot take any additional time instead of this. If you go on holiday for an extended length of time, funding will be stopped and the early years provider may give your child's place to someone else. If your child is going to be absent for a long time because of illness, please talk to your early years provider, as we may be able to continue to fund your child's place.
- **Will I be expected to pay anything towards my child's free entitlement hours?** Providers are able to charge parents for anything in addition to their free entitlement hours, i.e. meals, snacks, consumables such as nappies etc. However these charges must be voluntary for you as the parent. If you are unable or unwilling to pay this additional cost, please speak to your provider, it may be that you are allowed to provide a packed lunch for example.
- **Are providers allowed to ask for a deposit prior to my child starting their free entitlement hours?** Providers are allowed to ask for a deposit in order to secure your child's place at their setting, however they would be expected to give this back within a reasonable timescale of your child starting.
- **What can I do if I think my child is not getting their full free entitlement?** In the first instance, speak to your childcare provider, if you require further advice contact the Cumbria County Council Children and Families Information Service on 03457 125 737.
- **What will my child do at their early years setting?** All providers have to use a framework called the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for all 0-5 year olds whether their time is part of a free place or not. The EYFS gives the provider guidance about how they should work with young children and also sets out seven broad areas of learning. A short overview of the EYFS is included later in this booklet.



If you have any further questions in relation to Free Early Years Entitlement please contact the Children Families Information Service on **03457 125 737**.

The Early Years Foundation Stage: from birth to five

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five years. The EYFS exists to support all professionals to help your child, and was developed with a number of early year's experts and parents.

The EYFS states "Children develop quickly in the early years and a child's experiences between birth and age five have a major impact on their future life chances... Good parenting and high quality early learning together provide the foundation children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up." The EYFS aims to provide and ensure that there is:

- Quality and consistency in all early years provision, so that every child makes good progress and no child gets left behind.
- A secure foundation through learning and development opportunities which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and are assessed and reviewed regularly
- Partnership working between practitioners and parents/carers
- Equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice

It specifies requirements for **learning and development**, for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. The learning and development requirements cover:

- The 7 areas of **learning and development** which must shape the activities and experiences for children in all early years provision.
- The early learning goals that providers must help children work towards (the knowledge, skills and understanding children should have at the end of the academic year in which they turn five)
- Assessment arrangements for measuring progress and details how this should be reported to parents and/or carers.

The safeguarding and welfare requirements cover the steps that providers must take to keep children safe and promote their welfare.

The EYFS has four guiding principles which shape the work of practitioners, which are:

- Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured
- Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships
- Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers

- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates. The EYFS covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.

(source: Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage - Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five, March 2017).

Your child's provider will be able to tell you more about the EYFS and show you some of the materials they use to assess and record your child's development.

Learning and Development

The EYFS explains how and what your child will be learning to support their healthy development. Your child will be learning skills, acquiring new knowledge and demonstrating their understanding through 7 areas of learning and development.

The seven areas of learning are all important and all interconnected. The three areas which are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive, are called the prime areas these are:

- Communication and language;
- Physical development; and
- Personal, social and emotional development.

Providers must also support children in four specific areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied. These specific areas are:

- Literacy;
- Mathematics;
- Understanding the world; and
- Expressive arts and design.

These 7 areas of learning and development are used to plan your child's learning and activities. The professionals teaching and supporting your child will make sure that the activities are suited to your child's unique needs. It's basically a little bit like a curriculum in primary and secondary schools, but it's suitable for very young children, and it's designed to be really flexible so that staff can follow your child's unique needs and interests.

Children in the EYFS learn by playing and exploring, being active, and through creative and critical thinking which takes place both indoors and outside.

How can I find out how my child is getting on?

Research shows that children develop the best when there is a mix of good parenting and high quality early learning.

In order to support your child it is important that you and the professionals caring for your child work together. You need to feel comfortable about exchanging information and discussing things that will benefit your child.

These conversations can be with your childminder or, in a larger setting like a nursery, with your child's "key person". You should be informed of who your child's key worker/person is. This is usually the person who will be your main point of contact in the setting, who helps your child to become settled, happy and feel safe. Their role as key person is to help ensure that your child's care is tailored to meet their needs.

Try to speak to your child's key person as often as possible about what your child has been doing, what they have enjoyed, what they need to be doing more of and what you can do at home.

You should be able to get information about your child's development at any time but there are two stages (at age 2, and again at age 5) when the professionals caring for your child must give you written information about how he or she is doing.

Progress check at age two

At some point between your child's second and third birthday, practitioners must review your child's progress and provide you with a short summary as to how they are progressing in the three prime areas of learning (noted above).

The check should identify the child's strengths as well as highlighting any areas where the child's progress is less than expected.

If there are any significant concerns or any identified special educational needs or disability the practitioners should develop a targeted plan to support your child's future learning and development, this is something you should be involved with.

You may wish to share this information with other relevant professionals such as your health visitor and staff of any new setting your child may transfer to.

When your child is 5

In the final term of the year in which your child reaches five, teachers complete an assessment which is known as the **EYFS Profile**.

This assessment is carried out by the reception teacher and is based on what they, and other staff caring for your child, have observed over a period of time.

The assessment is to give you as parent/carers, practitioners and teachers a well-rounded picture of a child's knowledge, understanding and abilities. It will detail their progress against expected levels of development and their readiness for Year 1.

Practitioners should indicate whether children are meeting expected levels of development, if they are exceeding them, or are not yet reaching them.

The profile must reflect ongoing observations, all relevant records held by the setting, discussions with parents and carers and any other adults whom the teacher/parent/carer deems a useful contributor. So do make sure you let your child's teacher know about what your child does with you.

The school will give you a report of your child's progress, including information from his or her EYFS Profile, as well as explaining who you can speak to if you wanted to discuss it further.

Where can I go for further information?

The most important place to find out more about your child's learning and development is from your child's childcare provider – so do ask as many questions as you need to. Providers really do welcome speaking with you.



How to support your child

The quickest development of your child's brain takes place between their birth and the age of two. Your child continues to learn and develop rapidly during the important early years of their life.

As a parent/educator you can help your child's learning - you are your child's first educator and understand them better than anyone else. By building a few simple learning games into your child's daily routines and helping them investigate their environment; you can help give them the best possible start to their education.

This doesn't need to be anything extravagant all the activities that you do with your child at home are important in supporting their learning and development, and have a really long lasting effect on your child's learning as they progress through school.

Even when your child is very young and is not yet able to talk, talking to them helps them to learn and understand new words and ideas. If you make the time every day to do some of the following things with your child it will make a real difference to your child's confidence as a young learner.



(Source: A Parent's guide to the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, Exciting time ahead for you and your child)

By talking to them, playing with them and introducing simple skills you can help them in their future development. Some other play ideas include allowing your child to:

- Investigate things that open, close, float, sink, twist, turn
- Explore objects like large boxes, things that make noises and things that move
- Play for uninterrupted periods, alone or with others, with help from adults, and in their own way
- Talk to other children and adults
- Help their senses develop by allowing them to touch a variety of objects, listen to a range of sounds like songs, rhymes, stories, music, and taste a range of flavours
- Walk and look around the garden with you this can teach them about plant life, insects and animals
- Get involved with simple kitchen tasks, like letting your child spread the jam on sandwiches, can give an early lesson in cooking and improve motor skills

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- Play games together teaching fair play and cooperative behaviour
 - Look at family and holiday photos this is good for lessons in family history and geography
 - Reading together – You can read anywhere, whether it's the signs on the bus, in shops or at the post office, you can point out the words around you and that's the beginning of reading. Reading stories with your child, even if for just 10 minutes a day, will help to build important skills, as well as capture your child's interest in books.
 - Learning about numbers and shapes - Counting things and noticing shapes come naturally to children, so you can use your child's interest in these activities to help with maths. Maths skills can be developed through stories, songs, games and imaginative play. Even helping in everyday tasks like telling time or measuring ingredients for cooking, gives children the chance to learn new maths skills.

Lastly spending quality time together is invaluable - Turning off the television or computer and spending time with your child creates valuable opportunities for learning and enjoying each other's company.

For more information about supporting your child at home please visit our webpage www.cumbria.gov.uk and search for 'home learning'

If you're looking for more ideas of things to do then many children's centres offer a host of sessions such as 'messy play' activities which you and your child can join in with, the majority of the activities they provide are free. Staff can also give advice about the kinds of books or other activities your child might enjoy at different ages.