



What is a Nursery?

Nursery care can have several meanings in childcare services. This guide outlines what each of these options can offer you and your child.

The main types of nursery provision that are available include:

- Private day nurseries and pre-schools
- Nursery classes or private nursery schools
- Nursery provision attached to independent schools.

Looking for a nursery

You can start your search for the right nursery by looking at the different settings on offer in your local area. You can then consider which setting would most suit your child and the needs of the whole family.

All nurseries must be registered and inspected by the country's regulatory body – Ofsted in England, Estyn in Wales, Education Scotland in Scotland, ETI in Northern Ireland.



Private day nurseries

Private day nurseries can care for babies and children aged between three months and five years. They are normally open between 8am and 6pm, though the hours vary from place to place and some setting will offer as much as 12 hours per day. If you are looking for a full-time place or a full morning or afternoon of care as opposed to sessional care of two or three hours in a day, then this type of nursery may well suit you.

Nursery classes or nursery schools

Nursery classes are attached to primary schools and are registered alongside the school. Nursery schools (often referred to as pre-schools, sessional nurseries or playgroups) are run on separate premises. They usually offer morning or afternoon sessions for children aged 2.5 – 5 years, term time only.

Nursery provision attached to independent schools

Some independent schools have nursery classes attached to them. They usually take three or four-year olds but will occasionally accept younger children. Many are open from 9am to 3pm, but some schools are now extending their hours to help working parents.

How much does nursery care cost?

The cost of nursery care varies according to the setting. The charges for private day nurseries will vary from £40-100 per day depending on the nursery location.

As nursery class in state or independent schools tend to cater for three-year-olds and above, we have more detail about them in our Insider Guide titled Choosing an Early Education Setting. In this guide,

we look in more detail at private day nurseries that provide full-time or part-time daycare for babies and children aged three months to five years old.

What happens in a day nursery?

A typical day in a nursery will involve children taking part in a variety of activities that will vary according to the age and interests of the child. The children are usually separated according to age and the babies have a higher adult-to-child ratio. During a day there should be plenty of opportunity for free play with scheduled times for certain activities such as registration or circle time for the oldest children.

When children are at a nursery, they will spend time interacting and socialising with their peer group. Most nurseries include meals and snacks in their fees, and there should be suitable provision for children needing to nap during the day.



Do nursery staff need qualifications?

In **England**, at least half of the nursery staff must hold relevant childcare qualifications such as NVQ Childcare Level 2 or above. At least one member of staff on duty should have a First Aid certificate and all supervisors are required to have an NVQ Childcare Level 3 or equivalent.

In **Wales**, at least 80% of non-supervisory staff should hold at least a Level 2 qualification, and at least half of these should be a Level 3.

In **Scotland**, all managers should be qualified in childcare to SVQ level 4 and, as a minimum, at least half of the staff in any one facility should be qualified in childcare to SVQ level 2.

In **Ireland**, all staff working directly with children must hold a minimum of QQI Level 5.

Some nurseries work above these minimum figures, so make sure you ask as nurseries with higher qualified staff can offer better quality childcare

What training should the staff have?

All day nursery staff must be trained in the EYFS framework; this means they are trained to create a safe and stimulating environment for your child to enjoy and develop in. They must also provide toys and activities suitable for your child's age and stage of development.

Some nursery staff also complete a range of other courses to extend their skills ranging from first aid to a diploma lead course.

How many children can a nursery take?

The number of children a nursery can take depends on the size of the nursery and the number of staff employed there. There has to be a staff-to-child ratio of:

- 1:3 for under-twos
- 1:4 for two to three-year-olds
- 1:8 for three to five-year-olds.

(These are the maximum numbers of children that can be in a group with one adult).

What are the main advantages of using a nursery?

- A nursery is a great place for children to mix and socialise as well as learn through structured play
- Children who go to nursery are sometimes considered more confident and outgoing as they get older
- Nurseries almost never close because of illness. There is enough staff to cover one person's sickness, so you should never be in that difficult situation when your carer rings you at 8am to say that she is ill
- You will be able to find out what your child is doing during the day, and there are always other people around. Many parents like the openness and accountability that nurseries can offer
- Even if the carers change from time to time, the nursery and its routine will stay the same, so your child will feel familiar and safe there
- Day nurseries have to be inspected regularly and meet the guidelines set by the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) framework in order to remain registered
- Nurseries are child-centred. There will be a curriculum and themes throughout the year, and children will benefit from a variety of activities to keep them busy and happy
- Most nurseries will be able to offer you a full or part-time place
- You may be able to ask some of the nursery workers to be babysitters
- Development and progress is constantly monitored.
- Fees are often inclusive of food and nappies, wipes etc.

Are there any considerations?

- Some parents think that the 'institutional' environment of a nursery is more suited to older children rather than babies
- The opening and closing times are not flexible and some nurseries have financial penalties if you arrive late to collect your child
- Your child is likely to pick up more bugs in a nursery, mixing with other children all the time. Also, if they are ill they will have to stay away from the nursery until they're better
- Nursery places are in short supply and are not cheap. Your costs will almost double if you have another child there too, although many nurseries will offer a small sibling discount.
- Whilst a nursery is child-centred, one consequence of this may be that there are fewer opportunities to do 'ordinary' things like visiting the playground or the shops. Also, the change of staff (shifts and a possible high staff turnover) can be difficult for babies and young children.
- Every nursery has a different feel to it, even if it is in the same type of setting. Personalities, location, leadership style and the premises themselves will make each nursery individual. For more information on how to choose a nursery please see our Insider Guide Choosing a Nursery.

Further information

To view inspection reports on your local day nurseries, please see:

Organisation	Website	Contact
Education Scotland <i>The national body in Scotland for supporting quality and improvement in learning and teaching</i>	education.gov.scot/education-scotland/inspection-reports/	Telephone: +44 (0)131 244 4330 Email: enquiries@educationscotland.gov.scot
ETI <i>Education and Training Inspectorate Northern Ireland</i>	www.etini.gov.uk/publications/type/inspectionreports	Telephone: 028 9127 9726 Email: eti@education-ni.gov.uk
Estyn – Wales <i>Crown body inspects quality and standards of education and training in Wales</i>	www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection/search	Telephone: 029 2044 6446 Email: enquiries@estyn.gov.wales
Good Care Guide <i>Lets families find, rate and review local childcare providers</i>	http://www.goodcareguide.co.uk/	Email: support@goodcareguide.co.uk
Gov UK <i>The best place to find UK government services and information</i>	www.gov.uk/find-nursery-school-place	N/A
NDNA – National Day Nurseries Association <i>A charity that provide nursery membership, lobby government and offer training</i>	www.ndna.org.uk	Email: membership@ndna.org.uk
Ofsted <i>Inspection reports in England</i>	www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted	N/A

Recommended Service



Back-Up Care

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