

# How to choose quality Childcare



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

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Gwasanaethau Gwybodaeth i Deuluoedd  
Family Information Services



# Family Information Services (FIS)

The Family Information Service is a free information service for ALL parents and guardians of children aged between 0 and 19.

They are there to give you information and advice to help you find and choose childcare. They can also help you find out about the range of children, family and young people's services in your area.

You can either phone or visit your local Family Information Service to talk to people who can explain what childcare and children's services are available in your area and advise you on any financial support that you are eligible for to help pay for the cost of your childcare.

It's your ideal starting point if you have any questions about anything regarding your family. So call them first.

There is a Family Information Service in every local authority. Call 0300 123 7777 to find your nearest one. Alternatively, go to the 'Useful Contacts' section of [www.PlayLearnGrowWales.gov.uk](http://www.PlayLearnGrowWales.gov.uk).



\*Formerly known as Children's Information Services (CIS)

# How to choose a childcare service

Firstly, visit as many childcare providers as possible before deciding which one is best for you and your child, and check that they are registered. Secondly, to help you decide, we have prepared the following list of questions. These are things which other people have found helpful to ask when looking for a childcare service.

## Questions to ask when looking for a childcare service

### Is it welcoming?

- Are you made to feel welcome?
- How much attention does my child receive?
  - Is she / he made to feel special?
- Are the carers / staff helpful?

### Is it a stimulating place for children?

- Are there visible signs that children are having a stimulating and enjoyable time, for example pictures on the wall, happy faces, etc?
- What programme of activities is offered?
  - Is there variety and stimulation?
  - Are activities challenging and interesting?

- Are girls and boys encouraged to take part in all activities and encouraged to use all equipment?
- Will my child have stories? Are there books to look at?

### What facilities does it have?

- Are there lots of suitable toys and play equipment?
- Is there access to an outdoor play area?
- What use is made of television or computer games?
- What about meals?
  - If my child has special dietary needs, can these be catered for?
- Can the service provide Welsh language provision?
- Is there provision for special needs?

## Is it caring?

- Is the facility flexible about a settling in period for my child?
  - Can I stay with my child to help her / him settle?
- Will I have an opportunity to find out how my child is settling and progressing?
  - Are there any systematic ways of doing this?
- Will my child be given quiet time by him / herself if needed?
- Are there flexible rest periods?
- What procedures are there for emergency medical treatment and first aid?
- What about toilet training and what if my child has an accident?

## What about the staff?

- What qualifications do the carers / staff have? (For settings that are registered with Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) there are specific requirements on the level of qualifications staff should have.)
- Are carers / staff offered ongoing training?
- Do carers / staff get involved in the children's activities?
- How many carers and how many children are there in the facility?
- How do staff talk to the children e.g. do they show patience and consideration?

- How do staff encourage good behaviour?
- When considering childminders, ask to see their portfolio and references.

By law, the minimum ratio of staff to children is as follows:

Children's Age	Number of adults	Number of children
Under 2	1	3
2 – 3	1	4
3- 8	1	8

## Other questions

- How is the day structured?
- Are there trips and outings?
- What are the arrangements for booking?
- Can my child bring things from home to help him/her settle?
- What are the access and parking facilities?
- How much will the childcare cost? What will the cost cover e.g. outings, food, care during holidays etc?

Finally, once you have found a childcare service you are happy with, try to have a settling in period with a few short visits for your child and yourself. This will help you both feel more confident and at ease.

# Types of childcare

## Registered

Anyone who provides childcare for children under the age of 8 for more than 2 hours a day for reward must be registered with Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW).

### Registered services include:

- childminders
- day nurseries
- playgroups / cylchoedd meithrin
- wraparound Care/Gofal Cofleidiol  
(often referred to as Playgroup Plus /Meithrin Mwy)
- part-time education for 3 and 4 year-olds
- out of school childcare clubs
- open access playschemes

Call the Family Information Service for an up to date list of the registered childcare providers in your area.  
Call 0300 123 7777

# 1. Childminders

Childminders are day care providers who work in their own homes caring for children. They are based in the community, which means that children can go to local playgroups / cylchoedd meithrin, parent & toddler groups, clubs or visit friends.

## Responsibilities & Registration

Childminders are responsible for your child's safety as well as their emotional and physical development. They should provide a mix of play and learning experiences inside and outside the home.

All childminders must be registered and inspected by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), who will check on their suitability, their home and everyone over the age of 16 living in the house.

## Childminders must have:

- a registration certificate issued by CSSIW
- a public liability insurance certificate

## Fees and Flexibility

Childminders are self-employed and set their own fee. They can offer flexible childcare, year round, full-time or part-time and outside school hours. They can look after up to 6 children of varying ages at the same time and can therefore care for brothers and sisters together.

For more information: Family Information Service: 0300 123 7777  
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW): 01443 848450  
[cssiw@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cssiw@wales.gsi.gov.uk) [www.cssiw.org.uk](http://www.cssiw.org.uk)  
National Childminding Association (NCMA): 0800 169 4486 [info@ncma.org.uk](mailto:info@ncma.org.uk) [www.ncma.org.uk](http://www.ncma.org.uk)





## 2. Day nurseries

Day nurseries provide registered early education and childcare for young children from birth to age 5. They usually open from early morning to early evening, Monday to Friday, all year round. They offer a caring, safe, stimulating environment either as full day care or part-time care for babies and pre-school children. Some may also provide care before and after school and in the holidays for older children too.

### Day nurseries must:

- be registered and inspected by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)
- hold a registration certificate issued by CSSIW
- have a public liability insurance certificate
- have the appropriate food hygiene certificate

National Day Nurseries Association provides free advice to parents on choosing a nursery and paying for childcare, through a special parents section on its website [www.ndna.org.uk](http://www.ndna.org.uk). Day nurseries are supported and represented by National Day Nurseries Association. Many Welsh-medium day nurseries are affiliated to and supported by Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin.

For more information: Family Information Service: 0300 123 7777  
National Day Nursery Association (NDNA): 01824 707 823 [www.ndna.org.uk](http://www.ndna.org.uk)  
Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM): 01970 639639 [www.mym.co.uk](http://www.mym.co.uk)

### Fees

Most nurseries are run by private or voluntary organisations and fees will vary across the country. Support with costs is available from tax credits, childcare vouchers and free part-time places for all 3 year olds.

### Food and snacks

Most day nurseries have facilities to prepare food and snacks for the children in their care. They should produce at least a 3 week menu of good quality food and provide snacks appropriate to the length of day the child attends.



### 3. Playgroups / Cylchoedd Meithrin

Playgroups cater mainly for children age 2½ years to 5, usually for 2 to 3 hours in the morning or afternoon and mainly during term-time.

They offer a safe and stimulating environment where children play, learn and socialise with each other. Playgroups are developed and supported by Wales Pre-school Providers Association, a registered charity. Many Playgroups offer young children an introduction to the Welsh language. Staff and volunteers are actively encouraged to develop and share their Welsh language skills. Parents and carers are active in running playgroups and often join their management committees. Cylchoedd Meithrin are Welsh-medium playgroups which give children an opportunity to learn through play. Children from non-Welsh speaking families are welcome to attend

Cylchoedd Meithrin and are able to benefit by becoming bilingual. Cylchoedd Meithrin are supported by Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM), a national voluntary organisation.

#### Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

The Wales Pre-school Providers Association (Wales PPA) and Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM) offer information, support and training as well as referral schemes to integrate children with special educational needs and disabilities into local playgroups.



For more information: Family Information Service: 0300 123 7777

Wales Pre-school Providers Association: [sharmanm@walesppa.org](mailto:sharmanm@walesppa.org) [www.walesppa.org](http://www.walesppa.org) 01686 624 573

Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin: 01970 639639 [post@mym.co.uk](mailto:post@mym.co.uk) [www.mym.co.uk](http://www.mym.co.uk)

## 4. Wraparound Care/Gofal Cofleidiol (often referred to as Playgroup Plus /Meithrin Mwy)

Wraparound Care/Gofal Cofleidiol is offered in parts of Wales as an extension of playgroups/cylchoedd meithrin, and Local Authority Nursery Education Provision.

This is a service which is offered in conjunction with another partner, usually the local primary school. Groups may operate for up to 4 hours a day, but parents may avail themselves of extended provision in the local primary school. Sessions in the school can be held in the morning or in the afternoon. Groups are supported by Wales PPA or Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM) in the same way as Playgroups / Cylchoedd Meithrin are supported. Like other Playgroups/Cylchoedd Meithrin, the service may be based in community or church halls or schools. Meithrin Mwy are extended playgroups which offer quality care and education through the medium of Welsh. They are supported by Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM).



For more information: Family Information Service: 0300 123 7777

Wales Pre-school Providers Association: [sharmanm@walesppa.org](mailto:sharmanm@walesppa.org) [www.walesppa.org](http://www.walesppa.org) 01686 624 573

Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin: 01970 639639 [post@mym.co.uk](mailto:post@mym.co.uk) [www.mym.co.uk](http://www.mym.co.uk)

## 5. Part-time education for children aged 3 and 4

All children have the right to a free, part-time, good quality early education place in an approved setting the term after their third birthday. Part-time means a minimum of 10 hours a week, for around the same number of weeks as the normal school year. An approved setting may be a school, cylch meithrin, playgroup, day nursery or childminder who is part of a quality assured childminding network.

### Costs

You are not expected to contribute towards the cost of these places. If your child already attends an approved early education setting when she / he becomes 3, the fee will be reduced. However, you may have to pay for any services or childcare on top of the free education part-time place.

### Registration

All approved settings are inspected by Estyn the body responsible for training and registering nursery education inspectors. For more information on settings offering free part-time places, contact your local FIS.





## 6. Out of school childcare clubs

Out of school childcare clubs help parents or carers who work or attend training. They provide breakfast clubs, after school clubs, holiday clubs and wrap-around play-care for school age children.

### Registration

Many schools have out of school childcare clubs, while other clubs are based in village halls, community centres and day nurseries. Children's attendance is registered and they are given a snack and a drink. Where appropriate, clubs are registered and inspected by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) and qualified or trained play staff supervise activities (one member of staff to every 8 children under 8 years of age).

The play environment should be stimulating and varied, with a range of activities such as arts / crafts, games and physical play which children can choose. A quiet area for reading and homework may also be available. Children are supervised until a parent or carer arrives to collect them. Sometimes a collection service may be available to take children to school from the club and collect them from school at the end of their day.

## 7. Open access playschemes

Open access playschemes are places where children are free to come and go. They must be registered with CSSIW if they cater for children under 8 for more than 2 hours a day.

During school holidays, many local authorities organise or support play schemes which may be open access. Some local authorities also offer

Saturday morning clubs and special activity days. For details of play schemes in your area, contact your local Family Information Service.

For more information: Family Information Service: 0300 123 7777  
Clybiau Plant Cymru Kid's Clubs: [www.clybiauplantcymru.org](http://www.clybiauplantcymru.org) 02920 741000  
Play Wales: [mail@playwales.org.uk](mailto:mail@playwales.org.uk) [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk) 02920 486050

# Types of childcare

## Unregistered

The following childcare options are not required to be registered with Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW):

(Please note that if you use childcare which is not registered or approved, you will not be able to claim the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit.)

1. parent and toddler groups /  
Cylchoedd Ti a Fi
  2. au pairs
  3. babysitters
  4. friends and family members
- See page 14.

## May be unregistered

The following childcare options are not usually registered by CSSIW but do require registration in particular circumstances:

1. Nannies
  2. Crèches
- See page 15.



# Types of childcare

## Unregistered

### 1. Parent and toddler groups / Cylchoedd Ti a Fi

Parent and Toddler Groups cater mainly for children under 2½ years. Parents / carers must stay with and be responsible for their children, so groups are not required to register with Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). The sessions allow parents and children to mix with others and enjoy a variety of different activities. Cylchoedd Ti a Fi enable parents and carers to play alongside their children and socialise in an informal Welsh setting. Non-Welsh speaking parents are welcome to attend, and are encouraged to learn Welsh with their children, enjoying basic stories, songs and nursery rhymes as well as simple phrases to use at home.

### 2. Au pairs

Au Pairs are usually foreign students aged 17–27 years. They do not generally have childcare qualifications, so it is not a good idea for them to have sole charge of pre-school children. Au Pairs live as members of the family to learn English. They can work in the home for up to 5 hours per day in return for a room, an allowance and 2 full days off per week.

### 3. Babysitters

Babysitters typically look after children while parents go out for an evening or afternoon. There is no legal minimum age, but the NSPCC says they should be older than 16. If you use a babysitter under 16 and the child is injured in their care, you may be held responsible. So, choose babysitters carefully and ask for references if you do not know the person well. The leaflet 'Home Alone' advises parents looking for babysitters. It is published by the NSPCC and is available from your local Family Information Service. If you have a local babysitting circle nearby, you can share babysitting with other parents.

### 4. Friends and family members

Some parents are able to call on grandparents and other relatives or friends to look after their children. This often works very well, but you should think about this kind of childcare as carefully as you would about a registered facility. If anyone other than a close family member looks after your child regularly in their own home in return for money or reward, they must register as a childminder with CSSIW.

# Types of childcare May be unregistered

## 1. Crèches

Crèches provide occasional care for children while their parents are shopping, playing sport or on a course, for example. Parents are expected to remain on the same premises, although not necessarily in the same room. A crèche must be registered by CSSIW if it cares for children under 8 for more than 2 hours a day and for 6 or more days a year on the same premises (even if the child attends for shorter periods).

## 2. Nannies

Nannies look after children in the family home. They are not currently regulated and do not have to register with CSSIW unless they work for more than 2 families. Nannies may also register under the Childcare Approval Scheme Wales to become an approved childcare worker, allowing the families that they work for to claim the Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit or Childcare Vouchers.

As an extra precaution, you can check if your nanny is approved by the Childcare Approval Scheme Wales. To be accepted on the scheme, every nanny has to be fully qualified in childcare and trained in first aid. Reassuringly, they will also have had to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check to establish their suitability for working with children.

[www.childcareapprovalschemewales.co.uk](http://www.childcareapprovalschemewales.co.uk)  
0844 736 0260

## Duties

Nannies are employed by the parent and their duties are open to negotiation. It is important to discuss what you expect from a nanny before employing one. Nannies will generally look after all aspects of a child's welfare. They may baby-sit on a regular basis, but are not likely to do housework. They may live in or come to the home daily.

# Checking Childcare Quality & Standards

Childcare Standards are regulated by 2 bodies in Wales:

1. Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) is responsible for regulating daycare in Wales.
2. Estyn is responsible for regulating educational provision in daycare in Wales.

## Registered services include:

- childminders
- day nurseries
- playgroups / cylchoedd meithrin
- playgroup plus / Gofal Cofleidiol
- part-time education for 3 – 4 year olds (apart from school based education)
- out of school childcare clubs
- open access playschemes

Anyone, other than a close relative who provides childcare in the child's home may apply to become an approved childcare worker. In order to be approved under this scheme, childcare workers must:

- be aged 18 or over
- have a Level 2 qualification in early years and childcare
- have a first aid certificate
- have received Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance
- from October 2009 they are required to register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA).

Call the Family Information Service for an up to date list of the registered childcare providers in your area.  
Call 0300 123 7777

Childcare Approval Scheme Helpline: 0844 736 0260  
or visit [www.childcareapprovalschemewales.co.uk](http://www.childcareapprovalschemewales.co.uk).

ISA helpline 0300 123 1111 [www.isa.gov.org.uk](http://www.isa.gov.org.uk)



# National minimum standards

## 1. Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)

Anyone who provides a childcare service for more than 2 hours a day for children under the age of 8 must register with CSSIW.

Registered services must meet national minimum standards, as laid down by the National Assembly for Wales' regulations and the minimum standards set for each type of childcare service. The Regulations and Standards are available from CSSIW and can be accessed via the CSSIW website.

[www.CSSIW.org.uk](http://www.CSSIW.org.uk)



**To register with CSSIW, a childcare service must ensure that:**

- premises are safe and suitable
- staff are appropriately qualified
- staff have received health and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance and other references have been checked
- equipment and activities are appropriate for the number and ages of children
- compliance with regulations and standards is checked once every two years for registered services (annually for full daycare settings) through inspection by CSSIW and a report of findings is made available.

## 2. Estyn

Estyn inspects schools, nurseries and training centres in Wales. It is independent of, but funded by, the National Assembly for Wales.

As part of its job, Estyn is responsible for:

- training and registering nursery education inspectors
- monitoring the quality of inspections and inspection reports
- taking a second look at any setting which someone else says is well below the required standard of education

[www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)



**Estyn's Chief Inspector has to keep the Welsh Assembly Government informed about:**

- the quality and standard of nursery education
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children who are in nursery education.

# Disabilities and special educational needs

## Help at hand

Your local Family Information Service should have details of suitable childcare provision for disabled children and children with special educational needs in your area.

They will also have information about how to access help to cover childcare costs. Referral schemes in all parts of Wales help children with special educational needs to attend playgroups/cylchoedd meithrin with other children of the same age.

## Accessibility and the Disability Rights Commission

All childcare providers must meet the requirements of the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995 \(DDA\)](#) and make 'reasonable adjustments' to include disabled children. They must not treat a disabled child "less favourably" because of their disability. You can phone the [Disability Rights Commission \(DRC\)](#) on [08457 622 633](tel:08457622633) for guidance on legal requirements relating to childcare providers.

## Extra financial help

Child Tax Credit can include extra money for disabled children. Working Tax Credit can include help with childcare costs. To find out what you are entitled to, contact the helpline on [0845 300 3900](tel:08453003900).

Disability Living Allowance can be claimed for a child with a severe physical or mental illness or disability if, due to their illness, they need much more help or looking after than other children of the same age. For more information contact the [Benefit Enquiry Helpline](#) on [0800 88 22 00](tel:0800882200).

Family Information Service: [0300 123 7777](tel:03001237777)





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CMK-22-07-459 19096 Choosing Childcare Booklets 978 0 7504 5549 7