

Choosing the Right Nursery

To help you and your child, it is critical that both of you are happy and confident with your choice of nursery.

This guide will give you an insight into which questions to ask, what you should be looking for from a nursery and what legal requirements a nursery has to follow. The right research about your nursery will provide you with the reassurance that your child will be cared for in a safe, high-quality environment.

Visiting nurseries: Key points to consider on arrival

- **Parking and access:** Are there dedicated parking spaces or safe pull-in areas for easy drop-off and pick-up?
- **Entry system:** How secure and efficient is the nursery's entry system?
- **Staff reception:** Are the staff welcoming, polite, friendly, and professional? Was the door answered promptly?
- **First impressions:** Does the nursery feel friendly, clean, and safe upon entry?
- **Staff information:** Is there a clear staff board displaying roles and responsibilities, including the Designated Safeguarding Lead and staff trained in Paediatric First Aid?
- **Food safety:** Check the Food Standards Agency rating, which should be clearly displayed; a rating of 5 is the highest
- **Quality standards:** Ask if the nursery has achieved quality standards or awards like Millie's Mark or NDNA's Quality Counts, indicating their commitment to quality and improvement.



Nursery tour

You will be shown around the setting by a senior member of staff who will take you to each room. The manager and staff should clearly explain the activities and resources available, how they align with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum, and how they cater to each child's interests.

Don't hesitate to ask questions or seek clarification on anything. You need to be fully confident in your decision for your child's well-being and your peace of mind. Nurseries expect and welcome questions.

Ensure you see the entire nursery, not just the area your child will initially use. This provides a complete picture and prepares you for future transitions. Ask to meet with who may potentially be

your child's key person, who will be the main caregiver and who will build a close relationship with you and your child.

Key considerations:

- Are indoor areas safe, clean, well-lit, welcoming, and at an appropriate temperature?
- Is there a safe, secure, and clean outdoor play area? If there is no outdoor provision on site, find out how the setting enables children to access the outdoors every day
- Can children choose when to play outside, or are there set times?
- Do children have the freedom to choose what and where to play, with accessible storage units?
- Do the children look happy, settled, and engaged in activities? Are their needs being met?
- Do the staff appear friendly, welcoming, calm, relaxed and professional?
- Are they at the children’s level, e.g. sitting on the floor, sitting at the meal tables etc.?
- Find out how the nursery communicates with parents. They may use daily diaries, sharing sheets, parent’s evenings, or online journals.

Menus

A high-quality nursery should provide nutritious, balanced menus that meet individual dietary needs.

Key questions:

- How is the food prepared, e.g. on-site chef or catering service?
- Will they offer alternatives if your child dislikes something?
- How will you know what your child has eaten each day, e.g. daily diary?
- How do they accommodate special dietary needs, e.g. gluten intolerance, religious requirements?
- Do children have access to fresh fruit and water throughout the day?

Staffing

All staff must pass enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and provide references from previous employers and they need to hold, or be working towards, relevant early years qualifications.

There are specific regulations relating to how many staff are required for the numbers and ages of children within all nurseries. These are shown in the table below:

Age	Adult: child ratio
Under 2	1:3
2-3 years	1:5
3-8 years*	1:8

*Where there is someone with Qualified Teacher Status, Early Years Professional Status, Early Years Teacher Status then the ratio for this age group is 1:13.

Fees

While cost shouldn't be the only factor, it is important. Discuss fees thoroughly with the management during your initial visit.

Key questions:

- What do the fees cover?
- Are there extra charges for nappies, wipes, and milk/food, or do we need to provide them?
- Does the nursery close over Christmas and Bank Holidays, and if so, are these charged?
- Does the nursery increase its fees annually?
- What support is available for the cost of fees, e.g. childcare vouchers, government funding?

Additional information

- Ask specific questions about your child's care, such as procedures for toileting, potty training, promoting positive behaviour, or emergency protocols
- After your visit, gather your thoughts and make notes to help make an informed decision. Consider:
 - Did you and your child enjoy the visit?
 - Was the visit relaxed, friendly, and informative?
 - Did staff answer all questions clearly?
 - Did the nursery make you feel welcome, confident, and relaxed?
 - How did staff interact with both of you?
 - Can the nursery support any specific needs your child has?

We've included a table (below) to rate different aspects of the nursery for comparison.

Remember, if you're not satisfied with any aspect of the nursery, look elsewhere. If you have further questions after the visit, a quality nursery will be happy to answer them over the phone or welcome you for another visit.

Further guidance and reading

- NDNA Support for parents: <https://ndna.org.uk/parents-of-nursery-aged-children/>
- OFSTED report finder: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>
- The Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

Compare your nursery visits

Question	Nursery 1	Nursery 2	Nursery 3
1. How safe and secure did the nursery feel?			
2. How confident did you feel about the nursery staff?			
3. How would you rate the nursery environment? – indoors and out			
4. How well do you think the nursery provides for your child’s early education?			
5. How suitable is the location of the nursery?			
6. What are the fees for the nursery and what do they cover?			