

Types of nurseries: England

In this factsheet you will find information about the childcare requirements and the different types of nurseries to consider when choosing a nursery for your child.

Nurseries, pre-schools, childcare all refer to settings which care for children from birth to four or five-years-old. Some settings will also run before and after-school care (often referred to as wrap-around care) and holiday places.

No matter which type of nursery you choose for your child, they offer stimulating experiences to support your child's learning and development. Nurseries often stay current with the latest research to enhance children's outcomes. All settings follow an early years curriculum, promoting development through play-based activities.

Children should have daily opportunities to play and learn both indoors and outdoors. As a parent, you're a vital part of your child's development journey. Practitioners will collaborate with you to understand your child better, ensuring they meet each child's and family's unique needs

Private Day Nursery

A private day nursery is a childcare facility that operates independently and is typically owned by an individual, a charity, or a private organisation. These nurseries vary in size and the number of children attending - there are small and large independent nurseries and nursery chains. Children attending a day nursery are usually grouped together according to their age and stage of development.

Day nurseries are usually open between the hours of 7am to 6pm (although this will vary) and can be flexible with times and sessions to meet the needs of working parents and families. They usually work on a ratio basis (ensuring they meet national guidelines on the number of children who can be cared for by suitably trained early years educators/practitioners), so it is usual that the nursery will require your child to attend the same sessions each week. However, check with each setting as they may be able to cater for different needs on request.

Local Authority Maintained Nursery/Pre-school

Maintained nurseries and pre-schools usually provide education for children aged between two and five years and are often attached to primary schools, although they can be stand-alone settings as well. They typically operate during school term times and close during school holidays. Most are open from 9am to 3pm, Monday to Friday, and some may offer shorter morning or afternoon sessions of 2½ to 3 hours. Many also provide wraparound care, including breakfast, lunch, afterschool clubs, and holiday play schemes.

Places in nursery schools and classes usually become available at the beginning of the term after your child reaches three years old. Taking an early years place in the nursery of a school does not guarantee a child a place in the reception class of that school as this decision is made by the local authority and not the school.

Funding

Information is available on NDNA's funding page: <https://bit.ly/3C7fFcN> and at Childcare Choices: <https://bit.ly/3YtQatx>

Education Framework

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the name of the framework that is mandatory for all early years providers: <https://bit.ly/EFYS>

See also a parent's guide 'What to Expect in the Early Years Foundation Stage': <https://bit.ly/40Od9A6>

Early years settings are regulated and inspected regularly to ensure they are providing good, high-quality care.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

- Ofsted and the inspectorates of independent schools consider the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) when conducting inspections and report on the quality and standards of each provision
- Ofsted publishes its inspection reports at www.ofsted.gov.uk and Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) publishes their reports at www.isi.net
- Parent guidance 'How early years settings are inspected' is available here: <https://bit.ly/3YtRywf>
- Both inspections use a four-point scale to make all judgements. These judgements are outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate
- It is recommended to review these reports when choosing childcare.

Different approaches

All nurseries will have their own ethos, values and approach to learning.

- **Montessori** nurseries, pre-schools, and schools following the Montessori method are based on the principles of Maria Montessori, an Italian doctor born in 1870. Her philosophy emphasises respect for each child as an individual, guiding them toward goals while allowing them the freedom to choose their own learning paths. By minimising direction, children are encouraged to 'teach themselves'. Montessori practice fosters creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, and time management. Key elements include mixed-age groups, individual choice, and uninterrupted concentration

- The '**Curiosity Approach**'. This is a modern day approach to early childhood, taking elements from early years philosophy such as Reggio Emilia in Italy, Steiner, Te Whāriki in New Zealand and some Montessori. It is an approach where practitioners and professionals are mentally present and forever curious, helping children to learn through having fun, and make a difference mostly using natural and open-ended resources
- **Hygge** is a Danish and Norwegian word for a mood of cosiness and comfortable conviviality, with feelings of wellness and contentment. Many nurseries are following this approach particularly for younger children. It includes more natural light, lamps and fairy lights to create a calming environment that benefits their development and well-being
- **Forest schools** originate from Scandinavia and involve groups of children going out into a set woodland area, daily or weekly to engage in practical activities that help build confidence and skills. Some nurseries will be situated on woodland and others may travel a short distance to them each day
- **Beach schools** are similar to the forest school approach but use coastal areas rather than woodland to explore and enjoy the natural environment around them.

Awards

Other factors to consider are whether the nursery is working towards or has received any awards, such as:

- **NDNA's Quality Counts** - a quality improvement scheme indicating that the nursery is committed to making improvements and providing high-quality care
- **Healthy Eating Award** - recognising nurseries which promote healthy eating habits
- **Millie's Mark** signifies that 100% of the staff have a Paediatric First Aid Certificate. For more information, visit www.milliesmark.com

There are many other awards available, so it's worth exploring what each nursery has achieved.