

NURSERY CHECKLIST

How to find the best daycare nursery for your child

Finding a nursery

Day nurseries usually care for children from three months up to five years old. Using our guide (starting on page 11) you should be able to find a selection of nurseries in your preferred area. We advise you call one or two to arrange a time to visit.

We advise asking local parents if they can recommend a nursery. Check Facebook pages and local groups. Other parents will often know a nursery with a good reputation. They'll tell you if they have heard anything positive or negative about a nursery you're interested in.

Prepare to visit one or two nurseries

We have prepared a checklist to help prompt you towards the sort of questions and things to consider when selecting a nursery. Underline the questions that most interest you to ask when you phone and visit. Then compare your findings with any other nursery you are considering.

Remember, your own first impressions are the most important. Is it a friendly, welcoming atmosphere? What do you see? Are the staff calm and organised? Do the children look happy and occupied? Does the nursery meet your expectations? Listen and look but go with your instincts.

THE STAFF	Nursery A	Nursery B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the staff turnover? Look for a nursery with good staff benefits. Those that pay well and offer a good employment package are more likely to keep their best staff. Low staff turnover is one key to ensuring consistent, stable care for your child. Ask various members of staff how long they have been there, including management and the length of ownership. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What checks and cross-references are made before taking on new staff? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If there are staff absences, do they have their own bank or use an agency? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All managers should be qualified in childcare to SCQF level 9, and as a minimum, at least half of the staff in any one facility should be qualified in childcare to SCQF level 7. Also at least one member of staff should have a First Aid Certificate. What percentage of staff are trained in first aid/CPR? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask about child ratios. The guidelines require: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:3 for 0-2 years 1:5 for 2-3 years 1:8 for 3-8 years Do these ratios differ when outside of the nursery building? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the staff happy, relaxed, well-presented, calm, and confident? How did they interact with your child during your visit? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some nurseries have a full-time or a part-time teacher; ask how the preschool year group is prepared for school. Do they follow the Curriculum for Excellence? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the nursery have any specialist members of staff (e.g., for French, music, sports, or art)? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do they have any 'specialists' visiting the nursery? If so, what are the costs? 		

THE PREMISES AND EQUIPMENT	Nursery A	Nursery B
• Is the equipment of good quality, clean, safe, and appropriate?		
• Can the children help themselves easily to toys that interest them?		
• Is the interior bright, attractive, clean, well-decorated, well-ventilated, warm, and light?		
• Is there access to fresh air and physical play? Do the children have free flow play extending outdoors, even in wet weather? Do you provide waterpumps and wellies? Do you apply sunscreen?		
• What are the entry and exit procedures for parents, children, and visitors? Are these procedures secure?		
• Look at what is on the walls. It's important that there are plenty of drawings and paintings that the children have done themselves. This shows that their creativity is valued.		
• Where are naps taken, and what sleeping facilities are provided?		

THE CHILDREN	Nursery A	Nursery B
• Look at the children in the nursery. Do they appear to be happy, stimulated, and well occupied?		
• Are the children using a variety of activities?		
• Are the staff involved in play?		

DAILY ROUTINES	Nursery A	Nursery B
• Expect activities such as painting, drawing, gluing and sticking, imaginative play with the sandpit, water table, or playhouse. Story time and reading, construction blocks and dough, jigsaws and puzzles, moving and dancing to music, singing, and simple cooking should all be included. How do they avoid gender stereotyping?		
• How much outdoor time is provided each day, and when/where does this take place?		
• Television and videos should play little or no part in what your child does at nursery. If videos are part of the curriculum, are they age-appropriate and educational?		
• For three to five-year-olds, learning should be through play, exploration, and having fun. Ask how this happens in the nursery.		
• Are outside trips, visits, activities, or classes provided? Is there an additional charge for these? How are they supervised?		
• At what age, and how, are iPads and computers used to aid learning?		

NOTES

NURSERY POLICIES	Nursery A	Nursery B
• Will the nursery inform you if your child has been unhappy during the day? How do they comfort your baby/child if they cry? Ask if staff have knowledge or experience of attachment issues.		
• What are the settling-in procedures? Are any free settling-in sessions provided?		
• What are the nursery's policies on allergies, potty training, and discipline?		
• How does the nursery ensure that its staff are fully aware of each child's individual medical needs?		
• Are policies in place to deal with emergency procedures, injuries, and infectious illnesses?		
• Find out which illnesses will keep your child at home, and for how long. If your child is unwell, you may need to take time off work. You do have the right to take a reasonable amount of time off work if you need to care for your child at short notice.		
• Does the nursery share your views on sleep, discipline, feeding, and other care issues? Good carers will ask detailed questions about your child's health and care. How do they handle challenging behaviour? What do they consider 'bad' behaviour?		
• Does the nursery have an open-door policy that encourages parents to drop in unannounced?		
• How do they transition children into a new room as they progress through year groups? Do they work with feeder schools to ensure a good transition for P1?		
• How are the children transported to a local park or taken out on trips?		

FEEDBACK AND COMMUNICATION	Nursery A	Nursery B
• What sort of report do parents receive at the end of the day (nappies, sleeps, meals, activities), and is this verbal or written?		
• Is your child assigned a key worker with whom you can discuss daily matters and general progress?		
• Do the children have learning journals available to view, possibly online? How often are they updated?		

FOOD OPTIONS	Nursery A	Nursery B
• Are meals provided: Hot or cold, organic? Ask to see a menu. Has it been devised by a specialist in early years nutrition? If snacks and drinks are provided, what are they?		
• What are the food preparation facilities like? If they use an external provider, how robust are their allergen management procedures?		
• What provision is made for vegetarian children or those with allergies?		
• At what time are meals served? Do staff sit with the children at mealtimes?		
• Will they store expressed breast milk and give this on demand? Is there anywhere to breastfeed when picking up?		
• Do they brush or encourage the children to brush their teeth after lunch or snacks?		

COSTS & EXTRAS	Nursery A	Nursery B
• How are nursery fees collected?		
• Can you have flexible hours or an hourly rate? Is there a minimum number of sessions your child has to attend?		
• Are you charged during a holiday period?		
• Can you have a part-time place?		
• Is the fee reduced for a full-time place?		
• Are nappies, meals, milk, activities, and outings extra or included?		
• Is the nursery in partnership with the council providing 1,140 free hours for 3- to 4-year-olds? If so, how are they providing these hours?		
• Do you need to give notice for your child to leave the nursery? How much?		
• Does the nursery accept childcare vouchers?		
• If your child attends on a part-time basis, are you able to purchase extra sessions if necessary?		
• Are there any discounts available for students, families on low incomes, companies, and siblings? Remember, if you spend money on childcare while you work and qualify for the Working Tax Credit, you might be entitled to financial help with childcare costs.		

PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS	Nursery A	Nursery B
• Is the nursery registered with the Care Inspectorate? The registration certificate should be displayed together with a current certificate of insurance.		
• Ask when the nursery was last inspected by the Care Inspectorate or Education Scotland/HMIE. A copy of this report will be online—ask if the nursery could also email you a copy.		
• Does the nursery belong to a professional organisation, such as the National Day Nurseries Association Scotland, that will keep them informed of current issues and regulations? Are they a Montessori Accredited Nursery?		
• Has the nursery gained any awards of excellence? Do they hold an Eco-Schools Green Flag—Green, Bronze, or Silver award? Is the nursery an accredited Beach or Forest School? Does it hold Healthy Eating awards?		

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS	Nursery A	Nursery B
• Did you feel the atmosphere was chaotic or calm, and what do you think will best suit your child?		
• Do opening times fit in with your schedule? Remember, at private nurseries you are paying for the service and shouldn't have to drop off at precise opening times if it doesn't suit your schedule.		
• Are pick-up times flexible? Is there an After School Club for older children?		
• Is there parking available at busy times?		
• Find out what the entry procedures are, if there is a waiting list, and if so, how long?		