

Choices in Childcare

Your guide to childcare
in Sunderland



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What is Sunderland Families Information Service?

The Families Information Service is a new and improved service for parents and carers that provides information about all aspects of family life.

The service can offer help, advice or signposting to other organisations. It's for all families; whether you are a parent of a teenager, toddler or expecting your first child.

The range of information includes:

- Childcare and help available to pay for it
- Schools and education
- Health services
- Sport and leisure activities
- Family support

Please contact the service by telephone: 0191 520 5505, email: fis@sunderland.gov.uk or by calling into your local Children's Centre

How can you contact the Families Information Service?

By telephone: **0191 520 5505**

By email: **FIS@sunderland.gov.uk**

Or view the information online at:
www.familiesinfoservice.com

What else does the Families Information Service (FIS) do?

Choice Advice

FIS can also offer advice, support, help and information relating to making a preference for a place in primary or secondary school.

Brokerage Service

If you are struggling to find childcare we can offer a Brokerage Service.

This involves providing a little extra support to parents, who are unable to find the childcare they need.

How can you contact the Families Information Service?

By telephone: **0191 520 5505**

By email: **FIS@sunderland.gov.uk**

Or view the information online at:

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You can also make an appointment to discuss childcare options with a staff member from the Families Information Service staff. Telephone to arrange a convenient time and location.

Making comments, suggestions or complaints

The Families Information Service is constantly looking to improve its services, and welcomes your comments, suggestions and complaints. If you would like a copy of our policy please contact us by telephone or email.

All enquiries to the service will be treated confidentially. However, if there are concerns about the health or well-being of a child this may not always be possible. A protocol between the FIS and Ofsted sets out how such concerns are handled in the best interests of the child.

Childcare and early learning options in Sunderland

Birth to 1 year

Sunderland Children's Centres provide services for parents-to-be and families with young children in most areas of the city. Call us to find out about your nearest Children's Centre and the services available.

If you are a working parent and are returning to work after maternity leave, you may want to consider a day nursery or childminder to care for your child. You can find more information on choosing a day care nursery (page 14) or choosing a childminder (page 11).

We can also provide you with contact details of registered childcare in Sunderland and advice on financial assistance (page 9).

1 to 2 years

Parent and toddler groups are great if you have a small child. You can meet other parents and grandparents too (page 20).

2 to 4 years

After your child's second birthday you can put their name down for a place at a nursery school or class (page 18). Children are eligible for free early learning in the term after their third birthday in a nursery class or nursery school and some private nurseries (see page 19).



Crèches are sometimes available for your child if you are attending training (page 15).

4 to 5 years

In Sunderland, children start school at the beginning of the school year during which they turn five years old. You will receive a preference form from the City Council to choose a school for your child about a year in advance. Further information about schools is available from FIS.

5 to 14 years

If you are a working parent you may wish to choose a breakfast club, out-of-school club or childminder for before and after school care (page 16).

There are also holiday clubs for care during school holidays (page 17).

Support for children with additional needs

A range of support is available to help children with additional needs to access the right childcare. This can include funding for specialist equipment, additional staffing and training for example.

If your child needs additional support and you would like to discuss their childcare requirements, please ring 0191 520 5505 and ask to speak to the Inclusion & Equality Development Officer.

Who regulates and inspects childcare?

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) registers and regulates childcare for children up to the age of eight years. Childcare must be registered and inspected if it runs for more than two hours per day in premises that is not the child's home. Premises that do not need to be registered include crèches, hospitals, care homes and open access provision.

What do Ofsted look for when they are registering a new childminder or daycare setting?

Ofsted check that all childminders and staff caring for children are suitable to do so and ensure that they are fit and well. They will also confirm that childminders hold an up-to-date First Aid qualification and that the manager or owner of a daycare setting is suitably qualified. Premises are inspected to ensure that a safe environment is provided and that the necessary equipment and appropriate toys are available.

In the case of childminders, this would be their own home. Additionally, there are national standards, which childminders/managers must work to.

Inspections are carried out once a childcare setting is registered.

Changes to Ofsted

From September 2008, the registration of childcare for children under the age of eight will change. The changes separate the regulation of under and over fives childcare to reflect the different needs of school aged and pre-school children.

The Childcare Act 2006 introduces three new registers, which will be operated by Ofsted.

The Early Years Register

For childcare providers caring for children from birth to 31st August following the child's fifth birthday.

Compulsory Childcare Register

For providers of childcare for children from 1st September following their fifth birthday up to the age of eight years.

Voluntary Childcare Register

Providers of childcare to children aged eight and over, and care for children of any age that is activity based or provided in the child's own home, can choose to be registered on the voluntary part of the OCR if they meet the requirements.

How can I raise concerns or make complaints about registered childcare?

If you have a concern about the childcare your child attends, arrange to talk with the manager of the childcare setting or the childminder. Each childcare setting has its own complaints procedure. If your concern is not resolved you can talk to Ofsted who will take further action if it is required.

The helpline number is 0845 640 4040.

Alternatively, you can also contact the Families Information Service to report your concerns, which will be forwarded to Ofsted on your behalf.

Paying for childcare and early learning

The cost of childcare varies depending on the hours and the type of care your child requires. The information provided by the Families Information Service would include details of charges whenever they are available.

Help with childcare costs

Depending on their circumstances, there are a number of ways parents can get financial assistance to pay for childcare. Those at work may be entitled to the childcare element of Working Tax Credit or could get tax relief from employer contributions to childcare costs. There are a number of options for those considering training at college or university.

Young parents and lone parents could also be entitled to extra support. Also, all three and four year olds are entitled to a free early learning place.

All such support can only be used to support registered or approved childcare.

If you would like further information about help towards childcare costs, please call us.



Early Learning for three and four year olds

What is early learning and who provides it?

Early learning provides children with the opportunity to learn, play and to develop skills. They follow the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, which will continue through their reception year at school. Early learning providers include nursery schools and nursery classes, private nurseries, playgroups and nursery units of independent schools.

Are all children entitled to early learning?

Children become eligible for an early learning place the term after their third birthday.

All children in Sunderland should have access to early learning for three terms (sometimes more) before they start school, in their local neighbourhood.

If you would like more information about early learning and the Early Years Foundation Stage please ring and ask for a booklet.



Choosing a childminder

Childminders can look after children of any age in their own home. They must be registered with Ofsted if they are looking after children under the age of eight years. Childminders can offer full-time, part-time or flexible care. Some childminders also pick up and drop off children at school or nursery.

The number of children a childminder is allowed to look after is agreed with Ofsted when the childminder is registered. The maximum number is six under the age of eight, of which only three can be under the age of five years and of which only one can be under one year.

Childminders are great because:

- they are registered and inspected by Ofsted;
- there is a small ratio of adult to children so they can provide more personal one to-one care;
- they can care for children of any age;
- they have the flexibility to provide care at weekends or in the evening and can sometimes cover times which are needed for parents who work shifts;
- they can offer long-term support as children grow up;
- they can be used as emergency care.

If you are considering using a childminder you may want to consider:

- childminders must complete the course 'Introduction to Childcare Practice (home-based)' and have a first aid qualification. You may also want to check what other training the childminder has completed;
- childminders are self-employed and set their own charges;
- childcare may have to be found at short notice if the childminder is unwell or withdraws their service;

- you will have to negotiate a contract when you first start using the childminder to agree the hours, charges, illness, holiday pay, overtime and the notice period to end the agreement etc.



Choosing approved childcare

The Ofsted Voluntary Register provides a recognised status for childcare that does not normally need to be registered. This includes where the care is provided in the child's own home (i.e. nannies), is only provided for short periods of time such as some crèches, or is for children aged eight and over.

It verifies that those people providing the childcare have completed a childcare qualification, appropriate first aid training, and have had a recent advanced CRB (Criminal Records Board) check. The childcare must also meet requirements to ensure the well-being of the children and young people being cared for. Ofsted carry out inspections on a number of the providers on the register or as a result of a complaint.

Parents eligible for working tax credit may be able to receive financial assistance to pay for childcare on the Ofsted Voluntary Register.

Voluntary registered childcare is great because:

- home carers can provide care in the child's own home;
- parents of older children can access help to pay for the activities that their child attends.

If you are considering using voluntary registered childcare you may want to consider:

- alternative arrangements may need to be made if your nanny is ill or on holiday;
- what arrangements you may need to make if your circumstances change and you need longer term childcare for example if you return to work.

Choosing a day nursery

A day nursery provides care for children from birth up to the age of five years when children start school. Care can be provided on a full or part-time basis.

There is a standard ratio of staff to children:

- for children under the age of two:- one member of staff to three children.
- for children aged two to three:- one staff member to four children.
- for children aged three to five:- one staff member to eight children unless there is a member of staff working with the children who has Qualified Teacher Status, Early Years Professional Status or another suitable level 6 qualification.

Many day nurseries are open from around 7am until 6pm all year round. Some nurseries have an admissions policy that requires each child to attend for a minimum number of sessions each week.

If the nursery has registered with the City Council as an early learning provider, funding for free early learning can be claimed for children in the term after their third birthday.

Day nurseries are great because:

- they are registered and inspected by Ofsted;
- children can have consistent care from birth until the child starts school;
- early learning is available in most day nurseries in Sunderland;
- your child can socialise with other children;
- teams of qualified staff care for the children.

If you are considering using a day nursery you may want to consider:

- day nurseries are not flexible if care is required occasionally or to cover evening shift patterns;
- care will not be provided if children are ill.

Choosing a crèche

A crèche provides care for children from birth up to eight years or above. Care is part-time and accompanies an activity that a parent is taking part in, e.g. training or a meeting. Parents usually remain on the same premises as the child.

Crèches in Sunderland are for parents and carers who are using the facilities of the centre – they are not usually available to someone as emergency care or whilst at work. Crèches that run regularly can be registered on the Voluntary Register with Ofsted.

Crèches are great because:

- they can be offered for particular events;
- they enable parents with young children to access training;
- places can be booked in advance.

If you are thinking about crèches you may want to consider:

- crèches do not provide full-time childcare;
- age restrictions may apply.



Choosing a breakfast or after-school club

Out-of-school clubs are registered by Ofsted to provide care for children from the age of three up to the age of eight years. Older children can also attend out of school clubs. Care is provided part-time before and/or after school.

The clubs can be held at a school or other premises such as church halls or community centres. If the club is not school-based, collections are sometimes arranged. Some clubs also offer care during school holidays.

Out-of-school clubs are great because:

- if you are a working parent and need care for your child before or after they are at school;
- you want your child to play with friends in a safe, supervised environment;

- if you would like your older child supervised by adults after school;
- if you are looking for continuous care after school and during the school holidays, as most out-of-school clubs offer holiday schemes.

If you are thinking about using an out-of-school club you might want to consider:

- that school to club transport is not always available;
- if you need flexible care, that most clubs close by 6pm;

Holiday schemes

Some out-of-school clubs also operate holiday schemes through the Easter, summer and half-term holidays. Children can attend the schemes for a morning, afternoon or for a full day. Outings, play and craft activities are organised for children from around the age of three to 14 years.

Holiday schemes are great because:

- if you are working and need full-time care for your older children;
- if you are looking for a safe, supervised environment where children can play;
- if you want your child to mix with children from different ages;

- qualified staff will care for your child.

If you are thinking about a holiday scheme you may want to consider:

- you might need extra care for your child later in the evenings or early in the mornings.



Nursery schools and classes

Sunderland City Council's early learning provision consists of nursery schools, in their own premises and nursery classes, which are within a primary or infant school. Not all schools in Sunderland have a nursery class.

All children should be able to access a free early learning place for at least three terms before they begin reception in a school in their local neighbourhood. Children can continue to attend nursery until they start school.

The nursery provides free sessions of up to 15 hours per week. Some nursery schools and classes are also registered with Ofsted to provide childcare.

Nursery schools and classes are great because:

- children get used to attending and learning in an environment that is similar to a school;
- they provide the opportunity for children to make friends with their peers before starting school;
- staff are fully-trained and qualified teachers plan and deliver early learning.

If you are thinking about using nursery school and class you may want to consider:

- will the hours provide the flexibility you need if you are working?;
- who will care for your child during the school holidays?

Independent schools with nursery classes

This is nursery provision offered by independent schools – i.e. schools which parents pay fees for their children to attend. They take children from age three, up to five years old.

The nursery class provides free sessions of up to 15 hours per week. If the school has registered with the City Council as an early learning provider, funding for free early learning can be claimed for children in the term after their third birthday.

Nursery classes are great because:

- staff are qualified;
- they provide the opportunity for children to learn skills they will need at school.

If you are thinking about a nursery class in an independent school you may want to consider that:

- if you work full-time you may also have to organise childcare;
- you will have to pay fees for your child to attend when they move from nursery to the reception class.



Parent and toddler groups

Toddler groups can be found in church halls, community centres and school premises. They offer young children, parents and carers the opportunity to socialise with others.

Toddler groups are great because:

- if you want your child to meet other children and make friends;
- if you would like to meet other parents in your area;
- they are low or no-cost to attend.

If you are thinking about using a toddler group you may want to consider:

- children cannot be left;
- they are usually only available during term time.



Sunderland Children's Centres

There are currently 17 Children's Centres across the city, offering services to young children, their parents, carers and parents to be.

Children's Centres are springing up over the country to support families and the development of young children. They offer childcare and early learning, with a teacher based at each centre, family and health support to young families and mothers to be, antenatal classes, advice on breastfeeding and stopping smoking, plus information on all aspects of children's development and health.

Children's Centres also have strong links with Jobcentre Plus to offer advice to parents on retraining or returning to work.

To find out more information, or find the nearest available Children's Centre to you, please call for a leaflet.

Here are some of the ways that Sunderland Children's Centres can help you

By providing fun things to do for you and your child including:

- toy and book library;
- soft play facilities;
- baby massage;
- arts and crafts.

By offering you help and support including:

- advice on healthy eating for all the family;
- first aid and other courses.

By offering you companionship and advice including:

- time to relax, unwind and chat to other parents;
- crèche places available for the children;
- a chance for you and your child to make new friends.

What to look for when you visit a childcare setting

It is always a good idea to have a look around a setting before deciding on the right one for you and your child.

Here are some things to look out for:

- a warm welcome to you and your child;
- staff who are experienced and trained, who are involved with your child and respond to their needs;
- happy and relaxed children who are involved in activities;
- premises that are welcoming, safe, clean with outside play space and an area for sleep and relaxation;
- staff and children who reflect the ethnic and cultural groups of the area;
- fun activities planned each day – childminders, nurseries and out-of-school clubs all need to plan their days with children’s interest and enthusiasm in mind. Exercise and quiet times to relax are also important;
- a broad range and generous supply of toys and equipment easily accessible to children.

Questions to ask

- 1 What is the ratio of children to carers? How many children do you care for?
- 2 What qualifications and/or experience do you have?
- 3 What are the daily routines and how can you incorporate my child and other children's routines?
- 4 Do you operate a key worker scheme (where by one member of staff has key responsibility for my child)?
- 5 How will you keep me informed of my child's progress and news from the nursery/childminder/out-of-school club?
- 6 What are your policies on discipline and how do you manage children's behaviour?
- 7 Do you provide meals, snacks, nappies etc. or will I need to provide them?
- 8 Where can my child sleep or rest?
- 9 How will you contact me in an emergency?
- 10 Can I see a copy of your registration certificates and Ofsted inspection reports?

Other points to consider

- There's bound to be other questions you want to ask. You may find it useful to write a list of questions and take it with you when you visit each provider.
- You can also take up references from parents that have previously used the childminder or day nursery.
- Always trust your own feelings about childcare – you know your child best!

Sunderland Families Information Service

Children's Services

1st Floor

City Library and Arts Centre

Fawcett Street

Sunderland SR1 1RE

Tel: 0191 520 5505

Minicom: 0191 525 0075

Email: fis@sunderland.gov.uk

www.familiesinfoservice.com

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All information correct at time of going to press.

Published November 2008.

To obtain a copy of this leaflet in large text, audio format or in an alternative language please call 0191 520 5505 or email fis@sunderland.gov.uk