

Unplanned Pregnancy and Childcare

If your pregnancy was unplanned, and you have decided to become a parent, then childcare is probably one of the issues you are concerned about. Perhaps you are in college, planning to take a year out and wondering what happens when you go back to your studies? Or you're in a job and will be taking maternity leave but are concerned about how to manage when you return to work?

Finding childcare that suits both you and your baby can be a challenging and sometimes stressful task. But you don't need to panic. The most important thing is to take the time to really think about what you need and to check out all the options available to you.

Family Support

Family members may be in a position to help you with childcare and may offer to do so. Although this can be a happy early solution for everyone, take time to think clearly about your own situation. While wanting to help, other family members have full lives and taking on a small baby is a lot more work than it may initially seem. Talk openly and honestly with your family about the pros and cons and agree to regularly review the arrangement. Think about a possible back up if things don't go according to plan.

College

Does your college have a crèche? How do you apply for a place? Talk to your college counsellor, student officer, nurse or class rep. If there is no college crèche, ask if they have any links with local childcare facilities.

Childcare - Finding what works for both you and your baby

Whatever your situation, it is important to take time to think about what you need and to research all the options available to you to find the best childcare solution for you and your baby.

TAKING TIME TO THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED AND RESEARCHING ALL THE OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO YOU IS REALLY IMPORTANT

Before choosing childcare consider the following questions:

- How much childcare will I need?
- How much will I be able to afford for childcare?
- Will I be able to apply to a local community childcare service where costs will be subsidised?
- How will I get to the service?
- Will I need childcare close to home or close to school or work?
- Would I like my baby to be cared for at home?
- What back up do I have if my baby gets sick and can't attend childcare?
- Do I know and understand all the policies at work in relation to time off, sick leave and flexible working hours?
- Do I know other parents that I could talk to about their experiences of finding childcare?



Exploring your childcare options

Babies and children under 3 years of age

Parents with babies and small children have the option of full daycare in a crèche or using the services of a private childminder.

Full Daycare is provided by both private and community crèches. In rural areas parents are often limited to private crèches and childminders. Crèches generally open from 7am to 7pm and charge anything from €60 a week in a community crèche to €250 a week in a private crèche, depending on where you are living. These prices are subject to change. Children aged between 6 months and, in some cases, 12 years can attend crèches. All crèches are governed by the Childcare Act 1991, which means they must be registered with the Health Service Executive (HSE) and are inspected by Pre-school Officers.

Childminders are usually found within your local area and will generally care for children from 0-14 years. They can provide very flexible care. Babies and children can be cared for in the childminder's own home or in the child's home. Wages can be negotiated and can vary widely depending on where you live. Childminders have to register with the Health Service Executive (HSE) if they are minding more than three unrelated children in their own home.

Local County Childcare Committees or Childminding Ireland can be a useful source of guidance and information. It is important to have an agreement in place with the childminder that sets out the service agreed and the payment terms.

Children aged 3 years and older

It can be beneficial for children aged 3 years and over to attend an **early years service** such as a Pre-school or playgroup. Pre-schools are often part of a crèche. Early years service operate for approximately 3 hours a day and can vary in price from €10 to €60 per week for a part-time service. Additional childcare can often be negotiated with childminders who may agree to collect children from the early years service and take them home for the rest of the day.

Children over 5 years of age and up to 14 years

After-school services, also known as school age services, are often available for children between 5 and 14 years of age in local crèches, community centres or through private providers. Some school age services will collect children from the local primary school and give them dinner on arrival, although it is important to check this as services may vary. Generally, services remain open until 7pm depending on where you live and fees may vary. A wide variety of activities are offered by these services, such as art, sports, games and homework clubs.

Parent and child groups

Local parent and child groups provide a good opportunity for stay at home parents and children to socialise and play with other parents and children. They are normally run one morning a week. Details of local parent and child groups are often found in local papers, local Family Resource Centres, local parish halls and supermarket notice boards. Other parents are also a good source of such information.

Guidelines for choosing a childcare service

When you get to the stage of actively looking for childcare, it will be important to gather as much information as you can from a childcare provider about their service, as this will make it easier for you to make an appropriate choice. Take time to meet with a number of childcare providers. Don't be afraid to ask questions or take notes. Talking to your Pre-school Officer, based in your Health Service Executive (HSE) Area and your Public Health Nurse may help you to make a decision. You may find the checklist on the following page helpful for visits and meetings with childcare providers.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE AN AGREEMENT IN PLACE WITH YOUR CHILDMINDER

You may find the checklist below helpful for visits and meetings with childcare providers

Considerations	setting 1	setting 2	setting 3	setting 4
Is there a friendly, happy atmosphere?				
What is the ratio of staff to children?				
Do they have a copy of the parents' handbook to give to you?				
Is every child assigned a key worker?				
What is the daily routine? Are there nap times?				
How will you be kept up to date on how your child's day went?				
Are staff sensitive to and informed about the cultural and ethnic needs of your child?				
If English is not your child's first language, will they be able to work around this with your child?				
What is the policy on language and spoken language in the childcare service?				
What experience and qualifications do the staff have?				
What is the staff turnover?				
Are the premises clean?				
Are the premises registered with the Health Service Executive (HSE)?				
Can they show you registration, insurance certificates and safety reports?				
Do they provide copies of the childcare inspection report?				
Is it safe? Are safety gates, first aid kit, smoke detectors, alternative exit for fire, toys and furniture in good condition?				
What is the policy in case of an accident, illness or other emergency? Is there an accident/emergency log book?				
What are the contact arrangements in case of emergencies?				
What food and drinks are children given? Explain any specific dietary requirements your child may have.				
What are their policies on food and nappies?				
How is behaviour managed? Childminders and care staff are forbidden by law to smack children.				
What is their policy on collection of your child?				
Is there access to the service at any time to see your child?				
What are the costs and arrangements around holidays? In many crèches you must pay the weekly fee if you are taking annual leave but there may be a reduced fee over Christmas if the service closes.				



Planning for unexpected situations

Most crèches will not take children when they are sick i.e. when children have chicken pox, colds, flu and infections, so it's important to make prior arrangements for this. Having shared arrangements with friends can be a useful source of support if you need extra childcare.

When there's a problem with your childcare provider

Always make sure to ask for feedback on how your child is settling in. If you are not being told enough, don't feel too intimidated to ask. Talk initially to the staff who have been interacting with your child and then to the manager of the service.

Where you have a major concern about the health and well-being of your child and other children in the service it is important to contact the Pre-school Officer in your Health Service Executive (HSE) Area. Pre-school Officers provide information about childcare services locally and also inspect childcare facilities for compliance with standards.

Childcare is an important consideration in managing your time once your child is born. Taking the time to think through the options open to you and how you might use them is helpful. It will help you to balance your new role as a parent with your other commitments.

**IF YOU ARE NOT
BEING TOLD ENOUGH,
DON'T BE AFRAID
TO ASK**

Contacts:

Pre-school Officers

A guide for parents of pre-school children information leaflet is available from the Health Service Executive (HSE). This can be obtained by phoning your local Pre-school Officer who can also give information about childcare services locally.

Visit the HSE at www.hse.ie or the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) at www.omc.gov.ie for more information.

City/County Childcare Committees

County Childcare Committees will have lists of registered childcare services for your area. Local Childcare Committees can be contacted through your Local Authority. Contact details are available through Pobal, www.pobal.ie or call 01 2400700 or the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC), www.omc.gov.ie or call 01 635 4000.

The Childcare Directory

The Childcare Directory Ltd provides information on finding childcare solutions in local areas. Visit www.childcare.ie.

The Childcare Bureau

The Childcare Bureau operates under the auspices of the Northside Partnership and is working to develop an infrastructure in the North-East Dublin area, to support local childcare providers, employers and parents. Call 01 867 5244.

The Border Counties Childcare Network (BCCN)

BCCN operates in the counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Meath, Monaghan and Sligo. BCCN supports the development of a coordinated approach to the delivery of high quality, accessible and affordable early childhood services. Visit www.bccn.ie or call 047 72 469.

Contacts:

National Childcare Organisations

IPPA, The Early Childhood Organisation

IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation, is a nationwide practice based organisation and is the largest voluntary organisation working for young children and their families in Ireland. Founded in 1969, IPPA's membership of over 2400 includes Playgroups, Parent and Toddler Groups, Full Day Care Groups, After-school and Out-of-School Groups and individual members. Visit www.ippa.ie or call 01 463 0010.

The National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA)

The National Children's Nurseries Association provides advice, support and training for member nurseries as well as raising public awareness on issues effecting the childcare sector. Visit www.ncna.net or call 01 460 1138.

Childminding Ireland

Childminding Ireland, the National Association for Childminders, is the only organisation in Ireland dedicated to working for Childminding, providing information, advice and support to Childminders and parents. Visit www.childminding.ie or call 01 287 8466.



Barnardos

Barnardos supports children whose well-being is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Visit www.barnardos.ie or call 01 453 0355/1850 222 300.

Forbairt Naonrai Teo

Forbairt Naonrai Teo provides information on playgroups through Irish throughout the country. Visit www.naonrai.ie or call 01 477 3151.

St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland

Visit www.montessoriireland.ie or call 01 280 5705.

Irish Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Association (ISWECA)

Visit www.steinerireland.org or call 061 927 944.

The **Crisis Pregnancy Agency** is a statutory body set up to formulate and implement a strategy to address the issue of crisis pregnancy in Ireland. Visit www.crisispregnancy.ie for more information.

Funded by
crisispregnancyagency



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This leaflet has been produced by one family as part of the **Positive Options** campaign. This campaign promotes the availability of free, non-judgemental and trustworthy crisis pregnancy counselling. For a list of crisis pregnancy counselling agencies, freetext **L1ST** to **50444** or visit positiveoptions.ie.

Disclaimer: The information in this leaflet is correct at time of going to press. July 2009. Copyright © One Family 2009