

# “Top 10 Tips”

## How to Choose the Right Day Nursery for your Child

By Anna Bailey, Early Years Professional

Hello. I'm Anna Bailey and I've had over 22 years experience running day nurseries in Bromley and Orpington. It can often be daunting when trying to find the right childcare to suit you, but it doesn't need to be. Go with your gut instinct and don't over analyse. Definitely look around, but shortlist only three to view based on convenience to your home / work. For reassurance, I have given you ten tips to help you decide.

### **1. Do you find the Manager friendly, knowledgeable and approachable**

The relationship you build with the manager from the beginning will be invaluable to you throughout your child's time at nursery. They oversee the running of the whole nursery and ensure your overall needs are met.

### **2. Is the atmosphere homely and comfortable**

A good atmosphere is where the children are busy, there is a buzz of conversation and children are smiling and being inquisitive. The staff will be interacting with the children at child level. The environment will be warm, colourful and welcoming. If you feel at home, then your child will also. Please note that children can get irritable when they are tired and / or hungry.

### **3. Does the nursery plan activities both inside and out**

A good nursery should plan their activities considering the children's need and interests. There should be a range of adult led and child led activities throughout the day with routine times for meals and sleep/rest. Children should also play in the garden at least twice a day.

### **4. How will the nursery keep you informed**

Good communication is vital in any nursery to ensure information is passed easily from home to nursery in the morning and nursery to home in the evening. Staff should ask if everything's well in the morning when you drop off and give you feedback in the evening on your child's day. Children have good and bad days just like us, so do not expect 'sweetness and light' all the time. Parent and staff relationships are also vital and a good nursery should be offering you a variety of different opportunities to get involved to suit your work and other commitments i.e. fun days, evening socials, progress meetings.

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**Sunnyfields Day Nurseries “Where children are happy and parents feel confident leaving their children”**



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## 5. Look at the latest Ofsted Inspection

All nurseries are inspected by Ofsted to ensure they meet current standards. They can be awarded levels of Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement or Inadequate under different sections of the report, though an overall judgement is given based on the average. There is a requirement for nurseries to seek your views as parents, evaluate their own performance and make improvements where necessary.

## 6. Can you get a recommendation from a current parent or view any testimonials

Parents are often more than willing to give you feedback on the nursery, but often they are not around when you visit. If this is the case, you may be able to read testimonials of current and past parents. Ask the manager.

## 7. Do they offer the times and days you require

Nurseries can be very different in this regard and you need to ensure they have flexibility to suit your needs. Most nurseries run 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday all year round (closed only on Bank Holidays). A flexible nursery will offer any combination of full and half day sessions, full and part time places. They may also offer extended hours, extra days on a one off basis and babysitting in your own home. Please note, if you require different days each week or term time only, a child minder may give you more flexibility.

## 8. What ages do they cater for and are there any sibling discounts

You need to consider your future requirements. What will you do if you have another child. What happens when your child goes on to primary school. Ask if the nursery offers a sibling discount. For your information, most primary schools now have after school clubs until 6pm.

## 9. How will you get to work from the nursery

Choosing childcare is not all about the child. It has to work for you too. Please consider how you will get to work from nursery i.e. train times, car parking, etc. Maybe you can share drop off and pick up duties with your partner. For your information, nurseries usually have strict policies on times as staff aren't insured outside hours. If the hours are too strict for your needs, a child minder or nanny may give you more flexibility.

## 10. What will it cost

We cannot write this article without talking about the fees. Babies usually command a higher fee as adult:child ratios are high. Pre-schoolers from 3¼ years qualify for 'free early education' providing free education for up to 15 hours per week term time. Nursery rates can vary depending on what they offer, so you must decide what is reasonable. On a technical note, most nurseries ask fees to be paid monthly in advance and will accept a variety of payment methods including childcare vouchers which are tax free. Childminders can be more expensive per hour, but this may work out cheaper for you if you require shorter or more flexible hours.

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