

Choosing Childcare for Your Deaf Child: A checklist

We use the term 'deaf' to refer to all types of hearing loss from mild to profound. This includes deafness in one ear or temporary hearing loss such as glue ear.
We use the term 'parent' to refer to all parents and carers of children.

Introduction

The checklists below will help you to decide which childcare provider will best meet the needs of your child.

Most of the questions will be more relevant for 'formal' childcare providers such as nurseries, pre-schools playgroups and childminders. At the end, there are a few specific questions for if you're considering a nanny, home carer, childminder or au pair.

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General information

<p>Hours they can provide childcare and usual drop off and pick up times.</p> <p>(If needed) Is childcare provided outside of term time? Are the hours flexible to meet your working patterns?</p>	
<p>The cost and whether it's an hourly/daily/weekly fee.</p> <p>Whether the childcare can be provided free under any government schemes for where you live (see Your rights: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland for more information on funding arrangements).</p> <p>Are there any extra charges, such as for meals or nappies?</p>	
<p>Do they have places available?</p>	
<p>How many children do they have?</p> <p>If the childcare has different age groups in different rooms, how many children will be in different groups/rooms?</p>	
<p>How many children are deaf or have another disability or additional needs?</p>	
<p>Do they offer familiarisation or taster days for your child?</p>	
<p>How will your child get to the setting? Is there support available from the setting or from the local authority to help with transport?</p>	
<p>What curriculum does the childcare follow?</p> <p>(See Your rights: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland for more information, where available, on the different national curriculums in each nation.)</p>	
<p>What kind of daily activities do they run? Is there a mix of adult-led and child-led play?</p>	

Will there be opportunities to learn in a mix of ways – one-to-one or in small groups?	
Are there plenty of opportunities for your child to rest if needed? Are these provided at set times or whenever your child needs to?	
Has the setting been inspected recently? What did the inspection report say about the childcare?	
What is the building like? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how secure is the site? • is it clean? • is there plenty of outdoor space? • how is food provided? • what about toilet/nappy changing, and where is this done? 	
What are the mealtime arrangements? Can they cater for any dietary needs that your child might have?	

The Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years www.pacey.org.uk, the Pre-school Learning Alliance www.pre-school.org.uk, and the National Day Nurseries Association www.ndna.org.uk have more information and suggestions for other general questions you might ask.

Staffing

<p>Is the manager appropriately qualified?</p> <p>(See Your rights: : England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland for more information, where available, on different requirements in the nations.)</p>	
How many staff work in the setting?	
What's the staff turnover rate?	
What's the ratio of staff to children?	
<p>What qualifications do staff hold?</p> <p>Staff should have had training on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to promote children's learning and development • safeguarding and child protection • health and safety, including evacuation procedures. 	
<p>How many staff have a paediatric first aid certificate?</p> <p>There should be at least one person in the childcare at all times who is trained to deliver first aid to children.</p>	
If your child is aged three or over, does a teacher or early years professional work in the childcare?	
<p>Will you be allocated a key person or worker who is responsible for your child's learning and care, and for engaging with parents?</p> <p>Will the key person provide you with support and guidance on supporting your child's development at home?</p>	

How friendly and welcoming the childcare is

It's possible that staff at some early years settings may not know much about deafness, because they haven't had much contact with deaf children before. This is why it's important to get a sense of their attitude towards supporting deaf children. Providing they're welcoming and friendly and would be open to receiving advice and training, they may be an excellent childcare provider for your child. You might decide to take your child along to visit the setting and meet the staff and to help you answer some of the questions below.

Did you get a warm welcome when you arrived?	
Did the children seem happy to be there? Did they have plenty to do?	
Did you get a chance to meet all the staff?	
Was there lots of two-way interaction between the staff and children?	
Did the staff ask you lots of questions about your child and their needs? Did they seem keen to make sure your child's needs are met?	
What do other parents think? Can the childcare provide you with references from other parents?	

Access to specialist support and advice

In most areas, we would expect a Teacher of the Deaf or the local specialist education support service to provide advice and support directly to the childcare. However, this may depend on their eligibility criteria and capacity and where you live. For example, in Scotland, specialist education services for deaf children don't generally provide support to deaf children who aren't in local authority nurseries or in private nurseries that are not participating in the Private Childcare Partnership scheme. You may want to ask your child's Teacher of the Deaf or the local authority specialist education service for deaf children what support they will provide. The consistent use of hearing aids and/or cochlear implants will help deaf children overhear, allowing incidental learning to take place.

Have staff already had any deaf or disability awareness training?	
Are staff willing to work with the Teacher of the Deaf to make sure your child is effectively supported? This may involve training and ongoing specialist advice and support.	
Is there someone with specific responsibility for children with special or additional educational needs? Depending on where you live, this is often known as a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) or an additional support needs coordinator (ASNCO) in Scotland. If not, do staff have access to someone in the local area with expertise in special or additional educational needs? In England, this person is known as an area SENCO.	
How will staff assess the needs of your child, working with you and the Teacher of the Deaf?	
Will staff develop a transition plan before your child starts?	

Language and communication

The early years are a critical time for developing language and communication so it's important that any childcare provider understands how deafness can impact on language and communication and is able to support your child's development. Using sign language may remain an important way to reinforce learning of new language for some families, for communication at times when hearing equipment is faulty or can't be used, and for mixing with deaf friends and the Deaf community.

<p>Will staff follow good practice in communication? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making sure they have the child's attention before saying or signing anything • getting down to the child's eye level, as much as possible • not covering their face. 	
<p>Will staff model good communication with other children? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing other children with simple deaf awareness tips • encouraging other children not to cover their faces • setting up 'quiet' zones or times during the day. 	
<p>If your child communicates in sign language, will staff be able to sign with your child and support their language and communication development?</p> <p>Do staff hold advanced sign language qualifications (a Level 3 qualification)?</p>	
<p>If your child uses Cued Speech, will staff be able to follow this approach with your child and support their language and communication development?</p>	
<p>Are staff happy to adapt their teaching strategies to ensure your child can access learning? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greater use of visual aids • use of photo diaries and experience books 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • checking sensitively that your child has understood by, for example, using open-ended questions • reading with the child so that they can easily see the book and the teacher. 	
Are there lots of opportunities for your child to play music and listen to sound?	
<p>Are staff happy to support your child's social development? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting good communication between your child and their peers • encouraging your child to be more socially independent by, for example, making friends with other children by themselves • promoting deaf awareness within the setting and with the parents of other children. 	

The listening environment

Unless your child is communicating solely in sign language, making sure there is a good listening environment is important. A good listening environment will help your child to make the best of their hearing and support their language and communication development.

Have any of the rooms been adapted for deaf children by an expert in acoustics so that the rooms are as quiet as possible?	
Are there any carpets or curtains in the rooms? This can help improve the listening environment for deaf children.	
Are any of the ceilings very high? This can make the listening environment more difficult for deaf children.	
Is there good lighting so that your child can easily see other people's faces?	
Is the childcare provider able to manage noise levels – i.e. to quieten down children for any group work or listening exercises?	
Is there lots of noise outside of the setting (for example, busy roads or a railway)? Can the noise still be heard inside?	

For more information about the steps that nurseries and childminders can take to make sure there are good listening environments in place for your child, visit www.ndcs.org.uk/acoustics.

Technology

<p>Have staff had or are they happy and comfortable to have training from specialist education support services or elsewhere on hearing technology? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying out checks on your child's hearing technology • replacing hearing aid batteries • stopping any whistling from the hearing aids • using radio aids effectively. 	
<p>Do staff understand the importance of children wearing hearing technology throughout the day (except when they are sleeping or doing any activities involving water)?</p>	
<p>Do staff understand that hearing technology doesn't replace normal hearing and that your child will still need support, even when wearing hearing aids, radio aids, etc.?</p>	
<p>Is there a safe place where hearing equipment (such as hearing aid batteries and other accessories) can be stored and accessed quickly?</p>	
<p>Are staff happy to observe and feedback on any issues relating to how your child uses the hearing technology during the day?</p>	

Behaviour

What policy does the setting have on discipline? Will staff:

- take steps to ensure that your child has understood the rules that everyone is expected to follow and that their behaviour is wrong before applying any sanctions
- explain clearly to your child why they have been disciplined
- be alert to signs where misbehaviour might indicate that your child has not understood, is feeling tired or frustrated and left out?

Safeguarding

Do they have a safeguarding policy which explains how the childcare will keep children safe and what action will be taken if there are any concerns about a child or members of staff?	
Is there a lead person responsible for safeguarding in the childcare?	
Have all staff had training on safeguarding?	
<p>Have all staff had a criminal records check?</p> <p>In England and Wales, these are called Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) checks while in Scotland it's known as Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) disclosure check and in Northern Ireland, they are known as an Access NI criminal disclosure check.</p> <p>More information on these checks is available at www.gov.uk/dbs-check-applicant-criminal-record (England and Wales), www.mygov.scot/organisations/disclosure-scotland/ (Scotland) or www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/accessni-criminal-record-checks (Northern Ireland).</p>	
If your child takes any medication, does the childcare have a policy for how this will be managed?	

Keeping in touch

How often do parents receive updates on their child's progress? How will this be done? For example, will the setting share a 'diary' about your child and any other news with you?	
Is there a key person you can contact if you have any concerns or would like further information on your child's progress?	
Will you receive updates on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• your child's progress and planned learning outcomes• development of social skills and friendships• any issues around hearing technology• topics your child will be learning and how you can support their learning at home.	

Using a nanny, au pair, home carer and family members

Some parents of deaf children use nannies, au pairs, home carers or family members to provide childcare. One advantage is that they can provide more tailored, one-to-one support for your child, though you will still want to make sure that they have a good understanding of deafness and your child's needs.

These types of childcare don't have to follow the same kind of requirements as nurseries, pre-schools, playgroups, children's centres and childminders.

Does the carer have a good understanding of deaf children's needs or do they have any prior experience of working with deaf children?	
Does the carer have a good rapport with your child? Does your child understand and engage well with the carer?	
How will the carer ensure your child takes part in a mix of activities, including with other children?	
Is the carer willing to work with your Teacher of the Deaf (where available from your local specialist education support) to make sure your child is effectively supported?	
Can the carer provide effective support to your child around language and communication? (See earlier section.)	
Can the carer effectively manage your child's hearing technology? (See earlier section.)	
Have you agreed with the carer how your child will be disciplined if needed? Does the carer understand how the child's deafness may impact on their behaviour?	
Does the carer have a paediatric first aid certificate?	

Can the carer provide two sets of identification – one with their photo and another with their address?	
Does the carer have the right to live and work in the UK? You can check this at www.gov.uk/legal-right-work-uk .	
Has the carer had a criminal records check? More information on these checks is available at www.gov.uk/db-check-applicant-criminal-record (England and Wales), www.mygov.scot/organisations/disclosure-scotland/ (Scotland) or www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/accessni-criminal-record-checks (Northern Ireland).	

If you choose to have a nanny or home carer, you will be responsible for interviewing, checking registration and any references. As their employer, you will also need to make sure that tax and National Insurance is paid on their salary and pensions.

If you recruit from an agency, they will usually handle most of the administration involved.

The Childcare website www.childcare.co.uk/find/Nannies has more information about the practical arrangements in choosing and employing a nanny or home carer.