



## A guide to pre-schools and playgroups

### What is a playgroup or pre-school group?

Pre-schools or playgroups provide care, play and education for children under school age. They allow children to socialise and offer fun activities with opportunity to learn and play. They offer sessional care, usually for 2 - 3 hours a day, mornings or afternoons, although some groups offer morning and afternoon sessions on the same day. They normally run during term time either every day or on several days during the week and are usually for children from 3 - 5 years although some groups may take children from 2 - 2½ years. Often groups are run by a committee of parents and staffed by a qualified or experienced supervisor and assistant(s). Most groups provide places for 10 - 20 children. This may be more depending on staffing ratios.

Groups must be registered on the Ofsted Early Years Register, unless they run for less than two hours. Registered groups have to operate within the standards set for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Many groups are able to offer the Free Early Learning for 3 and 4 year olds. If the group is registered, parents and carers may also be eligible for financial help towards childcare costs by claiming the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. Alternatively employer supported childcare vouchers may be used. For more information please ask for our factsheets.

### How do I find a playgroup or pre-school?

Playgroups and pre-schools are often held in community centres, church halls, schools, leisure centres etc and often share premises with other community groups. First Point can provide you with lists of groups in your area. You might also find out about a group through adverts in local shops, newsletters, community centre noticeboards, or by word of mouth.

### What do children do at a playgroup or pre-school?

Children are involved in planned activities offering the opportunity to learn and play with other children. These include arts, crafts, water and sand play, reading stories and music. Children will develop skills such as speaking, listening, persistence, early reading, writing and numeracy. Staff aim to create a stimulating environment where children feel safe and secure.

### How do I choose a playgroup or pre-school?

Visit the group with your child. You may want to visit several groups. Is there a friendly and welcoming atmosphere and do the children there look happy? There are things you might want to observe and questions you may want to ask on your visit:

- Do the children there look happy and busy?
- Are staff friendly and approachable? How do they relate to the children?
- Check whether the group is registered and has current public liability insurance – certificates will normally be displayed.

Visit First Point 8.30am to 5.30pm or ring us on 275 6699

8am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

First Point is in the city centre at Howden House, Union Street - close to the Peace Gardens.

[www.sheffield.gov.uk/firstpoint](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/firstpoint) [www.asksid.net](http://www.asksid.net)

- Is there a key worker for your child, and are staff qualified? If the group is registered there must be qualified staff in charge. (All supervisors and managers must hold a relevant level 3 qualification, with half the remaining staff holding a relevant level 2 qualification.)
- Are the premises warm, clean, light and well ventilated with enough space for play?
- Are snacks and drinks provided?
- Are there enough toys, books and play equipment provided?
- Do the toys take into account the children's ages, cultural backgrounds and any special needs?
- Is there a programme of appropriate and varied activities?
- What are the staffing ratios? These will be set for registered groups. Are there volunteers and are they properly supervised?
- Is there a safe, supervised outdoor play area that is kept secure?
- Can the group provide Free Early Learning places for 3 and 4 year olds?
- Do staff carry out regular fire drills and have their fire equipment maintained?
- Are parents encouraged to be involved in the group?
- Are parents provided with information about services and policies, e.g. safeguarding, fire drills, medical emergencies?

## **Quality Improvements**

Those who look after children, whether offering childcare, early education or playcare are encouraged to ensure their services reach a quality standard, above basic requirements. There are a number of recognised awards and you may wish to check whether a provider has one.

## **Does your child have a special need or disability?**

Groups should be able to offer the support needed to include children with special needs and disabilities. Parents can contact the Early Years Inclusion Service to access additional support (see below). Sheffield Information Link provides a specialist information service called SIGN for families with children who are disabled or have special needs. The service can provide information on services, support and specific health conditions and disabilities. See 'Useful contacts' section.

## **How much will the group cost?**

Most groups charge on a sessional basis. Costs can range from £1.75 – £12.50 but on average are around £6.50 for a 2½ hour session (the average hourly rate is around £2.50). Some groups can provide free sessions through the Free Early Learning for 3 and 4 year olds.

## **How do you settle your child?**

You will probably need to stay with your child for a few sessions until they become familiar with the new place and staff. Staff at the group may suggest you leave your child for short periods until you are able to leave them for the whole session. You will need to give your contact details to the group and any important information about your child, e.g. any allergies etc.

## **What to do if you are not happy with the group**

Discuss any difficulties with staff at the group as soon as they arise. The group should have a complaints procedure which you could follow. If you are unable to resolve your difficulties and they relate to the quality of care being provided, you can contact Ofsted (see following page).

## **Useful contacts and information**

### **Sheffield Information Link**

Tel: 0114 249 8271 (out of hours answerphone)

9 Leopold Street, Sheffield, S1 2GY

Email: [info@sheffinfoolink.org.uk](mailto:info@sheffinfoolink.org.uk)

Website: [www.sheffinfoolink.org.uk](http://www.sheffinfoolink.org.uk)

*Sheffield's Family Information Service. Additional support for families requiring childcare and other services for children and young people in Sheffield.*

### **SIGN (Sheffield Information Giving Network)**

Tel: 0114 266 9476 (out of hours answerphone)

Ryegate Children's Centre, Tapton Crescent Road, Sheffield, S10 5DD

Email: [sign@sheffinfoolink.org.uk](mailto:sign@sheffinfoolink.org.uk)

Monday – Friday 10.00am – 3.00pm, drop in and phone service

*Free information for parents and carers with children or young people with special needs or disabilities.*

### **Early Years Inclusion Team**

Tel: 0114 239 8336

*Works with young children with special educational needs at home and support nurseries, playgroups and primary school reception classes to include children with SEN and disabilities. Parents can refer direct or can ask a professional to refer on their behalf.*

### **OFSTED**

Tel: 0300 123 1231 - Helpline

Tel: 0300 123 4666 – Complaints and Concerns

Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

*Access to inspection reports and useful publications for parents/carers.*

### **Pre-school Learning Alliance**

Floor 3, 9 Leopold Street, Sheffield, S1 2GY

Tel: 0114 273 1007 or 249 8894

Email: [info@pre-school.org.uk](mailto:info@pre-school.org.uk)

Website: [www.pre-school.org.uk](http://www.pre-school.org.uk)

*Provides support and advice to pre-schools, playgroups and toddler groups.*

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