



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking
for early years

Factsheet

Preparing You and Your Baby for Nursery (Returning After Maternity Leave)

Parent Guidance

Parent Guide: Preparing You and Your Baby for Nursery (Returning After Maternity Leave)

Thinking about childcare and returning to work can be a daunting and often scary thought, especially when baby places in popular, high-quality nurseries often fill up fast - meaning you may have to make these decisions when your baby is still quite young. This factsheet has been developed to support you through this process and make that transition from maternity leave to a working parent a little easier.

Finding the right nursery

You may have used your local Families Information Service or recommendations from family and friends about childcare providers local to you. It is recommended that you go and look at different nurseries in order to gain a feel of what they have to offer. Our factsheet 'Choosing the Right Nursery' offers further information and advice about what you might want to look for or ask when going on these visits.

Settling

Once you have secured a nursery place and a start date has been established, most nurseries will let you have as many settling visits with your child as you require. Some may even set a minimum to ensure that they really get to know you and your child. They will usually assign you a key person who will be your and your child's key contact and they will carry out an initial meeting with you to find out all about your child: their likes and dislikes, routines, sleep patterns, eating styles etc.

During this initial meeting, the key person should also gather some information from you about your child's interests and development, e.g. if they are pulling themselves up, starting to say some words etc. This is so they can start to plan your child's next steps appropriately in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum that their setting offers. Further information about the EYFS can be found in a parent's guide in the link below.

All children develop at different rates and stages and are treated as individuals, so try not to worry if you think your child is or isn't yet doing something another child their age is doing. Your child's key person will plan learning and activities that will individually support your child's development and share photos and observations with you. Also, your child may achieve development milestones at home where they feel most confident, but it may take a little longer for them to display this at nursery.

It is really important to remember that the environment is very new to both you and your baby, so while nursery practitioners will aim to follow your preferences and routines, they may differ

depending on how your child settles. For example, it is quite common when a child first starts at nursery that they do not eat or sleep the same as they may do at home.

Your child's key person will discuss with you how the settling visits are going. These will usually increase gradually, starting with half an hour or an hour and you staying, to a time where you leave the room and then maybe the building.

They will work with you on times to attend, and include time over lunch and sleep so your child begins to get used to all aspects of the day.

Once you all feel happy and a start date is agreed, it is often a good idea to try to allow for shorter days for the first few weeks where possible, so try to keep some annual leave to allow for this. This should help to make the process a little easier for you both.

You may find that your child seems ok on settling but then has a little wobble when they realise it is the 'real deal.' This is perfectly normal and they may only be upset for the separation part and then settle down. Speak to your child's key person if you have any concerns and over time your child will settle down.

Also, remember if they are only doing one or two days a week it may take a little longer for them to settle than if they are attending full time. Again, this is fairly common and it will settle down.

Sleep

Nurseries will vary in practice, but usually, children will sleep based on their individual needs and preferences. This may be in a cot or on a sleep mat. It can help practitioners if you can start to think about your child's daytime sleeps when at home and where a baby may have been used to sleeping, such as in a pram or sling during the day, to try to transition them where possible to a bed or a mat. This will help the transition at nursery. Nurseries will have policies to ensure safe sleep practices are in operation, which you can look at.

Milk and eating

Nurseries will work with you and provide your baby with whatever they need in terms of milk and food. If you are breastfeeding they will have policies in place to store and give your child this milk safely, from a bottle or beaker. Again, if possible, try to practice this in advance of them starting the setting so they begin to get used to taking it this way. This will then make it easier for them when they start and the surroundings and staff are different. At least they will be used to having it this way and this won't be new too.

If you are weaning, share with staff your child's eating preferences. Many settings have cooks on site that can make food to your child's requirements. This is the same for allergies and dietary requirements too.

Nappies

Some nurseries may provide nappies, whereas others might ask you to take them in. If you use reusable nappies, then nurseries should include the processes around using these within their policies.

Comforters

Leaving your child for the first time can be worrying and unsettling but often having a familiar item from home can help this - you will often see children clinging on to their favourite teddy from home. The setting will have hygienic storage for dummies too. If your child has a favourite story or song share these too, as reading or singing those throughout the day will really help them to settle in to nursery life.

Sharing information

Many nurseries now have online journals where they can upload photos instantly of your child that you can then access through a private secure account. This enables you to see what your child is doing and can be reassuring, especially in those early days and if they cry as you leave. Some of the online journals also enable you to upload photos and information. It is encouraged that you do this as it enables the staff to find out more about your child. This can help the staff talk about familiar things and places and even show the photos to your child to help them feel settled and at ease. It will also enable them to plan more appropriately for your child based on their interests and developmental stages.

They may also upload information about their care routines or provide you with a care sheet at the end of the day so you can see what they have eaten or when they have slept.

Some nurseries may have diaries that go between home and nursery and include an area for you to write about what your child has been doing at home. Don't feel you have to write lots and lots in here - just focus on the key points. For example, if your child has been somewhere which the staff can then talk to them about or if they have learnt something new, tried a new food, had an unsettled night due to teething etc. The intention is to share information so the staff can better support your child during the time they are with them.

Don't forget you can call the nursery at any time to check how your child is and/or ask the nursery to call you to let you know how they are settling in.

Family photos

Many nurseries will ask you to take in family photos to display in the nursery for familiarity for your child. If they don't you can always take one in anyway and ask them to show it to your child throughout the day. Don't forget to include extended family and all the special people in your child's life such as grandparents, cousins etc. If you are from a different culture or tradition,

nurseries will welcome lots of information around this including any keywords in your language to further support your child in settling into their new environment.

Information sharing

All nurseries follow the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR), Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 with regard to the storage of data and access to it. Each setting should have a privacy notice that details how any personal data related to you or your child will be dealt with and it is recommended you ask to look at this in relation to information sharing.

Summary

It is ok and perfectly normal for you and your child to feel sad when you leave your child at nursery when returning to work. It's a big change after having time together. However, you will find that soon enough your child will enjoy their early education experience and seeing them learning and developing each day and making lots of experiences, friends and memories will soon put you at ease.

If you have any worries or concerns, speak to your child's key person or the Nursery Manager so together you can discuss these and ensure you and your child feel happy and settled in their new environment.

Further guidance

- What to expect in the Early Years Foundation stage: a Guide for Parents:
<https://bit.ly/3u1anJ>
- Parents – Choosing The Right Nursery for Your Child – NDNA factsheet
<https://bit.ly/3xmxgZK>



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Our factsheets are written by early years experts for the early years workforce. Most NDNA factsheets are free to our members.

NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets

The information provided in this factsheet is for use by early years practitioners only. It has been written by early years experts but is not intended to be, and should not be relied upon, as a substitute for professional advice. NDNA has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information presented in this factsheet. NDNA assumes no legal liability or responsibility for your interpretation or use of the information contained within it.

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