

Who will look after my baby best?



www.whataboutthechildren.org.uk



We believe that, in an ideal world, every mother should have the choice to look after her own young children. However, many parents today feel they have little alternative than to go quickly back to work.

What About The Children? is a charity working to overcome this problem by increasing awareness of the emotional needs of babies and children under three. We suggest ways in which families can be supported and given a real choice to look after their own children during these first crucial years of life.

If you are considering various child care arrangements for children under three, this leaflet will help you make an informed choice. It explains why we place such an emphasis on the child's emotional well being and happiness.

Note: in our information sheets we refer to your baby as a boy. That is to avoid confusion when we talk about 'she' or 'her' as you might think we're referring to the mother and not her baby!

Why are your baby's first three years so important?

...because they set the scene for the rest of his life. During this time he will develop a view of the world and of the people around him. This view can develop positively and make him feel confident, secure, loved and able to trust people. Or it may become negative – making him feel angry, fearful, insecure, unlovable and suspicious of other people.

Right from birth your baby's behaviour is influenced by the way he is treated by those who look after him.

Did you know? Scientific research over more than fifty years clearly shows that young children need a secure, continuous, loving relationship with a prime carer, ideally supplemented with other supporting relationships. ⁽¹⁾

This has been re-emphasised by recent research into early brain development which shows that the quality of interaction between a baby and his carer has a direct impact on the way the brain develops. How well we get on with other people is not determined at birth, or gradually assembled over years, but becomes ingrained in our brains during the first two years of life in direct response to how we are loved and cared for. ⁽²⁾

This early love and caring fundamentally affects each

person's ability to control his emotions, to be sensitive to others, respond to stress and to form close relationships for the rest of his life. If this opportunity is lost, it is much harder to correct later on.

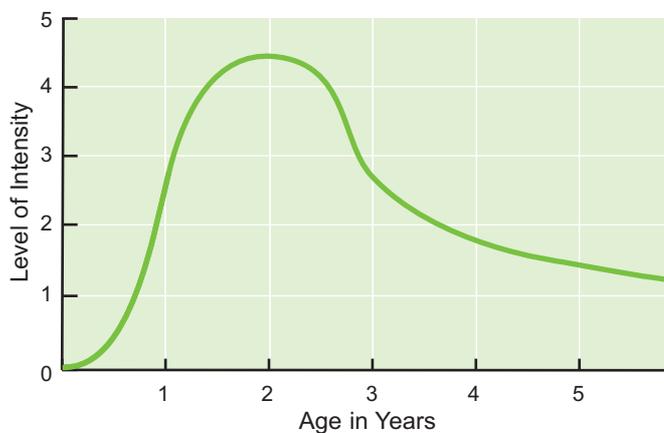
The mother/baby relationship starts from the time the pregnancy is confirmed and, if all goes well, it will develop into a secure relationship, providing a good basis for sound emotional development rather than anti-social behaviour. As he grows older a baby will show that he's happiest near his mother and from the age of about seven months he might begin to show distress when separated from her, particularly if left with strangers.

- **For more information please see our leaflet 'A special bond, a special time - the first three years'**

Separation anxiety at this stage is normal. It is important to listen to your child and respond to his need to stay close to a trusted, familiar person and especially to spend most of the time with his main carer, usually the mother. If this need is overridden your child may feel rejected and insecure.

- **For more information please see our leaflet 'Ready to leave your baby? - Is your baby ready to leave you?'**

Changes in intensity of separation anxiety with age



The intensity of anxiety shown on the graph was measured by observing the degree of stress children displayed on separation, such as crying, searching and calling for the mother.

Of course it is good for babies and very young children to get to know a variety of people provided that mother is also there, or they are left for fairly short periods with people they already know and feel comfortable with. However, it is very difficult for a baby, or very young child, to deal with too many relationships and changes of carers. He needs the continuity of one special person most of the time to help him sort out all his different experiences. In nine out of ten cases the best person for your baby is you, his mother.

Exceptions may be when a mother has severe mental health difficulties, including depression, or when other stresses from present or past events make it hard for her to form a mutually engaging and satisfying relationship with her baby. In these circumstances the baby is unlikely to get the love and attention he needs. This is where his father and/or grandparents or other relatives can be invaluable in supporting the mother on a regular basis. Otherwise a substitute carer may be able to provide important temporary or long term help.

All babies and young children need to have a clear primary attachment relationship.

If the early mother/child relationship is not fulfilled, there is a danger that the child will always be seeking his mother's love. It is highly inappropriate for a very young child to float between several carers outside the family. John Bowlby, a pioneer in the field of early development, wrote: 'The more dependent a very young child is allowed to be, the more independent he will be as he gets older.'

It's very important that both parents know how vital their behaviour is for their baby's future at this very vulnerable stage of development.

- **For information on a father's role, see our leaflet 'A new baby .. a new family .. where can dad fit in?'**

Further reading or going to classes such as those run by PIPPIN (3) can help both parents understand their baby's emotional needs. These include knowing that babies and young children:

- thrive on loving individual attention
- develop language better when interacting one to one rather than in group care
- need consistent relationships with people they know well and trust.

Some children are more vulnerable to change than others e.g. boys because their emotional development is often slower than girls (4); and some children – just like adults – are temperamentally less able to cope with new experiences, crowds, noise etc.

Most mothers would prefer to look after their own children for the first few years. **If you can do this, you are the ideal person to care for your own baby.**

Even though you understand how important you are to him, you may be very sad to realise that you cannot look after him yourself, perhaps because of financial pressures and fear of losing your job.

- **For more information please see our leaflets on 'Baby matters, Money matters' and 'Pregnant and pleased - but worried about your career'.**

So what can you do to make the best of a less than perfect solution?

Try to organise your work so that you can keep time spent apart to short periods, e.g. half days rather than full days, and find the best person you can to look after your baby the rest of the time.

This person should be totally dependable, focused on your baby and should understand his need to have continuity of care. In some cases the father may be able to fulfil this role.

The following are some other options for childcare

Au pair	Learning the language and helping mother in the family home
Childminder*	In carer's home, maximum 3 children aged under-5 and 3 children aged over-5
Close relative	Unrestricted
Day nursery/crèche*	Children age 0-5 in group care
Nanny [could be shared]	In one of the children's own homes
Pre-school/nursery school*	Traditionally part-time group care and education for age 3-5s, but increasingly including younger children and for longer hours

* These must be registered by OfSTED, requiring minimum qualifications e.g. Childminders require a 12 hour introductory course plus first aid. Day nursery/crèche and Pre-school/nursery school require one staff member with NVQ level 3, or equivalent in childcare and education, and half the staff with NVQ level 2.

Care given by nannies, au pairs and childminders may be satisfactory if they are committed to looking after the same child, or small group, for several years. They need to be able to show sensitivity and affection, speak the child's language well and provide a good range of activities. They need to liaise closely with the parents and have expectations appropriate to each stage of development.

Organisations with a vested interest in commercial childcare sometimes promote the idea that childcare outside the family is better for a young child. The research they quote to support this is usually in relation to children from highly disadvantaged backgrounds, where childcare is an improvement on their home situations. There is no evidence to support the idea that childcare outside the family is better for your baby, but plenty of evidence to show that up to three hours a day in good quality nurseries and pre-schools is beneficial for children from about the age of three. (5)

For further information about **What About The Children?** or to join and support us in our work, please see our website below or contact the office at the address on the back page.

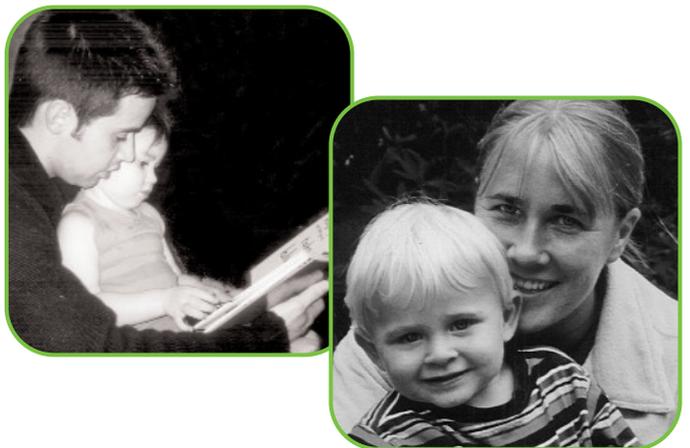
What research tells us about childcare

The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project found that when children were assessed at three plus years for social/behavioural development results showed:

- high levels of group care before the age of two were associated with higher levels of anti-social behaviour
- although moderate levels of childminder care were not associated with increased anti-social behaviour, extremely high levels were
- where there was substantial care from a relative (usually grandmothers), there was less anti-social behaviour in children (5)

A preview of the initial findings of a current study, 'Families, Children and Child Care' (FCCC), was given at a conference in 2005. The study is looking at the different ways in which 1,200 children under the age of three have been cared for and how this has influenced their development. It finds that the children cared for by their mothers did significantly better in developmental tests than those in any other form of care. At eighteen months old, while the cognitive and language outcomes of children who had been in non-maternal care for at least 12 hours per week were not significantly different, their socio-emotional development was definitely less good.' The babies and toddlers who did worst were those in group daycare, such as nurseries and crèches.

They tended to display more extremes of behaviour with higher levels of aggression or be withdrawn, compliant and sad. The latest findings of this study may be seen on the FCCC website. (6)



The cortisol (stress hormone) levels of young children who spend long hours in large groups have been found to rise by as much as three times the levels they experience when they are at home.

Cortisol impairs the growth of the brain and increases a child's vulnerability to later problems ranging from anxiety and depression to cardio-vascular disease, diabetes and strokes. (7)

Making the best choice for your baby and your family

Remember in this leaflet we're concerned only with those factors which relate specifically to children's happiness and sense of security, which will affect your baby now and for the rest of his life.

To use this chart, rate your expectations about the ability of each type of care/carer to meet the needs of your child. Give marks from 0-3, 3 being top, then add the marks down each column to judge which rates the highest. If possible visit and check out a range of the possibilities available and affordable for your area and circumstances.

Social and Emotional Needs of Child Under Three	Mother	Father/Granny or close relative	Nanny	Child-minder	Au Pair alone	Day nursery or crèche	Pre- or nursery-school taking under-3s
To be given plenty of individual attention	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To be with the same carer for most of the day	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To be with the same carer for most of the week	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To form a close and trusting relationship	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To continue this close relationship for at least three years	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To get used to a familiar language	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To have consistent expectations for behaviour	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To be given praise and encouragement	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To feel loved and valued	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To be held and cuddled	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To experience a range of activities suitable to each stage of development	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To have individual needs respected e.g. for rests and food and interests	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
To be comforted quickly and effectively when distressed	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
TOTAL	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Timing and settling in

If your child is going to spend most of his waking hours with someone else, you will have to accept that this relationship will become very important to him and realise that you may have to deal with your own feelings of jealousy. Sometimes it can appear that, at the end of a long day away, your child has “switched off” and shows little interest in you; this is a normal response to separation. Although this is hard, all the research over many years shows that it’s in his best interests to have a close and caring relationship with one other special person rather than have many superficial relationships outside the family.

If your child is going to be looked after by someone else for just part of the week, he’ll find it easier to adjust if this can be for a few hours at a time on consecutive days rather than whole days all at once.

Separation anxiety is normal in young children, (indeed lack of anxiety when left with a stranger after the age of about seven months may be a symptom of disturbance). But you can help your child settle in to his new situation as painlessly as possible by planning the change well in advance. Make frequent visits together and make sure that you and he are happy with his new carer before he’s left alone without you. Leaving him with one of his favourite possessions, as well as something to remind him of you, may help to comfort him.



It is important to say goodbye and to tell your child the truth when you leave him, even though he may not fully understand or have much concept of time. It’s better to be honest, keep his trust and put up with some tears rather than be deceptive and creep away when he’s not looking. He will feel much more fear and anxiety if he suddenly looks up and finds you have gone and he will find it much harder to let you go next time, so, for both your sakes, say goodbye positively. You can always phone to check how he’s getting on if you are worried. A good carer will encourage you to help your child settle in, keep you well informed about how he is getting on and contact you if he’s ill or very unhappy. At under three he may not be able to tell you much about his feelings in words, but he can express a lot through crying, smiling and body language which you’ll understand better than anyone. Try to stay tuned in to his wishes and needs and keep him as happy as you can. You can help him to adapt and reduce his stress levels after time away from you in child care by being particularly soothing and responsive to his cues.⁽⁸⁾

What questions do you need to ask next?



- Q. Will the same person be looking after my baby all the time?
- Q. How long can my baby’s carer (key person) commit to being the special carer for my baby?
- Q. How many other children will my baby’s main carer be looking after?
- Q. Will the carer enjoy looking after my baby?
- Q. What arrangements can be made if the main carer is off sick / on holiday?
- Q. How much experience has the main carer in looking after children of this age?
- Q. What qualifications has the main carer?
- Q. Are their policies e.g. over discipline, the same as mine?
- Q. Will they eat together as my child gets older?
- Q. What are their ideas for play and do I agree with them?
- Q. How much individual attention will my child receive?
- Q. Will the individual needs of my child be met e.g. to eat and sleep as needed / to be allowed choices according to interests?
- Q. How quickly can I get there if my baby needs me?
- Q. How much will this person care about my baby?
- Q. How much time will he spend in this type of care per week?
- Q. How many other carers/close relationships does he have?

Can mothers be given a real choice?

Many mothers feel pushed back to full-time work so they are not able to look after their under-3s as they would like. Sadly few parents feel they have a real choice in the matter.

Currently in Britain more public money is spent subsidising care of babies away from their homes than is given to helping parents find a solution within their own family. What About The Children? is working to create a more level playing field.

Join us and find out more about young children's emotional needs and what can be done to make this important issue a priority.



What the under threes need in order to be emotionally healthy:

- to be looked after for the majority of their waking hours by a special someone who loves them, knows them well and will not end the relationship
- a limited number of secondary caring relationships
- plenty of individual attention, either one to one or in a very small group
- plenty of interaction - playing, talking, singing, eye contact, cuddling
- sensitivity to their individual needs – their moods, rests, preferences, special words
- a variety of activities and challenges, appropriate to their age and stage of development
- praise and encouragement - moulding social behaviour through positive reinforcement

References:

1. John Bowlby, 1953 (and later editions), *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, Pelican Original.
2. Sue Gerhardt, 2004, *Why Love Matters, How Affection Shapes A Baby's Brain* - Routledge.
3. PARENTS IN PARTNERSHIP PARENT INFANT NETWORK, <http://www.pippin.org.uk/index.html>
4. Steve Biddulph, 1997, *Raising Boys*, Thorsons.
5. *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project*, ongoing, <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe>
6. *Families, Children and Child Care (FCCC) project*, ongoing. <http://www.familieschildrenchildcare.org>
7. D Friedman, 2005, *Stress and Architecture of the Brain*, National Scientific Council on the Developing Child.
8. A Ahnert and M Lamb, 2003, *Shared Care: Establishing a Balance Between Home and Child Care Settings*, Child Development Vol. 74 Issue 4.

What About The Children? is developing a series of leaflets which may answer other questions you have. We also have detailed booklists and information about other research. An information pack is available when you join **WATCH?**

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