

Child Care Options for Under fives in France

One of the good things about living in France is the amount of cheap, really good quality childcare which is available. To access this childcare you will need the following documents (this is France after all!!)

- **"Livret de famille"** - this is a small book given to French families when the parents marry or when children are born. It documents marriages, births and deaths. There is not an equivalent for British families so you will need to take your wedding certificate and your child's Birth Certificate. This should suffice. If you are not married but living with your partner, you may need to provide a "Certificat de Concubinage". This is a certificate which says you live with your partner and can be given by your local Mairie.
- **"Sécurité Sociale"** documentation - if you have a French "Carte Vitale" and social security number you will need to take a copy of this. If you do not have cover under the French system, take a document which shows that you have international health insurance which also covers your family whilst living in France.
- **"Justificatif de domicile"** - this basically means you need to prove your address in France. A bill such as your EDF bill (electricity) or France Telecom will be OK. Please note that mobile telephone bills are NOT accepted as a proof of your address. It is often requested that these bills should be less than 3 months old... be warned!
- **"Carnet de Santé"** - this is the book given to your child when they are born in France to record all their medical history such as vaccinations etc. If you do not have the French "carnet de santé", take along your child's medical & vaccination records. You can also get your paediatrician or GP to write a letter testifying that your child has had the necessary immunizations (BCG is mandatory).
- **"Photocopie du dernier avis d'imposition"** - this is the copy of the taxes you paid last year. You need to provide this information for both parents (a joint form for married couples or 2 separate ones for non-married couples). This is obviously only possible if you are paying taxes in France. If you are not under the French taxation system, take a copy of your payslip. This information is used to calculate the hourly rate that you will pay as the fees are "means based". If this information is not provided you will automatically pay the highest fees but even this top bracket is usually very reasonable compared to childcare costs in the UK for example.

The different Childcare options available are as follows:

1. Registered Child Minders

Child minders are called "**Assistante maternelle**", "**Nourrices**" or "**Nounous**" in French - these all mean the same thing and is basically a private qualified nanny who will look after your child in their home.

Assistantes maternelles are controlled by the "Protection Maternelle Infantile"* or PMI which is a state governed body regulating child care issues. A paediatric nurse controls the environment where children will stay.

If you know where you are going to be living, you should contact your local Mairie or the "Centre Medico-Social" and ask for the list of registered child minders. You need to ask for: "La liste des assistantes maternelles agréées sur le secteur de (your town)". The list will probably be updated about once a month as vacancies appear.

You will sign a contract between you (the "employer") and the Assistante maternelle. The Assistante maternelle will have a standard contract for you to sign which will cover things like times, payment etc. As you will then be the "employer" under French law you will have to fill out a "déclaration mensuelle" (a monthly form which summarises how much you have paid your Assistante maternelle for how many hours etc.). This is quite easy and can usually be done on the internet.

An approximate rate is 3 euros per hour, plus 3 euros for lunch each day and a monthly 2/3 euros towards craft equipment. If you are working this is all tax deductible under the French income tax system.

Be warned that you may find it difficult to get a childminder for just part of a week; they are registered for perhaps 2 or 3 children in total and it doesn't matter if they are part or full time.

2. Crèches

This option is only available when BOTH parents are working. Each town has a crèche run by the Mairie; you should contact your Mairie to ask for the contact details of your local crèche.

They are usually fairly cheap (2-3 euros per hour) and means assessed. These are usually very good and have qualified carers; however, they are usually very busy and waiting lists are more or less the norm.

3. Halte-Garderie (part-time day care)

The halte-garderie is similar to a crèche but places are reserved entirely for children with Mums that do NOT work.

The halte-garderie is also run by the Mairie and sometimes towns have the crèche and halte-garderie in the same place so your child will be looked after with some other children who are "part-time" with the halte-garderie and others who are "full-time" with the crèche.

Most towns or villages have their own halte-garderie but if yours doesn't, you will be able to enrol in a town or village nearby. To find out where your nearest one is, go to your local Mairie and ask for the "halte-garderie" for your address. Some towns and villages have a "Relais d'Assistantes Maternelles" (RAM) or a "Maison de la petite enfance" which are both places where you can get the list of halte garderies available and enrol your child. They usually provide help with the forms.

Staff working in halte garderies are all qualified nursery nurses and both the staff and the building where the halte-garderie is run are monitored and controlled by the French authorities.

You can leave your baby from 3 months and up until they start school. Be prepared that starting your child off in a halte-garderie will be more difficult around 12-18 months of age than before as this is when they do not want to be separated from Mum!

Once you have secured a place at your halte garderie, the staff will ask you to make some appointments for a "période d'adaptation". This is a period of between 2 to 4 weeks where you start introducing your child to the idea of being left for a little while (without you!) at the halte-garderie. Some halte-garderies ask the Mums to stay with the child for the first couple of times, others will ask you to leave the child on his/her own but only for 10 minutes, then 20 minutes, then half an hour etc. As soon as the child is settled with this you will be able to leave them for longer periods (usually a maximum of 4 hours in either the morning or the afternoon twice a week).

Some halte-garderies require that you decide on your two mornings and afternoons and that you always bring your child on those same days each week. Others are quite happy to be flexible and you can make your arrangements for different dates on a week to week or month to month basis, depending on how your local halte-garderie operates.

The halte-garderie will have a separate room with cots and beds where children can sleep according to their own rhythm (of course, this is sometimes easier said than done and will depend on whether your child will sleep in a room with other children, some of whom will probably not be sleeping!).

Halte-garderie can be a very good stepping stone for those of you with children living here where French is not spoken at home. It will introduce your child to the French language and

hopefully make the big leap involved in starting at a French school at a later date a lot less daunting.

Rates are again fairly cheap (approx. 2 - 3 euros) and means assessed.

Some towns and/or villages (such as Lègevin!) do have waiting lists for putting children into the halte-garderie. However it is unusual to have to wait more than 6 months. Other locations will have places available immediately.

4. Private nurseries

There are some private nurseries, but they are few and far between because the local provision is good.

5. Schools

Local **primary schools**, called "**école maternelle**", take children from 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ if they are potty trained. Places for 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ yr olds are limited but if your child is 3 before September you should definitely register him/her for school. You can usually send him/her there for as many or as few sessions as you like (i.e. just mornings or a couple of mornings a week, although this does depend on the headmaster of each school). This is free. Once they are 3 years old they can stay for lunch and remain there all day if that suits you. For the first year ("petite section") they will have an afternoon nap.

Montessori schools: there are two that are bilingual English and French, and they take children from their 2nd birthday. One is in Labège and the other is in Grenade. There are also French Montessori schools.

Depending on where you are living there is also the **International School of Toulouse**, this is private and they take children from about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3.

6. Home Helps

You could also hire someone to come to your house and look after your child. It is not unusual to ask this person to do some cleaning as well. Some of the agencies who provide cleaners will tell you that the cleaner will also look after your child; this should be fine as long as you are comfortable with the cleaner.

Other information:

Just to warn you....in France the BCG vaccination is compulsory if you want your child to go into collective child care. Some of the other vaccinations are also compulsory and you will be required to prove that your child has had them. If you are moving to France from the UK or USA, please ask your current doctor/health visitor for a list of the vaccinations your child has had on headed notepaper and take lots of copies as you will need them.

As you can see, you will need to know where you are going to be living before you can organize a lot of this. All of the Mairies have web sites with details of their "services petite enfance".

* Your local "Centre Medico Social" will also tell you where to find your nearest "Protection Maternelle Infantile" (PMI). The PMI is usually open a couple of mornings a week in each town or village and is basically the French equivalent to a baby and toddler drop-in clinic. You can get your baby weighed and checked by a paediatric nurse and, when they are on duty at the centre, a doctor. You can also have your child's vaccinations done here. Everything at the PMI is free of charge.

Also, please see separate document/link about how to enroll your child into French primary school.