

Part-time Day-care for Babies & Toddlers in France

Are you interested in putting your baby or toddler in day care for a couple of mornings or afternoons a week?

- The French childcare system has an excellent service available called the "**Halte Garderie**". Halte garderie means "part time day-care".
- It is similar to a crèche but places are reserved entirely for children with Mums that do NOT work. It is just to give us a couple of mornings or afternoons a week to "breathe" without having the children around.
- Sometimes towns run the halte garderie together with the crèche 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.
- Most Halte Garderies offer 2 mornings/afternoons a week although this can be more if there are less children attending in your town.

How to find your nearest halte-garderie:

- Go to your local "**Mairie**" (town hall) 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.

The documents you will probably need to register your child at the Halte garderie:

- "**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). Your child will not be accepted into day care without this. You will need to see your paediatrician or GP before taking your child to enrol as you will also need a letter from him/her detailing what the halte garderie staff should give your child if he/she has a temperature. The doctor will say which medication should be given and under what circumstances (e.g. doliprane for a fever of 38.5° or above).
- "**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 still very reasonable.

Other information:

- Some towns and/or villages (such as Léguevin!) do have **waiting lists** for putting children into the halte garderie. However it is unusual to have to wait for more than 6 months. Other locations will have places available immediately.
- Staff working in halte garderies are all **qualified nursery nurses** and both the staff and the place 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.

Other part-time day-care solutions available:

- “**Assistante maternelle**”, “**Nourrices**” or “**Nounous**” – 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.
- You can obtain a list of Assistantes maternelles who are located within your area upon request from your local “**Centre Medico Social**”*. You need to ask for: "La liste des assistantes maternelles agréées sur le secteur de (*your town*)". You can either call into the Centre Medico Social and ask for the list of Assistantes maternelles or contact them in writing or by phone. The list will probably be updated about once a month.
- It may not be easy to find an Assistante maternelle who is willing to look after your child for just a few hours a week as most of these private nannies look after children full-time for mothers who work. However you can find some who are prepared to take a child on regular mornings and/or afternoon and just part-time.
- The documents needed for setting up a contract with an Assistante maternelle are approximately the same as those listed above for the halte garderie.
- 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 mensuel**” (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.

* 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.