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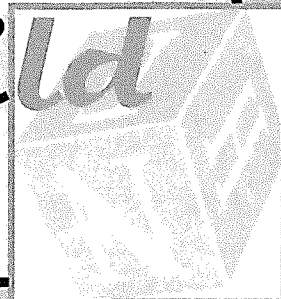
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***Choosing
the Best for
your Child***

A PARENT'S GUIDETO
CHILD MindERS • NURSERIES/CRECHES • BABYSITTERS



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Bibliography compiled by Patricia McKeown

In the interest of gender equity, we have used “She” for the carer and “He” for the child.

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and
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1998

SHARING THE CARE OF YOUR CHILD

Most parents need to find good quality reliable care for their children at some stage whether they choose a childminder, a nursery/creche or a babysitter. Choosing child care can be very difficult. This booklet is designed to alert you to the main issues that need to be considered when making choices that relate to the above types of child care. It does not cover sessional services such as playgroups or drop-in centres. It combines the requirements under the Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations 1996 and good practice recommendations. If child care arrangements break down it can be a source of great stress to parents and children. Consistency helps children feel secure. It is therefore, very important that you select the right child care in the first place. Don't leave the selection to the last minute. Take time – it is an important decision. Remember you are choosing someone to share the care of your child.

THE LAW

For the first time in Ireland regulatory provisions for pre-school services which include nurseries, childminders (if not exempted) creches and drop-in centres were introduced and became law on 1 January 1997.

These regulations introduced under the Child Care Act 1991 lay down the minimum standards which must be adhered to in each pre-school service. Included in these standards are adult/child ratios, safety in relation to premises and equipment, hygiene, fire safety and the space needed for each child. They also detail the records that all pre-school services must keep and which records are available to parents whose children are attending or whose children may attend a particular pre-school service.

Some childminders are exempt from these regulations.

The exemptions are:

- (a) *The care of one or more pre-school children undertaken by a relative of a child or children or the spouse of such a relative*
- (b) *A person taking care of one or more pre-school children of the same family and no other such children (other than the person's own children) in the person's home*
- (c) *A person taking care of not more than 3 pre-school children of different families (other than the persons own children) in that persons home*

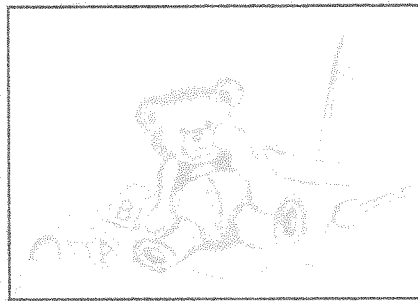
(CHILD CARE ACT 1991, SECTION 58)

The Regulations are available from Government Publications (see address at the back of this publication) and each service should also have them available for inspection. It is recommended that parents take time to consult the Regulations.

HOW DO YOU FIND THE BEST CARE FOR YOUR CHILD?

- Under the new Regulations, the health boards are required to provide information relevant to pre-school services to parents. Most health boards have pre-school service officers who take responsibility for services in their area. Contact your local health board to find out what is happening in your area.
- Talk to your friends and neighbours, they may know of someone reliable. Also your Public Health Nurse may be aware of a good creche or childminder in the neighbourhood. Your local shops and supermarket often display notices from people who wish to care for children. The Golden Pages carry advertisements for creches and nurseries. Check out local newspapers and community directories. Your local Public Library may also be able to help.
- The *National Children's Nurseries Association* has a list of people who operate nurseries and creches. Their address and telephone number is available at the back of this booklet.
- One way of finding childminders is by contacting childminding/nanny recruitment agencies. Check the Golden Pages for phone numbers.

CONSISTENCY



HELPS PROVIDE SECURITY FOR A SMALL CHILD

CHILDMINDERS

Childminders are defined in the Regulations as those who look after children in the childminder's own home. They offer this service all the year around for the full working day or for different periods during the day. Only childminders caring for more than 3 children are covered by the Regulations.

You may wish your child to be cared for in your own home or alternatively in the childminder's home. If so, we recommend you check the following:

- Ask for at least two references. Ask the referees about the childminder's ability to deal with emergencies, to keep your child safe, to generally care for young children and if they believe the childminder is a suitable person to mind your child.
- If the childminder is not exempt from the Regulations, has she notified the local health board as required?
- Visit the childminder in her home, if that is where the child will be cared for, and check out safety issues. For example: check the stairs, are there any hazards? Check windows or glass doors – is there a possibility your child could fall through them? Observe where kettles and other electrical appliances are kept – might a child pull a flex? Look out for sharp edges, dangerous objects and where cleaning materials are kept, could children be in danger from any of these? Do you feel the childminder's house is right for your child, for example, is it warm enough? Does it appear clean enough and above all does it have a welcoming feeling?
- A safe outside play area is essential.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions. We suggest the following:
 - What does the childminder like doing with children?
 - What does she consider to be “bold” behaviour and how does she deal with it?
NOTE: Physical punishment is prohibited under the Regulations.
 - What is her view on children watching television or videos?
 - How does she deal with an angry or upset child?
 - If a child wants to sleep, where will he be? Are you happy with this arrangement?
 - What meals and snacks will be provided for the child? Who pays for them?
 - Are there appropriate toys for children to play with? What area of the house is “open” to the child?
 - What other children will be in the home? What are their ages? If there is a two year old and your child is two, is this the stage to integrate them? Remember they may not want to share.

- If your child is a baby, and there is another baby, will your child get enough individual attention?
- Are there school-going children to be collected? Will your child be travelling in a buggy, in a car, or will he be left at home?
- If travelling by car, what safety restraints are in place and are they used?
- What other adults will be in the home? What contact will they have with your child? Are you happy with this arrangement?
- Do they have creche/childminders insurance cover?
- What would the childminder do in the case of an emergency? Are you satisfied with this approach?
- Is there a telephone on the premises?

It is important that you are satisfied with the answers to the above questions.

- Visit the childminder's home with your child to see how the childminder and the child get on together. Does the childminder ignore, rush, or gently talk to the child? Does the child warm to the childminder? Children's own reactions are important to observe.
- **If the childminder will be in your own home most of the previous questions are important but it would also be necessary to clarify the childminder's role.**
For example:

- Are you expecting the childminder to care for your child only or do you also expect some housekeeping tasks to be done? It is important to be clear about this issue.
- Do you allow the childminder have visitors in your home? Do you allow the childminder to take your child to other homes?

Settling in

- Gradually build up the time your child spends with the childminder.
- Supply relevant information about the child – likes, dislikes, health issues and comforters.
- Make sure you leave your telephone number, your GP and other significant adults to be contacted in an emergency.

It is in the best interest of your child to be open and honest about any concerns with the childminder.

Setting up a contract and putting it down on paper can be a very wise move and can avoid difficulties later on. Remember it is a business agreement and should include the following:

- Agreed costs. When will the childminder be paid? Is she to be paid when the child/you are on holidays or on sick leave?
- What happens if the childminder needs a day off?
- What about an infectious illness? Who cares for the child?
- Will the childminder take the child to the doctor or health clinic if necessary?
- Agree to review the situation on a regular basis.

The *National Childminding Association of Ireland* represents and trains some childminders. It also provides information and operates an advice line. The address and telephone number are available at the back of this booklet.

NURSERIES/CRECHES

Full Day Care

**Under the Regulations full day care is defined
as structured day care for more than 3.5 hours per day**

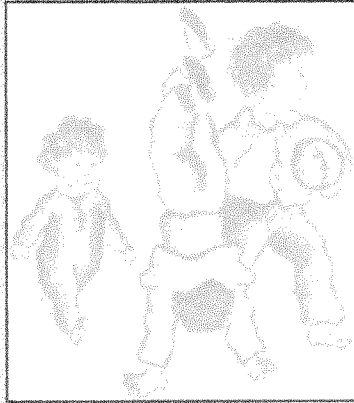
Most nurseries and creches are run by private individuals or groups

**When choosing a creche or a nursery we
suggest checking basic information by phone**

- Has the service notified the health board under the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996?
- Has the service been inspected?
- Confirm the opening and closing hours. Is there flexibility within these hours? If they close at 6.00 pm what happens if you are delayed at work?
- Is there a place available? If not, how long is the waiting list?
- What insurance cover does the service have? Under the 1996 Regulations each child must be covered by insurance.

- What is the total number of children in the nursery/creche?
- Is there one adult who will have primary responsibility for your child?
- What are the charges? Are there additional expenses?
- How many staff are there and what training and experience do they have?

If you feel satisfied with the telephone checklist make an appointment to visit and take time to explore standards of care.



First Visit Checklist

Ratio of children to staff

Under the Regulations the following adult/child ratio applies:

Under one year old – Adult/Child 1/3

One year to 3 years old – Adult/Child 1/6

Three years to six years old – Adult/Child 1/8

Taking into consideration the child's need for consistency you might ask how many different adults would care for your children during the course of each week? What training and experience do they have? The day care manager should be able to make records regarding staff qualifications available. This is a requirement under the Regulations.

During your visit to the nursery/creche you may wish to ask the following questions:

- What are the ages of the youngest and oldest children in the group?
- What size of a group will your child be in?
- How are the children divided: for example, are all of the babies together, all of the toddlers together, all of the pre-school children together? Are they mixed for all or part of the day?
- Young children require continuity of care, trust between parents and carer, stimulation, good rest and physical care and room to move to facilitate crawling, toddling, balancing and walking.
- What is the adult to child ratio? How many staff are with the younger children?
- Are the children taken on outings and if so how many adults go with the children?
- What insurance cover does the nursery/creche have?

Information Exchange

- What information is required about your child? Do they want to know about allergies, pet names or comfort habits?
- What information will be shared with you regarding your child? How will you get it? Do they share information on sleeping patterns and food matters?
- Under the Regulations some information must be shared with parents on request. This includes:
 - personnel information regarding staff and staff rosters
 - details of maximum number of children catered for
 - staff/child ratio
 - type of programme provided
 - facilities available
 - opening hours
 - fees
 - details of medicines administered to your child
 - details of any accidental injury to your child
 - fire drills
- What is the procedure if you are unable to collect your child and want to send someone else?

Are you welcome to come and visit your child during the day without making a previous arrangement?

Nursery Rules

- What are the holiday arrangements?
- Will the child be allowed attend the nursery if he is ill and if not, will you still have to pay full fees?

Location

- Is the location suitable for you and your child? Consider the advantages and disadvantages of the location: is it near your home or near your workplace?

Health and Safety

The Regulations lay down some minimum requirements regarding health and safety. Consider the following:

- Is there an adequately stocked first aid kit on the premises?
- Are the stairs protected?
- Are there appropriate safety precautions on all low level windows, glass panels and patio doors?
- Are there any sharp edges or dangerous objects that could damage your child?
- Is there thermostatically controlled hot water?
- Is there an outside play area which is safe and secure?
- Are all cleaning items, medicines and toxic substances stored out of reach of children?
- Under the Regulations a written record must be kept of
 - all fire drills which take place on the premises
 - the number, type and maintenance record of fire fighting equipment on the premises
 - are there fire extinguishers, fire blankets and smoke alarms?
- Is there a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire? Is this displayed in a prominent position in the premises?
- Is the nursery warm enough? Is there enough air? Is the nursery well lit and attractive in appearance?
- Is there enough space for your child to run around safely?

Under the Regulations the following clear floor space allocation is required for full day care:

<i>0-1 years</i>	<i>3.70 square metres</i>
<i>1-2 years</i>	<i>2.80 square metres</i>
<i>2-6 years</i>	<i>2.32 square metres</i>

Clear floor space per child i.e.

- for children's play and movement
- without furniture or permanent fixtures
- separate space should be provided for:
 - kitchen
 - toilets
 - sleep
 - any other area (e.g. storage)

Is there a safe and hygienic changing area for babies? Under the Regulations this should not communicate with any occupied room or food room.

Under the Regulations the following sanitary arrangements are required:

For every 10 children – 1 toilet + 1 wash hand basin is required

For every 8 adults – 1 toilet + 1 wash hand basin is required

Do they use paper towels or individual towels for children as opposed to a communal towel?

Is the rest/sleeping area supervised?

Food Preparation

The Regulations state the following regarding food preparation and storage:

- A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that suitable, sufficient, nutritious and varied food is available for a pre-school child attending the service on a full-time basis.
- Where food is consumed on the premises by a pre-school child, the person carrying on the pre-school service shall ensure that
 - (a) adequate and suitable facilities for the storage, preparation, cooking and serving of food, and
 - (b) adequate and suitable eating utensils, hand washing, wash-up and sterilising facilities are provided.

Observe the following when visiting the centre:

- How is the food prepared?
- Is the area spotlessly clean?
- Is the food preparation area separate from other areas that children use?

- Who does the cooking? Are the children allowed in the cooking area while cooking is going on?
- Is the food fresh, frozen or processed?
- Are the menus balanced and varied?
- Is it possible to cater for a child with a special diet?

If you are happy with your first visit, it would be a good idea to take your child along with your for a second visit.

Second Visit Checklist

- To help you judge the quality of care we would recommend that you join the staff and children in their normal daily routine and be aware of the following points:

Working with Children

- What actually happens during the day? You may need to spend an hour or two observing the children to really know what goes on.
- Does the daily routine account for the children's need to be active; rest; make noise; be quiet; be busy; relax; be social and to be solitary?
- Is the children's language development encouraged? For example, do staff spend time talking and listening to the children as opposed to having short exchanges with them, or simply giving directions? Do they respond to the children's questions and chat?
- Do staff use every opportunity to talk to the children, for example, while changing their nappies? Remember, all children, especially very young ones, need to be stimulated.
- Watch the children. Are they encouraged to become independent, to choose activities for themselves and to share with other children, or are they handed out toys which discourage creativity and imagination?
- Is there a variety of interesting material for small children, for example, to touch, to listen to or to look at?
- Do staff direct the children all the time or do they provide activities and encourage the children to lead or join in?
- Do the children appear happy? Are they having fun? Are they interested in what they are doing? How do they relate to the staff?
- How do the staff deal with an upset and angry child?
Note: Physical punishment of any kind is prohibited under the Regulations. Practices which threaten, humiliate or frighten children must never be used.

- Do the staff have a sense of humour? Are they having fun? Do they seem pleased to see the children?
- Do the staff seem to understand that each child is an individual and needs to be treated as such?
- Is the service a calm and caring place for your child?

Your child could spend the best part of his waking hours in the nursery or creche you choose. Perfection is difficult to find, but IS IT RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD?

Note: creches and nurseries providing quality care are usually very open to parents visiting but remember that they have to put children's needs first.

BABYSITTERS

Babysitting is a big responsibility. Don't take chances! You are trusting your child and your home to the care of someone else. We suggest you meet the babysitter and ask the following questions.

Babysitters are not covered under the Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations, 1996. This places the full responsibility on parents to choose a responsible babysitter for their child. The following questions are designed to help you make this choice.

- What experience does she have in caring for children? If you are seeking a babysitter for a small baby it is essential that she has experience in changing and feeding them.
- What does she consider to be "bold" behaviour and how would she deal with it? A babysitter may consider turning off the light in the bedroom and leaving the child in the dark appropriate, but would you?
- What does she like to do with children? This should indicate if a sitter is genuinely interested in children or just prepared to "sit". Can you guarantee your child will remain asleep and only need the safety of someone "sitting" them. Children often wake and need to be reassured.
- How would she deal with a fire or if the child had a bad fall? Is the babysitter capable of coping with an emergency?
- With increased awareness of child abuse, both physical and sexual, parents need to consider carefully gender, age and emotional maturity of a babysitter.

On the night

Trust your child, if they indicate a dislike for a particular babysitter, there is usually a good reason.



Before leaving for your night out be sure to leave your doctor's phone number, where you can be contacted or the phone number of a friend or relative in case of emergency. Leave these in a place beside the phone. Remember to always introduce the child to the babysitter and tell the child you are going out – don't sneak out as children can get very upset when this happens. Explain the child's routine to the babysitter, for example how much television is allowed, what time the child goes to bed and whether the babysitter should give the child supper. Tell them about any special names the child may use, for example, for the toilet or comforter. Make sure that you tell the babysitter the time that you expect to be home and if you are delayed you should phone. Be clear about the babysitter's role. Do you allow friends to accompany her and do you allow use of the phone? Experience has shown it is very wise to agree these ground rules.

How can the National Children's Resource Centre help you as a parent?

The National Children's Resource Centre provides information on all matters relating to children including childhood problems, child health and safety and childcare. For further information contact the Information and Library Service (open 9.30 am – 1.00 pm, Monday to Friday) at:

**National Children's Resource Centre, Barnardos
Christchurch Square, Dublin 8**

Tel: (01) 4549699. Fax: (01) 4530300.

E-mail: info@barnardos.ie Website: www.barnardos.ie

FURTHER HELP

Government Publications

Sales Office
Molesworth Street
Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 6613111

National Childminding Association of Ireland

10 Marlboro Court
Marlboro Street
Dublin 1 (postal address only)
Tel: (01) 2875619

National Children's Nursery Association

Carmichael House
North Brunswick Street
Dublin 7
Tel: (01) 8722053

National Children's Resource Centre

Barnardos
Christchurch Square
Dublin 8
Tel: (01) 4549699

Fingal County Libraries

Children are the citizens of tomorrow. They deserve the very best child care provision and resources. Fingal County Libraries have a commitment to providing quality library and information resources for your children – through its branch network and the Schools Library Service. In addition, we recognise the need of parents and guardians for resources on parenting and childcare. We hope that the annotated booklist will help address some of your queries in relation to these topics. Books mentioned are available throughout the library system. Our branch libraries are as follows:

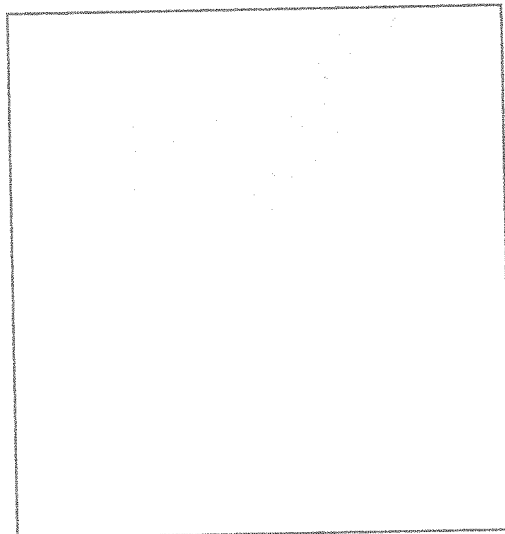
Balbriggan. Tel: 01-8411128
Roselawn, Blanchardstown. Tel: 01-8212701.
Howth. Tel: 01-8322130.
Malahide. Tel: 01-8452026.
Rathbeale. Tel: 01-8404179.

Part-time Centres

Baldoyle. Tel: 01-8322549.
Garristown. Contact headquarters
Skerries. Tel: 01-8491900.

For further information on all services contact:

Fingal County Libraries
Second Floor,
11 Parnell Square,
Dublin 1.
Tel: 01-8727777.
Fax: 01-8732021.
e-mail: fincolib@iol.ie
Website: www.iol.ie/~fincolib/



FURTHER READING

ANDREWS, PAUL SJ

Changing Children: Living with a new generation

Gill & Macmillan 1994 ISBN 0717121380

A chatty and intimate style, laced throughout with case histories and anecdotal intelligences makes this an easily read book. The author covers all major areas of parental worry in the easy manner of a favourite uncle or trusted adviser.

BROTT, ARMIO

The New Father: A Dad's guide to the first year
Abbeville Press 1997 ISBN 0789202751

An American publication, but very down to earth and informative. The book, humourously illustrated, covers the events a new dad might face in his first year as a Daddy.

GAFFNEY, MAUREEN

Parenting: A handbook for parents in association with the Gay Byrne Show
Town House 1991 ISBN 0948524200

An oldie but a goodie (published 1991) this book takes a very practical and empowering attitude towards the everyday events of family life. Forty pages of intelligent observations on teenage life are also worth reading.

GREAT ORMOND STREET

New Baby and Childcare Book: the essential guide for parents and children aged 0-5
Vermillion 1997 ISBN 0091852994

Everything you ever wanted to know about bearing and rearing your children. Written by respected specialists from the famous children's hospital, its a well packed reference tool.

GREEN, CHRISTOPHER

Toddler Taming: A parents guide to the first four years.

Vermillion 1991 ISBN 0091772583

Written with great authority but humorous overviews, this book should answer many questions on your child's care and development. Good advice, easily absorbed.

KITZINGER, SHEILA

The year after childbirth: Surviving the first year of motherhood

Oxford 1994 ISBN 0192861654

Well written, easy to follow with good illustrations and lots of information for care of both mother and child. Plenty of practical information with all major aspects of personal life explored.

LEWIS, DAVID

Help your child through school: How to make the most of your child's education from pre-school to teens

Vermillion 1992 ISBN 0091754356

Uninspired but informative book detailing what parents can do to help their children make it to secondary education. Based on the English education system, it nevertheless has much valuable advice for Irish parents.

MURRAY, PATRICIA HAYES

Choosing Childcare. Solving your childcare problems.

Attic Press 1993 ISBN 1855940620

Highly intelligent collection of information and facts to help you choose the right person(s) to look after your child. Useful appendices at the back of the book not only give addresses but also lists of what you should get straight before you even think of leaving junior ...

ROSEN, MICHAEL

Just Kids: How to survive the twos to twelves
John Murray 1995 ISBN 0719556805

Funny, chatty book with a very enjoyable approach to the various problems parents encounter as their children grow up.

STEINER, DEBORAH

Understanding your one-year old
Rosendale Press 1992 ISBN 1872803105

Well laid out text takes the parent through the second year of their child's life. Details of child development are illustrated at every point by case histories.

**EISENBERG, ARLENE; MURKOFF, HEIDI;
HATHAWAY, SANDEE, E**

What to Expect: The toddler years
Simon & Schuster 1996 ISBN 0671511831

A month to month analysis of what your toddler might be doing and what you should be doing. Very American in its approach but excellent information, easily accessible.

LEACH, PENELOPE

Children First: What we must do – and are not doing – for our children today
Michael Joseph 1994 ISBN 07181381

This authoritative book addresses three broad questions: Which modern Western trends are inimical to children? How do they distort policy and practice in areas of known parental and child need? How practically could we do better?

JONES, MAGGIE

Choosing older motherhood: the essential guide to becoming a mother over 35
Vermillion 1996 ISBN 00091813026

Mainly about getting pregnant, being pregnant and giving birth but with a good chapter on adjusting to being an older parent.

SYLVIA, KATHY & LUNT, INGRID

Child development: a first course
Blackwell 1994 (new ed) ISBN 08652160545

Meant for psychology students but easily absorbed by the lay person. Fascinating look at how children develop mentally and emotionally. Very practical.

REID, SUSAN

Understanding your two-year old
Rosendale Press 1992 ISBN 1872803156

This well laid out, (large type for easy reading), book maps out the growth of mind and personality over the course of the second year of life.

GOTTMAN, JOHN

The Heart of Parenting: How to raise an emotionally intelligent child.
Bloomsbury 1997 ISBN 0747530580

Slightly intimidating in layout, this book purports to teach adults to teach their children ways of dealing with their emotions and feelings. Not to be entered into lightly heartedly.

CHALK, STEVE

How to Succeed as a Parent: ten survival tips for busy mums and dads

Hotter & Stoughton 1997 ISBN 0340679034

Perfectly logical advice given matter-of-factly by someone who is not afraid to tell you that he doesn't expect you to agree with him on everything. He writes to "trigger thought and discussions" – it works!

DAVIS, ANNE

Confident Parenting: a hands-on approach to children

Souvenir Press 1997 ISBN 0285633767

Clearly written with a no nonsense approach to rearing children. Deals intently with disciplining children in non-physical ways.

STENHOUSE, GLEN

Confident Children: developing your child's self-esteem

Oxford University Press 1994 ISBN 0195583140

Wonderful little paperback (100pp) giving clear, helpful advice on the shaping of positive children's attitudes to life. Easy to read and understand full of examples of possible situations and their resolution.

Magazines/Periodicals Available

Family Life

BBC Publications (Monthly)

Mother & Baby

ABC Consumers Press (Monthly)

Our Baby

NPA (Monthly)

Prima Baby

PPA (Quarterly)


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