



Choosing a Childminder

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



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Introduction

NICMA – the Childminding Association (NICMA) is a membership organisation which works to support Childminders, parents and children.

Founded in 1984 NICMA's main purpose is;

**'To promote
quality home based
childcare and learning
for the benefit of
children, families and
communities'**



Childminding is the largest form of registered day care provision for children aged 0 – 12 years, with 74% of providers working as Childminders.

NB: For the purposes of this booklet, we have used the term of 'she' in relation to the Childminder.



What is a Registered Childminder?



“There is no occupation more important than looking after children. A Childminder not only protects and cares for a child, but also has a profound influence on the child’s future.

As a carer and an educator – and there is no neat distinction between these roles – a Childminder can become one of the central figures in a child’s world. That is why quality in childminding is crucial.”

A Registered Childminder is:

‘a person who looks after one or more children under the age of 12, for more than two hours per day, on domestic premises for reward’

Children (NI) Order 1995

Registered Childminders are self employed day care providers who work in their own home to provide care and learning opportunities for other people’s children within a family setting.

Childminders may be registered to care for up to six children between the ages of 0-12 years (including their own

children). In some instances, dependent on registration, a Childminder may provide an extended service by using an assistant.

There are around **3,400 Registered Childminders in Northern Ireland** offering over **18,500 childcare places for both pre-school and school aged children.**

Only **Registered** childminding is considered eligible when applying for statutory help with childcare costs.



What does Registration mean?

A Childminder **MUST** by law register with the local Health & Social Care Trust.

The purpose of registration is:

- To protect children
- To provide reassurance to parents using childcare
- To ensure that childminding services meet acceptable standards

To achieve registration a Childminder is required to comply with standards of safety, equipment and numbers of children. The home environment is checked to ensure that it meets the

standards required and that it is a suitable environment in which to care for children. References and health checks are required as are police checks on all individuals in the household over the age of 10. Childminders are also required to comply with '**Minimum Standards**' as part of the registration and inspection process.

Each Childminder is issued with a **Registration Certificate**. To ensure the validity of this document check that the Childminder is listed on the public register which can be found at www.familysupportni.gov.uk



DARE

THE GAME THE RULES THE WINNER
PUNISHING THE LOSER THE BRAGGING
THE PRIZE MORE FUN THE MORE
DARE AS MANY CRAZY ZANY DARES
AS YOU CAN HANDLE

ASDA
Smart Choice
15 Eggs
from Caped Hen
CLASS A
15 EGGS



Minimum Standards for Childminding and Daycare for Children under age 12

The Minimum Standards, launched in July 2012 by the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety, state that all prospective Childminders are required to undertake:

- 1. A Pre-registration Briefing Session** – which provides information on Childminding as a career and the subsequent registration process
- 2. Core Training** - in the following 3 areas:
 - Health & Safety in a Childminding setting
 - Safeguarding Children
 - Introduction to Paediatric First Aid

The Minimum Standards have been developed to provide assurance of a consistent level of quality in childcare services and also to ensure a consistent regional approach to registration and inspection. Health & Social Care Trusts are responsible for registering and inspecting these services against the requirements laid down in the Children [NI] Order 1995.

Minimum Standards are exactly that – the minimum level of service that has to be provided in order to be registered with a Health & Social Care Trust and meet the inspection standards. There are 16 minimum standards and they are grouped under 4 headings:

Quality of Care

Quality of Staffing, Management and Leadership

Quality of the Physical Environment

Quality of Monitoring and Evaluation

A fifth section outlines the Policies and Procedures required in settings which Childminders must share and discuss with parents at the outset. The parent will need to sign their agreement of the Policies. The standards can be found at the following link: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/phealth/sqs/sqsd-standards/sqsd-standards-care-standards.htm>

The Benefits of Quality Childminding



“My Childminder makes my child feel welcome, at ease, happy and secure in my absence. She provides excellent continuity of care and helps my child develop important skills through play. She has also helped develop her social skills. I would recommend NICMA to anyone wanting information on childcare and a reliable trustworthy Childminder”

Parent, Belfast



There are a number of unique features of Childminding which support children's learning and development.

- **Children's individual needs can be met** – through individual attention from the Childminder and interaction with other children of all ages. Babies, particularly, benefit from the individual, family type care provided by Childminders.
- **Low adult/child ratio** – Childminders can be registered to care for up to six children, three of whom can be under the compulsory school age. This low adult/child ratio allows for children's individual needs to be met.
- **Flexibility and choice in hours of care** – Children can be cared for on a full or part time basis from babyhood, through their pre-school, nursery and school years, and accommodate the varying needs of working parents.
- **Family friendly** – Childminding offers parents the opportunity for all of their children to be cared for in the same setting regardless of age, stage and ability. Childminded children are not segregated because of age or stage. This encourages siblings to bond and so encourages family relationships to fully develop.
- **Part of the community** – Children are cared for in their own community, enabling them to build and develop their own local connections and providing opportunities for close links with community based services and with local schools.
- **Real life learning** – Children looked after by a Childminder enjoy real life experiences like cooking, shopping, gardening, mealtimes, etc. These everyday activities promote all areas of a child's development.
- **Support and back up** – Childminders can provide support to parents by offering homework supervision, back up and emergency care where required.
- **Equality of Opportunity** – Childminders offer all children equality of access to opportunities to learn and develop, taking account of the child's age and stage of development, gender, ethnicity, special educational needs and any additional need. Childminding also offers children with additional needs the opportunity to be cared for in an inclusive setting with children of differing abilities, ages and backgrounds.



Choosing a Childminder?



“My daughter loves going to the Childminder and comes home full of stories of the games and activities she has enjoyed. If I didn’t have the Childminder I would not be able to fulfil my goal of obtaining my degree - it makes it possible!”

Parent, Belfast

One step towards finding the best care for your child is by contacting NICMA - the Childminding Association which was set up to provide a wide range of services for Registered Childminders and parents.

NICMA's aim is to help you find a Registered Childminder who will suit the needs of your family and with whom your child will be happy.

Try to be as organised as possible in your search for a Childminder. It is difficult to plan ahead if you suddenly find a job and need childcare in a hurry, but if you do have time to plan, then it helps to give yourself as long as possible. In some areas, Childminders are in great demand and it helps to check with a few at an early stage to find out if they expect to have any vacancies in the future.

If a Childminder knows that they will have a vacancy in the near future (eg because a child is going to school or moving) then they might be prepared to put your name down for the place. You might be asked to pay a retainer fee, to ensure that the place is kept open for you. This is because the Childminder might have a number of requests for the place and wants some guarantee that you will actually use the place when it becomes vacant.



Choosing a Childminder who is right for you

We suggest that you visit a few Childminders. Do not try to get to know them over the telephone. Arrange to meet with each of them to discuss your needs. Prepare a list of questions and issues that you want to bring up beforehand and make notes as you go along. This will be a useful reference for you later on and also places the whole arrangement on a more organised and professional footing from the start.

NICMA operates a **Childminding Vacancy Service** to help parents find Childminders to meet their individual requirements. This is available as a telephone service or on line at www.nicma.org. The telephone service offers parents the names and contact details of Childminders in their area who have current vacancies. It will then be up to the parent to contact and meet with the Childminders to check if they still have vacancies and decide if they are suitable to meet their needs. The online service works similarly in that the parents can search for Childminders in their preferred area via our website and then can make contact with any they feel may suit (nb. the names available on the web are not from an exhaustive list as not all members choose to advertise online). Further information on actually choosing a Childminder and what questions to ask are given later on in this booklet.

The Family Support website has also been developed to provide information and vacancy detail on a range of childcare provision. <http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk>

Advertising

Some Childminders advertise in local newspapers or shop windows. It is also open to parents to advertise for a Childminder. However, you can not be sure that these Childminders are registered. If you do not obtain a name through NICMA or the Health & Social Care Trust, it is important to ensure that the Childminder is registered, insured and can show you up to date certificates. To ensure the Childminder is registered you can check the public register which can be found at www.familysupportni.gov.uk

Before you visit, spend some time thinking about all the things you are looking for in a Childminder – listed overleaf are some suggested questions:



Questions to ask



First and foremost is your Childminder Registered and Insured?

– this is absolutely vital and a legal requirement. Some other questions:

- Ask to see the Registration Certificate
- What hours does the Childminder work?
- Is she flexible on pick up times?
- What are the charges per hour/week?
- What method of payment is acceptable. eg. Childcare vouchers, cash etc.
- What are the charges for holidays/sickness?
- What training or experience does she have?
- Is she a NICMA Member and is adequate insurance cover provided in relation to her childminding role? Ask to see a current NICMA Membership Certificate
- Ask to see a copy of the current 'Inspection Report'
- Is a retainer fee required to keep a place open?
- Does she have any pets? If so, where are they kept?
- Are there any smokers in the household?
- Are there other people who will be in the house during the time the child is being cared for?



- Does she have a car? Will she take children to/from school/playgroup? If so, does she have appropriate level of insurance?
- Are seat belts/car safety seats fitted? Do they conform to current British Safety Standards?
- What food is provided? What about healthy snacks?
- Are there extra costs for food?
- Is she prepared to cater for special diets?
- What are the ages of her own children?
- What sort of routine does she have?
- How many other children does she care for and what are their ages?
- Is there an outside play area?
- What other visits will be made as part of the days programme?
- Does she have an emergency arrangement with another Childminder or nominated person? If so, try to visit them also
- Are there plenty of books and toys available for all age ranges?
- Is there somewhere quiet for the children to rest?



Inspecting the Home

It is quite reasonable to ask to see those parts of the house and garden in which the children will be cared for, and no Childminder should object to this.

Once you have made a decision

When you have chosen the Childminder you feel is right for you, and if she is a member of NICMA, she will want to talk to you about hours, fees, holidays etc and will ask you to sign a contract stating the childminding arrangements you have both agreed.

Always use a contract. A written contract, even for short term childminding arrangements, provides a safeguard for both parent and Childminder. If you have sorted everything out at the start of the childminding arrangement then, later on, you should not have difficulties which could lead to a build up of resentment. Make sure you receive a copy of the contract.

Settling-in-Period

A two to four week 'settling in' period is recommended at the start of the arrangement. During this time no notice period or notice payment should be required if either party wishes to end the agreement. Fees are due at the contracted rate.

The contract also fulfils another, very important, function. Even though you have now made your choice of Childminder, you will not know each other very well and may still be shy about discussing certain aspects of childcare. Taking an hour to fill in a contract together, perhaps over a cup of tea, gives you both a formal and less threatening way of talking about these issues. It offers an opportunity to talk about things which are not covered in the contract, such as food, potty training or managing children's behaviour. You might have strong feelings about such issues which you want the Childminder to take on board.



**NICMA provide
childminding
members with
model Contracts and
Guidelines for Terms
and Conditions. Ask
to see them.**

You will also be asked to fill in a form giving details of your children's medical history, ie. childhood diseases, inoculations etc. Other information would include your work telephone number, who to contact in an emergency and your Doctor's and Health Visitor's numbers. Please do not be put off by these forms; NICMA members are encouraged to use them to help maintain a professional childminding service. If you need any help or advice or are unsure what you are signing for, please contact NICMA's Information & Advice helpline on 028 9181 1015



Fees and Conditions

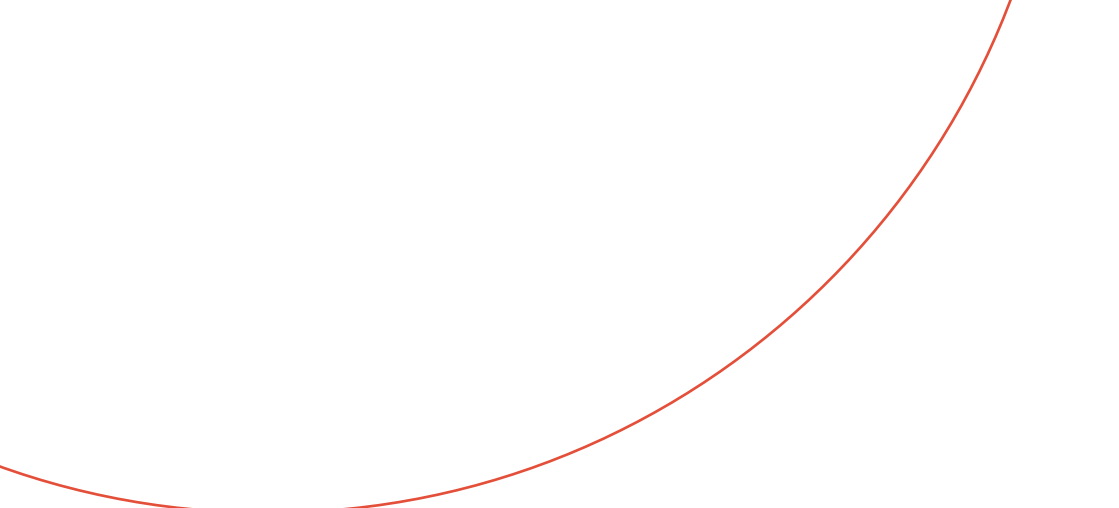
Payment for childcare is one of the most difficult areas to discuss. NICMA publishes annual **Childminder charges** for its members but these are recommendations only and can differ across Northern Ireland. This guide covers all aspects of the Childminders service eg. holiday pay, overtime rates, sick pay etc. If your Childminder is a member of NICMA they will be happy to go through these charges when negotiating the terms of the childminding arrangement.

Please contact NICMA for advice on the current recommended rates for childcare, but note that as Childminders are self employed, they can set their own fees.

Do not be afraid to ask about payment, and about any extra charges. It is not just the hourly or weekly fee that you need to take into account. You will also need to ask about any sickness or holiday payments, overtime rates or extra charges for food and outings. Ask when the Childminder reviews her charges. NICMA's recommended rates are revised annually. Remember that a Childminder's fee has to cover many things: toys and equipment, safety items, heating and lighting, wear and tear, NICMA membership which includes insurance and of course, her own self employed wage. Remember to renew the contract each time conditions change.

Holidays/Paid Time Off It is essential that holiday arrangements (ie. payment of fees, number of days etc. for both the parent/child's holiday and the Childminder's holiday) are clearly set out in the written contract which you will negotiate together. It is important that as much notice as possible is given for holidays although emergencies do happen and provision needs to be made for occasional days off, eg. medical appointments, funerals etc.

Illness Please inform the Childminder, preferably before the normal arrival time, if your child is unwell and remaining at home. If the child goes to the Childminder as usual, remember she may not be able to give the child the individual attention they may require. Always tell your Childminder if the child requires any medication – please provide written instructions and a signed authorisation for any medicine to be administered. Childminders cannot normally undertake the care of sick children ie. those with infectious diseases, excluding coughs and colds. The usual childminding fee will normally be charged if your child cannot attend due to illness.



Giving Notice Once you and the Childminder have signed a contract it is a legally binding document. If you (or the Childminder) want to end the contract or change the arrangements, you (or the Childminder) should give the other notice in writing. If you are unable or unwilling to wait for the notice period to end, you must pay the childminding fees that would have been due during that notice period. If the Childminder is unwilling to work the notice period the contracted fee is still due.

Review your contract NICMA recommends that you and your Childminder review your contract every 6 or 12 months. This gives you both a chance to talk about your child's needs and how things are going.



Permission Remember that your Childminder requires written permission:

- (a) to take your child on outings
- (b) if you allow them to come home from school on their own
- (c) if the Childminder proposes to transport children by car
- (d) to give your child medication

This list is not exhaustive; ask to see the Childminders policies and discuss these so that you are aware of the standard of care that is being provided.

Playgroup/Nursery Attendance It should be noted that if the Childminder is responsible for the child during this time, childminding fees will normally be due.

Help with Childcare Costs You may be able to get help with your childcare fees through the Benefit System.

For Tax Credits - Contact the helpline on 0345 300 3900.





Settling a Child in



**'The
Childminder is
like a second Mum
to my son – she treats
him like one of her
family'.**

Parent, Dromore

Getting to know one another It will take time for parents, children and Childminder to build a relationship. The longer you have before you go back to work, the easier it will be, because you can increase your visits over a period of time. Once you have arranged for the childminding place to be kept open by payment of a retainer, you can visit once or twice for half an hour or an hour, staying with your child, and then leaving them for short periods, perhaps while you go shopping. Say goodbye to the child and tell them very clearly that you will be coming back. When they see that you do come back they will feel happier about being left for longer periods.

Your Childminder will probably have a lot of experience of settling children in and you should discuss this and then work out a plan between you. Children, in particular toddlers, are often upset at first and this is only natural. If the problem persists for more than a couple of weeks you will need to discuss it again with your Childminder.

When your child starts going to the Childminder regularly, you may find that their behaviour will be unsettled for a while; this is quite common during the 'settling in' period. Each child will take their own time to become comfortable with the situation.



**“Real, personal
relationships are vitally
important, especially to
babies & toddlers – if babies &
toddlers are not to be cared for by
their families in their own homes, they
need an extension of that rather than
something different. Purpose built
premises with tiny lavatories & special
toys may look like lovely fun, but they
are not a lot to do with family life.”**

**Dr Penelope Leach,
Child Psychologist**





Keeping a good relationship with your Childminder



“When a parent/ Childminder relationship is working well, it comes closer to that of an extended family than any other form of daycare”.

**Dr Penelope Leach,
Child Psychologist**

Maintaining a good relationship

In order for your child to feel happy and secure, it is important that parents and Childminder work together. It is very distressing for a child who is moved from carer to carer when childcare arrangements break down because of disagreements between the adults involved.

The obvious piece of advice is to be open about your concerns and to talk things through with your Childminder rather than allowing any resentments to build up.

You should try to set aside a time to talk with your Childminder when it is convenient for both of you. Mornings are often difficult – you will be in a rush to get to work and there will be lots of comings and goings at her house. Evenings may offer more opportunities. You will rarely need to sit down for a long discussion but you will want to know what your child has been doing and you will often have family information to pass on to your Childminder.



Behaviour Management

The physical punishment of young children is an area over which parents and Childminders might disagree. NICMA operates a 'No Smacking' policy for its members as does the Health & Social Care Trust who register Childminders and we ask that Childminders never agree to a parent's request that they should smack.

All Childminders will have a Policy on "Behaviour Management" which they must discuss and agree with parents.



In order for your child to feel happy and secure, it is important that parents and Childminder work together. It is very distressing for a child who is moved from carer to carer when childcare arrangements break down because of disagreements between the adults involved.

The obvious piece of advice is to be open about your concerns and to talk things through with your Childminder rather than allowing any resentments to build up.

The Emotions of Childminding

Daycare for young children may be an emotional topic for parents. Many people assume that children will be unhappy at being apart from their parents and that parents will feel guilty about going back to work and paying someone else to look after their children. The reality is that neither of these things need happen.

Most young children thrive on new relationships and environments and if you have done your best to find and settle your child into suitable daycare then she will benefit from the new worlds which are opened to her.

Many (but by no means all) parents may feel guilty, many more will be sad at missing out on the delight of their child's early years. But it is important to remind yourself that, you (and your partner) are still the most important people to your child. No one can replace you and a Childminder would never want to. They are often, misleadingly, called 'substitute mothers' but most Childminders see themselves as professional carers in a family setting and would be horrified at the suggestion that they can in any way be a 'substitute' for a parent.

Having said that, children can build strong bonds with their Childminders, particularly when they are cared for from a young age. This is not a bad thing, children need to build a stable relationship with those around them and this is an important reason for choosing the 'right Childminder' and keeping her for as long as possible.



You might decide that you have made the wrong decision. Your Childminder, equally, might decide that she cannot continue to care for your child. If you have explored all the possible reasons for the problem together and are convinced that you will not be able to solve the problem, then you should look for another Childminder. If your child is clearly unhappy at the Childminder's home then you should not hesitate to remove her, making sure that you end the arrangement having given the notice agreed in your contract. If you are concerned about the quality of care offered by a Childminder then you should discuss it with the registering Social Worker.

No guide can hope to cover all the circumstances which might arise in a very individual and personal form of care like childminding.

If nothing else, we hope to have convinced you of the importance of talking everything through, clearly, with your Childminder – many problems can be avoided or solved in this way.

If you want specific help or advice on childminding then, please feel free to call our **Information and Advice Help Line** and we will try to help you where possible.





16-18 Mill Street
NEWTOWNARDS
Co Down
BT23 4LU

CHILDMINDING INFORMATION AND ADVICE HELP LINE

To help with any child care queries

CHILDMINDING VACANCY SERVICE

To match up your child care needs with a Childminder

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Thursday 9.30 am – 4.00 pm
Friday 9.30 am – 1.00 pm

Telephone: 028 9181 1015

Fax: 028 9182 0921

E-mail: info@nicma.org

Web Site: www.nicma.org



NICMA 2015

Promoting Quality Home-based Childcare
Company Limited by Guarantee

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Charity No: XR 42365