

Childminders

So what is a registered childminder? -

“A person who looks after one or more children under the age of 12, for more than two hours per day, on domestic premises (usually their home) for reward (payment)’

Children (NI) Order 1995.

There is over 3,500 registered childminders in Northern Ireland offering over 17,000 childcare places for both pre-school and after school children. They can be registered to look after **up to 6 children** between the ages of 0 to 12, including their own children.

What Does Registration Mean?

A childminder must, by law, register with their local Health & Social Care Trust. To achieve registration they will be assessed to make sure they are in a position to offer a quality childminding environment. They must comply with standards of safety, equipment and the number of children they care for. References and health checks are required as are police checks on all individuals in the household over the age of 10. The Trusts are responsible for keeping a register of all registered childminders in their area and will provide interested parents with this list.

NICMA

NICMA is the Northern Ireland Childminding Association. They are a regional charity and membership organisation which works to support childminders, parents and children. If your chosen childminder is a member of NICMA they will have agreed to work towards the 10 standards of the NICMA Quality childminding charter.

- Take a professional approach to registered childminding
- Manage children’s behaviour (appropriately)
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Respect confidentiality
- Promote children’s learning and development
- Work in partnership with parents

- Keep children safe
- Know about nutrition
- Have good business practices
- Seek support

Finding a childminder

NICMA is a good starting point for finding a quality childminder for your child. Your local Health and Social Care Trust also holds a register. Some childminders advertise in papers or shop windows. Ask trustworthy friends if they know or use a childminder. It is important that you take time to find the right person for you and your child. It is best if you plan well in advance to give you time to make this very important decision. You should:

- Visit a number of childminders
- Prepare a list of questions in advance
- Take notes of observations and responses to your questions

Questions to ask?

Before the visits think carefully about what you are looking for in a childminder and also consider some of the practical aspect as well. Some suggestions are:

- Insurance, ask for an up to date insurance certificate
- If the children will be in her car ask for proof of car insurance
- Ask to see their current Registration Certificate – this is their licence to practice as a childminder
- Does she belong to a Childminding Association?
- How long has she worked as a childminder?
- What training/experience does she have?
- How long does she intend to continue to work as a childminder?
- How many other children does she care for?
- Can she give you details of parents you can contact about her services?
- What are her working hours?

- What are her rates?
- Is there a retainer fee required to keep a place open?
- What about holidays/sickness?
- Are there any animals in the house, and if so, where are they kept?
- Does anyone in the house smoke, if so, where do they smoke?
- Who else will be in the house when the children are there?
- What are her views on food? e.g. healthy or junk
- Are there facilities for outdoor play?
- What are her views/techniques on managing behaviour?

These are some suggestions for you to consider you may have others of your own. You may for example wish to see other parts of the home that your child will use, the bathroom, kitchen or play area. What about sleeping arrangements and facilities for small children?

Contracts

Although this may seem over the top a contract in writing makes things easier for everyone. It clarifies everything and ensures there is no misunderstanding about what has been said.

Some things you should expect to see on a contract are:

- Charges, either hourly, daily, weekly or monthly
- Extra charges, if any – meals, nappies, outings
- Hours that the childminder is available to you
- Rates, if they change say for week-end, evening work or public/bank holidays
- Fees, if any, when the childminder is on holiday
- Are there any discounts for more than one child?
- Child sickness policy
- Notice periods

Once you and the childminder have signed the contract it is a legally binding document. You and your childminder should arrange to review the contract every 6/12 months.

Finally

➤ Permission

Your childminder requires written permission from you to:

- 1) take your child on special outings with groups
- 2) allow them to walk to/from the childminder's home
- 3) transport your child in a car
- 4) give your child medication

➤ Unhappy child

If your child is unhappy with the childminder and you she have been unable to resolve this then you should move the child. Remember if you do this without proper notice the childminder is still entitled to be paid for the notice period.

➤ Help with Childcare Costs

If you use a registered childminder you may be able to get help with your childcare fees through the Working Tax Credit system.

If you would like help with any other family issue, Please ring **Parents Advice Centre** for guidance and support on **Freephone 0808 8010 722** or email parents@pachelp.org