

***Guidelines for Quality in Family Based Care
A Guide for Childminders***

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1. Definition

Childminders provide full-time or part-time day care in their homes for up to six children of all ages which number includes the Childminders' own children who are under six years of age. Regulations apply to Childminders caring for four or more unrelated children who are under six years of age.

2. Role of the Childminder

The Childminders role is to provide a loving, comfortable home environment for the child/ren, where their physical, emotional, recreational, developmental and educational needs are met, by offering love, security, food, time, warmth, attention, outings, routine, stimulation and protection, and by sharing in play and providing appropriate materials and toys for play and learning activity.

Central to the role is an intimate and open relationship with the children's parents or guardians.

3. Tasks involved in Childminding

1. Becoming self-employed
2. Offering a professional service to parents
3. Caring for children
4. Caring for self and own family
5. Managing children, time, money, home
6. Educating children
7. Educating self
8. Organising planning and reviewing
9. Negotiating with children and parents
10. Communicating and co-operating with Childminder's own household members, parents, statutory visitors, Childminding groups and the wider community
11. Keeping records of children, attendance, income and expenditure

4. Responsibilities

The work of Childminding brings with it the following responsibilities, particularly compliance with current statutory regulations and guidance.

- The Childminder is a self-employed person, with a Duty of Care to the children for whom s/he undertakes sole responsibility while they are in his/her care. If caring for or intending to care for four or more non-related children who are under six years of age, then notification to local Health Board is required.
- S/he and all members of her/his household must be suitable for assuming the responsibility of Childminding in terms of health, freedom from conviction of any offence involving a child or illegal substances.
- The actual demarcation place, where handing over responsibility from parent to Childminder and back occurs, must be identified and its significance understood and respected by parents, children and Childminder. This is important, because at collecting time, most children indulge in attention-seeking behaviour which can have dangerous consequences. The Childminder maintains responsibility and authority within that demarcation and the parent assumes responsibility beyond it.
- The Childminder must
 - a) have the necessary training/experience to provide high quality child care
 - b) have written policies in place with regard to child welfare and protection, behaviour management and respecting diversity
 - c) ensure a high standard of safety and hygiene including a non-smoking environment
 - d) provide a variety of appropriate play and learning materials
 - e) provide insurance cover to protect the interests of the children in the event of accident or injury, and to indemnify self
 - f) have procedures in place and back-up arrangements in the event of illness, fire, accident or other emergency

- g) keep records on all minded children, covering contact phone numbers and addresses of parents, relatives and G.P., details of immunisation, special dietary or other requirements, attendance and authorisation for collection
- h) have a contract in place with parents, so that the quality of the relationship between Childminder, Parents and Children will not be impaired by misunderstandings about money
- i) liaise closely with parents on a regular basis with regard to the child/ren's contentment, development and welfare

5. Suitability of Person

A Childminder must be a person who genuinely likes children and is experienced in their care and development, in good general health, of good character and integrity, with the maturity to undertake the job, an awareness of the Duty of Care and of the responsibilities undertaken by a self-employed professional working alone.

A Childminder must be free from conviction of any offence in respect of his/her own or any other child/ren or any illegal substance.

A Childminder must have an understanding of children's rights and needs, and recognise and respect their individual characters, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, religion or social class. S/he must be sympathetic to the parent's wishes and share the parenting in an open, non-judgmental way. S/he must understand his/her significance as a role model for children, requiring very high standards of integrity and self control.

A Childminder must understand that early childhood is a time of enormous learning and s/he is therefore an educator as well as a carer. S/he is a window through which children come to view the world and should view his/her personal development in this context.

A Childminder should have a good knowledge of a child's dietary requirements and hygiene in food preparation and storage.

6. Recommendations

Childminders are recommended to

- undertake training in child care, development and behaviour, the provision of various types of play, play and educational material, music, art and drama
- hold a current First Aid Certificate
- understand the importance of language acquisition
- be informed of up-to-date quality child care practice and issues
- develop themselves through hobbies and activities which provide recreation with adults
- be aware of the professional support available from Childminders Advisory Officers and other statutory personnel and particularly from membership of *Childminding Ireland*

7. Suitability of Premises

The Childminder's home should

- have a telephone
- be fitted with smoke detector alarms throughout the home whether areas are accessible to children or not
- comply with relevant planning laws and bye-laws
- be clean, well ventilated and organised for children's comfort and safety
- have external doors secure to prevent children exiting or unauthorised persons entering
- have internal door keys removed
- be safely heated with no open fires, portable or open flame

heaters or heating systems that may emit harmful gases, fumes or odours

- maintain all heat-emitting surfaces controlled or protected by a fixed guard or thermostatically controlled to ensure that surface temperature does not exceed 50 degrees centigrade
- have adequate play space and separate sleeping space for the number of children including the Childminder's own
- have safety glazing or suitable protective film and locks on low-level windows and glass doors, and locks on upper floor windows with due regard to fire safety
- have child-proof door and cupboard locks fitted as necessary to prevent inappropriate unsupervised access by children
- Stairs should be fitted with a child-proof gate.
- Floor coverings should not be worn or damaged and should be easily cleaned.
- Polished floors, rugs and mats should be avoided.
- Electrical sockets should be fitted with child-proof covers and electrical installations and equipment must be in safe working order. The use of electrical adaptors and extension cables should be avoided.
- Furniture should not have sharp edges, or be excessively worn or damaged.

Kitchen

Of necessity, the kitchen is accessible to children in a Family Day Care Setting, but it should not be used as a playroom during cooking operations. Particular attention should be paid to cleanliness, and spills should be wiped up immediately to prevent accidents.

The Kitchen should be equipped with:

- A cooker, fitted with a pot guardrail, a fridge of sufficient capacity and organized for the separation of cooked and raw food
- A constant supply of hot and cold running water
- Fire blanket and fire extinguisher
- Sufficient power sockets
- A specific area set aside for bottle feed preparation and sterilization process
- Cleaning equipment and materials and small electrical appliances must be in a locked cupboard out of reach of young children
- Floor space, to be kept clear and storage provided for brushes, ironing board, laundry etc.
- A First Aid box, to be maintained, clearly marked and locked out of reach of children

Sleeping Area

- Appropriate sleeping accommodation must be provided for each child under 6 years of age in full day care i.e. for more than 3.5 hours in any day. Buggies and beanbags are not suitable as regular sleeping places
- Bed linen, blankets (and pillows for older children) must be clean and properly aired and changed regularly, or as required, each child having his/her own
- Cots should be easily cleaned and of safe construction
- Electric blankets or hot water bottles should never be used
- Pillows, duvets or eiderdowns should not be used for children under 2 years of age

- Sleeping room temperature should be maintained at 18 degrees centigrade
- Sleeping children should be checked regularly at 10 minute intervals including when a baby sound monitor is in use

Bathroom

- A high standard of hygiene should be maintained by regular, thorough cleaning of bathroom equipment, floor etc.
- Family toiletries, razors, make-up, nail polish, aerosols, medicines, etc. must not be left in the bathroom/toilet used by children
- Anti-bacterial soap and disposable towels should be used
- Each child should have a personal face-cloth and tooth-brush with appropriate storage
- Each child using a potty should have his/her own potty, which should be cleaned and disinfected after each use
- A step-up to the toilet and child's toilet seat should be used appropriately
- Children must be attended appropriately while using the bathroom

Nappy Changing Area

A suitable area should be designated solely for the purpose of changing nappies with a secure container for soiled nappies and hot and cold water supply with antibacterial hand-wash and disposable towels close by. Used nappies must be disposed of in line with local authority requirements.

Garden

- If no garden or outdoor play space is available, children should be taken regularly to parks and playgrounds

- Garden play must always be supervised and the garden must be secure, preventing access by unauthorised persons, or exit by the child/ren
- With due regard to children's ability to climb, nothing should be piled against walls
- Clothes lines should be well above children's reach and trailing ropes, cables or wires should be removed
- Where the garden is very large or on a farm, a limited area should be made secure so that supervision of children is practical
- Garden play equipment such as swings, see-saws, etc. should be of very solid construction, with no sharp edges, securely set into the ground in concrete
- Garden tools, ladders, lawn mowers, petrol and garden chemicals should be kept in a locked store
- Glass-houses, cold frames, ornamental ponds, swimming pools, water butts or any such hazard must be securely fenced off
- Plants, trees and shrubs in the garden should be identified, as being non-toxic and any toxic varieties should be removed

Pets

- Parents should be advised of any pets in the Childminders household.
- Animals and children should not be left together unsupervised
- Attention must be given to prevent pets soiling outdoor play areas or grass, and any sandpit play areas should be covered when not in use

Toys and Recreation

- Play equipment should be of sound construction to high safety standards, plentiful, age-appropriate and of a wide variety and discarded when broken or damaged, and should be cleaned regularly

- Attention must be given to the need for older children to engage in real activities such as making things, fixing things, using real tools, growing plants and helping with appropriate household and garden tasks with supervision
- Books should be in plentiful supply, suitable to all age groups and the local library used where practicable. The importance of reading to children is stressed
- Musical instruments should be available
- Appropriate furniture, space and lighting should be available to children for doing home-work
- T.V., videos and computers can be used as an adjunct to play and activities but not as a substitute for these or for interaction with the Childminder. Parents' wishes should be sought and respected
- Internet access should always be supervised
- The Childminder should be aware of books, magazines or videos in the household, which are unsuitable for children and take steps to ensure that they are not accessible
- The Childminder must ensure that the children respect the property of other members of the household

The Car

Children must never be left unattended in a car - even for very short periods - it is dangerous, often with fatal results

- Insurance cover must be adequate for number of minded children.
- Specific cover is required, when driving children is part of the Childminding contract.
- The car must be roadworthy, in compliance with statutory regulation for motor vehicles, regularly serviced and equipped with seat belts or appropriate car seats for each passenger.

Particular care should be taken to ensure that car seats are correctly fitted and that age appropriate booster seats are used in conjunction with seat belts for smaller children.

- Child-proof door locks should be fitted and in use.
- Car keys should be kept safely out of children's reach.

Outings

- The age range of the children in family day care should allow for outings at least during part of the day.
- Insurance cover for outings should be in place.
- Judgement must be exercised in the number of children who can be taken out together, depending on their ages and stages of development.
- Particular attention should be paid to the children's safety
 - In traffic
 - Near water – ref. Water Safety Guidelines
 - On steep or slippery ground
 - Untoward approaches by strangers

8. Discipline

- *Childminding Ireland* adopted a No Smack Policy in 1989 and recommends that children should not be shouted at, frightened, humiliated or threatened.
- Children become self-disciplined principally by having their needs readily met, by observing self-discipline and consistency in those who care for them, and above all, by receiving love and approval and respect from those around them.
- Time must be made to allow quality communication between Parents and Childminder to iron out any difficulties that arise. This should be set aside apart from "leaving" and "collecting" time, as most children indulge in attention-seeking behaviour at collecting time.

9. *General Guidance for Childminders*

Childminders, in undertaking sole responsibility for the child/ren in their care must ensure that attention to their safety and well-being is on-going. The Childminder must never do anything or fail to do anything which could put the children at risk of accident or illness, or which would interfere with their comfort and safety. This must be balanced with their need to explore. A Childminder must not leave the child/ren in the care of any other person, except by prior agreement with the parents or in an emergency situation.

Family based day care by definition requires that the child/ren come to know the Childminders home as an extension of their home with the freedom and privileges, comfort and security which the word "home" implies. This is worthy of note, because from the child/ren's point of view, it is peculiar to know that their own home (often nearby) is inaccessible during the day. Some personal things, clothes, books, toys, etc. should remain permanently at the Childminders.

Childminders require the co-operation and/or participation of their own family in sharing their home with minded children and whatever age his/her own children are, careful attention must be given to their need for family time.

10. *Dispensing of medicines*

WARNING

No medication whatever, whether prescription, over-the-counter non-prescription, herbal remedies, vitamin supplements, teething soothing preparation, ointments, creams, inhalants or any application for internal or external use may be administered to a minded child unless a written prescription from a medical doctor with clear written instruction as to dosage, frequency, application or use is supplied and retained by the Childminder for reference.

Please refer to your insurance policy for details of cover when administering medication.

11. *Support Systems and Organisations for Children and Families*

Childminders should be aware that many organisations exist to help children, parents and families at times of crisis or with long term difficulties.

Many voluntary organisations and support groups have published useful guidance material. Information may be obtained from:

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

Tel: (01) 453 0355

12. Cot Death

The following notes are from SIDS and should be updated and included together with guidance for prevention.

Every year in Ireland a number of sudden infant deaths take place when children are in the care of professional or volunteer Childminders.

Carers need to carry out a number of important duties when a child in their care dies suddenly and unexpectedly. All carers should be trained in how to resuscitate a child if he/she stops breathing - this procedure is best carried out by trained people.

1. If you think that a child in your care has stopped breathing or may be dead, a trained person should immediately commence resuscitation.

Phone 999, 112 or the GP, and request immediate assistance.

Be aware that the Gardaí may also arrive – under the Coroners Act of 1962, the Gardaí are required to notify the coroner and as

the Coroners agents, are required to inquire into the circumstances of any sudden deaths, where the deceased has not been seen or treated by a doctor within one month prior to the date of death, or for any death for which a medical certificate as to the cause of death is not procurable.

2. Contact the infant's family immediately. Advise them that their child is seriously ill and that you have called an ambulance/doctor. If the ambulance/doctor wish to immediately take the child to hospital and this is before the parents arrive, an adult should (if possible) accompany the infant on the journey to the hospital.

3. When contacting the parents, and if their child has already been taken to a hospital, let them know which hospital and let the hospital know of the parents' intended arrival. Tell the parents what has happened and answer any questions they may have. Suggest to the parents that, if possible, a relative or friend should accompany them on their journey to the hospital or to your premises.
4. Gently explain to any other children in your care that the infant is not well and an ambulance or doctor is coming to take care of him or her. An adult should stay with the other children and continue their daily routine. If possible, provide the children with a separate area in which to play. Answer the children's questions honestly and simply and reassure them that an adult will be staying with them until their parents come to collect them.
5. When the parents arrive, immediately bring them to where the child is/was. Allow them some private time to be with and hold their child.
Explain to the parents that because their child died suddenly and unexpectedly the Gardaí may call to visit them and that as the carer, you will also be asked some questions. Parents usually want to know the details of the events surrounding their child's death. Let them know that you are willing to give them all the details and to answer any questions they may have. Be aware that parents may wish to visit you again and again to go over the events. You may also have to cope with an emotional outburst from parents so you may need extra support yourself at this distressing time.
6. Ensure that the child's clothes and personal belongings are not thrown out. Advise the family that they are available for collection at any time.

Do not arrange to have them laundered unless parental permission is given.

7. Keep the area where the child was sleeping (cot, mattress, play pen etc) intact, this may be required by the Gardaí. Do not discard the bedding and sleeping area (cot, mattress, play pen etc.) in which the child was sleeping, this may be required by researchers at a later date.

8. When the other parents arrive to collect their children, privately explain to them what happened. Discuss their child's reaction to the infant's death with them and reassure them that you will let them know of any questions the children may raise in the future.
9. Contact ISIDA's National Office and request them to supply you with copies of their booklet of information on SIDS bereavement 'A Precious Past, A Hopeful Future'. Provide all the parents of children in your care with a copy of this booklet.
10. Reassure the children that no one is to blame for the child's death.
11. The other children in your care will need an explanation about the infant's death and the events that took place. How this is done should first be discussed with their parents. It is very important to give an explanation that can be built on at a later stage and not answers that have to be 'unlearned' (see ISIDA's booklet, 'A Precious Past, A Hopeful Future', section 'Children and Grief'). Be aware that children's reactions to, and perceptions of, death are dependent on their age, experience, personality and family circumstances. If a child's behaviour is a cause of concern, advise the parents.

13. *Quality Indicators in Family-based Childcare*

- Quality in family-based childminding is highly dependent on the personal qualities in the Childminder who usually works as a sole self-employed caregiver. These would include genuine appreciation of children, warmth, commitment, integrity and high self-esteem.
- Childminder trained to understand the importance of the early months and years and have an understanding of physical and cognitive development and the activities which support these
- Childminder facilitating children's need for fun, recreation, relaxation, risk-taking and socialisation
- Mutually satisfying communication with parents of minded children
- Mutual respect between parents and Childminder
- An individual holistic care plan for each child
- Networking with other Childminders
- Membership of professional support organisation
- Maximum number of children under six years = 6 (including Childminder's own children)

- An age spread including the Childminder's own children to enable empathy rather than competition and to facilitate regular special outings and routine local outings to shops and for walks
- No more than one infant (under 12 months)
- Regulation of adult:child ratio should be flexible enough to accommodate care of twins or triplets, to avoid separation of siblings, and to prevent breakdown of an existing placement due to birth of new baby to the childminder or sibling to a minded child
- Adequate indoor play space and access to all common areas of home
- Secure outdoor play space and planting garden
- Participation by children in real household activity which can be creatively exploited as learning opportunities, e.g. Understanding mass, volume, space, sorting, measuring, counting
- Range of well maintained and replaced toys, books and project materials
- Children's room for projects, storing materials, painting, hobbies, musical instruments and relaxing
- Approach to include planning and flexibility
- Regular review involving observation of children and consultation with parents and children

NOTES



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