

childcare

advice & information

0800 028 3008

www.employersforchildcare.org

Choosing a Childminder

A registered childminder is " a person who looks after 1 or more children under the age of 12, for more than 2 hours per day, on domestic premises, for reward" (Children (NI) Order 1995). Registered Childminders are self-employed carers based in their own home and must be registered with their local HSST (Health and Social Services Trust). Annual inspections are carried out by the HSST on a childminder and their home to ensure a safe environment. References and health checks are required, as are police checks on all individuals in the household over the age of ten.

A parent using a registered childminder can claim financial help through the childcare element of Tax Credits for working parents (if eligible), and/or Childcare Voucher schemes.

Childminders may be registered to care for up to 6 children between the ages of 0-12 years - 3 children under 5 and 3 children over 5 (this number includes their own children).

Childminders can provide full or part-time care for children not yet attending school, as well as before and after school care for school-aged children. Childminders generally work all year round, although some work term-time only or just in the school holidays. Childminders can provide a wide range of activities for children, such as outings and visits to parent and toddler groups and libraries. Most childminders are happy to provide meals and are able to cater for any special dietary requirements. Some childminders provide childcare at weekends and a few may offer overnight care but you should discuss all these issues with the childminder at your first meeting.

Childminders are self employed and set their own rates, usually paid on an hourly basis, according to the service they provide and at a rate negotiated with the parent - check with NICMA for the current average hourly rate for Northern Ireland.

HOW DO I FIND A CHILDMINDER

Lists of childminders are available from 2 sources:

" Your local HSST Early Years Team who are the registering body for all forms of childcare (contact details available from Employers For Childcare).

" NICMA (Northern Ireland Childminding Association) who are the umbrella body for childminders. NICMA is a voluntary sector organisation with charitable status which provides a range of services for its members and parents. Once a childminder is registered they can then choose to become a member of NICMA. NICMA childminders have

access to additional support regarding their childcare practice and their business practice, they also hold relevant public liability insurance (currently, approximately 65% of all childminders in NI are members of NICMA). NICMA's Childminding Vacancy Service Tel: 028 9181 1015 is open 9 - 4 Mon - Thurs, 9 - 1 Fri. Information is also available on www.nicma.org or email info@nicma.org

It can be useful to go to NICMA in the first instance as they hold their member's details on a computerised database. They can do a postcode search for childminders in your area and carry out a vacancy search.

If there are no suitable childminders or childminders with no vacancies, from this search then that is the time to consult the main register held by the HSST. Quite often these lists are not searchable via computer and will be sent out as a list of all the childminders in the trust area and it is just a question of working your way through it.

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NETWORKS

NICMA also have a number of childminding networks across Northern Ireland which are an approved formal group of 20 - 30 registered childminders who are recruited, assessed, monitored and supported by a dedicated Network Co-ordinator. Network childminders work together as a team led by a co-ordinator, supporting each other through network meetings, ongoing training, self-investment and workshops to the standards of NICMA's Quality Childminding Charter.

Network Co-ordinators have specialist local knowledge of the childminders in their group, current information on vacancies and may have fore-knowledge of childcare places due to become vacant in the near future. Their contact details are as follows:

" Downpatrick Area Childminding network, Co-ordinator Mary Maechling 028 4372 5307 (home) 07752962682 (mob)
www.childmindingnetworkdownpatrick.org

" Limavady Area Childminding Network, Co-ordinator Cathy Todd 028 9181 1015

" Clogher Valley SureStart and Shankill SureStart have also developed Childminding Networks. SureStart is a Government initiative to enhance services for children under 4, and their families, in areas of greatest need through better access to family support, advice on parenting, health services and early learning. Users of their services must register with the

SureStart Scheme before they can access a facility. They must live in the catchment area of the scheme and they will be allocated a place depending on need and availability. Typically placements are for short term and respite childcare only.

NICMA can offer parents advice and guidance on developing a good working relationship with their childminder. They produce a 'With Parents in Mind' information pack which covers all aspects of childminding including the registration process, how to choose a childminder, sample contracts, childminding fees etc.

A childminder is ideal if:

- You need flexible care because you work irregular hours which don't correspond to a normal 7.30am - 6pm nursery day
- You want your child to be cared for in a home environment with a single carer
- You have children of different ages and want them to be cared for together
- You want childcare that offers continuity from the newborn to after-school stages

A childminder may not be so suitable if:

- You are not comfortable with the childminder's approach to childcare. Ensure that you are aware of, and are comfortable with, their approach to childcare
- You find it hard to insist on what you want because the childminder is based in their own home. Check how your provider will accommodate your

wishes, for example in behaviour management and in using treats and rewards.

Always check:

- That the childminder is registered with their local HSST and has a public liability insurance certificate
- A current first aid certificate (although this is not a requirement of registration)
- That their home is a safe environment with plenty of play and learning opportunities
- That if your child will be travelling by car, the childminder has properly-fitted car seats and is adequately insured
- That the contract - which you've both agreed, signed and have individual copies of - covers hours, pay, illness, holidays etc (contact NICMA for more details about contracts)

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Questions to ask:

Ask to see the childminders registration certificate, public liability insurance certificate and details of any training they have completed. A good childminder will be only too happy to share this information with you.

How long have they been childminding, how long do they intend to continue, and can they give you the names and telephone numbers of other parents they work with so you can follow up references?

What are the ages of the other children they look after - including their own - and which ones will be there at the same time as your child?

Book one of your preliminary visits when these children are there, to see how well they mix with each other.

What is the childminder's routine?

How often do they take the children out, and where?

What age-relevant activities will they do with your child?
What kind of food do they provide?

What other adults will be in the house, and how do they feel about the arrangement?

Who would the childminder call on in an emergency - for example, if they had to take one child to hospital, who would care for the others?

What is their attitude and policy on

key issues like sleep, potty-training and setting boundaries on behaviour?

Discuss and agree on the approach to be taken with your child.

How does your childminder fit in household chores?

Do they shop, or take other children to school while your child is in their care?

How often, and how, will it affect your child's day?

FAMILY MEMBERS AS CHILDMINDERS

Under the Children (NI) Order 1995 those exempt from registration include '...a relative (defined as) (a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, step-parent and by affinity) of the child'. This means that parents who make the personal choice to leave children with relatives cannot claim financial help with childcare costs through the childcare element of Tax Credits or childcare vouchers.

However, a relative, such as a grandparent for example, can become registered as a childminder so long as they look after at least one other non-related child. This means that the grandparent's own grown-up children will also be able to claim financial help with childcare costs through the childcare element of Tax Credits if eligible, or use childcare vouchers.

OTHER REGISTERED CHILDCARE OPTIONS

There are other registered childcare options for working parents to consider as well as childminders, such as Day Nurseries or an after school club (depending on the age of the child). We have a database of Day Nurseries, after schools clubs, playgroups, Parent & Toddler groups etc and a search can be run based on your postcode to find what childcare facilities are available in your area.

We also have a 'Choosing Childcare' booklet which sets out the different registered childcare options available, and the pros and cons of each for working parents.

For further information please contact Employers For Childcare:

Childcare Advice and Information Helpline:
t: 0800 028 3008

w: www.employersforchildcare.org