

Choosing a Childminder

Introduction

Childminders must follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) which sets standards for the learning, development and care of your child from birth to 5 years old. Many childminders in Middlesbrough are registered to deliver Achieving Two Year Olds and the Nursery Education Grant which follows the EYFS framework.

Many Childminders begin childminding when they are parents with young children of their own. This means many of their skills as carers will come from their own experience as parents, as well as their training. It is useful to spend some time talking to any potential Childminder about their approach to childcare, so that you know that you share common views. Good Childminders expect you to ask questions and will be happy to answer them.

Remember that if you phone during the day the Childminder is likely to have children around, so it's best to ask if it's a good time to talk and keep your questions short. If the Childminder seems suitable, arrange a time and day to visit.

Questions to ask

This is not an exhaustive list of questions but gives an idea of the types of things to ask or consider when choosing a Childminder.

- How long have you been a Childminder?
- What relevant training have you done?
- How many children do you look after, how old are they and how long have you been looking after them?
- Do you have any children of your own? How old are they?
- Do you have pets?
- Do you and the children regularly go on outings during the week?
- Can you describe a typical childminding day or week?
- What arrangements do you have for meals and snacks?
- How do you encourage good behaviour?
- What do you consider unacceptable behaviour, and how do you deal with it?
- Which festivals and special occasions do you celebrate and how?

Don't worry about asking these questions. You may feel it's impolite to ask, but you are within your rights to find out how your child will be treated. There are no right or wrong answers, but the best Childminder for you will be the one whose answers closely correspond with your views.

Things to look out for when visiting a Childminder

- Are the children calm, safe, happy and busy?
- Do the children play and talk together?
- Is the Childminder listening to the children and answering them carefully?
- Are there lots of fun activities planned to help children learn and play?
- Are there plenty of clean toys and equipment for children to use?
- Are the premises clean, well-kept and safe for children with a fun outside play area (or will the child go to parks and other places regularly)?
- Ask to look around the rooms and outside play space
- Where will your child rest?

Practicalities

- Childminders must be registered with and inspected by Ofsted. Ask to see their Ofsted registration and insurance certificates and latest inspection report.
- What would you do in an emergency involving yourself or one of the children?
- Do you ever take the children out in the car, and if so, do you have suitable insurance cover, seat belts and car seats for this?
- What do you do about holidays – both ours and yours?
- Can I see any references from parents?
- Do you have up-to-date first aid training?
- Have you got a food hygiene certificate?
- What hours are you open?
- How much do you charge? What does this include? Food? Nappies?
- You will need to consider back-up care for your child to cover emergency situations and holidays. Discuss the possible alternatives with your Childminder.

What is expected?

Childminders are self employed and negotiate their own terms and conditions.

- Your Childminder should ask you to complete a contract to agree things like fees, hours and arrangements for holidays and sickness. This provides a safeguard for you and the Childminder. It is important that you read over and agree the terms of the contract in advance, as these are the guidelines by which you and the Childminder will work in future.
- Childminders are required to keep simple records on the children in their care and will need your co-operation in this. It is your responsibility to ensure that the Childminder has accurate, up-to-date information about you and your child.
- A settling in period is advisable, during which time your child can become gradually accustomed to being in the care of the Childminder. This is also an opportunity for everyone involved to try out the arrangement and decide whether it is going to work. The normal conditions of notice do not usually apply during the trial period of the contract.
- Childminders are expected to treat all children and families with equal concern and should respect a child's religious and cultural background. They will expect a similar respect from parents using their service.
- It is important that parents abide by the conditions agreed. You should bring and collect your child on time, and make sure your child has everything they need. Any changes to normal routine or problems arising should be discussed as soon as possible. Regular communication and mutual respect is the key to a successful and happy arrangement.