

# Parents Guide to Choosing a Childminder



If you are a parent looking for a Childminder, you probably have a good idea of what you want – a place that is safe, happy, and loving, where children can learn and have fun. At the same time, childcare must also meet your needs. Childcare should be convenient, affordable, and offer care when you need it. Finding childminding care that has the quality and convenience you want—at a reasonable cost—can be a real challenge. This guide is designed by South Dublin County Childcare Committee to assist you in making informed choices.

## Step 1 – Get Organised

Finding a quality Childminder is going to take a little homework. If possible, begin gathering basic information a few months before you think you will need childcare.

- Ask your friends, family, neighbours and co-workers for recommendations.
- Contact South Dublin County Childcare Committee on (01) 4570122 for names and contact details of childminders in your area and any other useful information they may have.
- Place an advertisement in the local newspaper or in local places of business.
- Reply to Childminder advertisements.

## Step 2 – Conduct a Telephone Interview

Save time and energy by using the phone to narrow your search. It is a good idea to contact a number of different childminders. To get the best response avoid calling at busy times such as arrival, departure, or lunchtime. Take time – Don't rush into any arrangement, explain your childminding needs. Arrange to meet a few Childminders in your area. Before meeting the Childminder prepare a list of questions and topics you want to discuss.

## Step 3 – Make a Visit

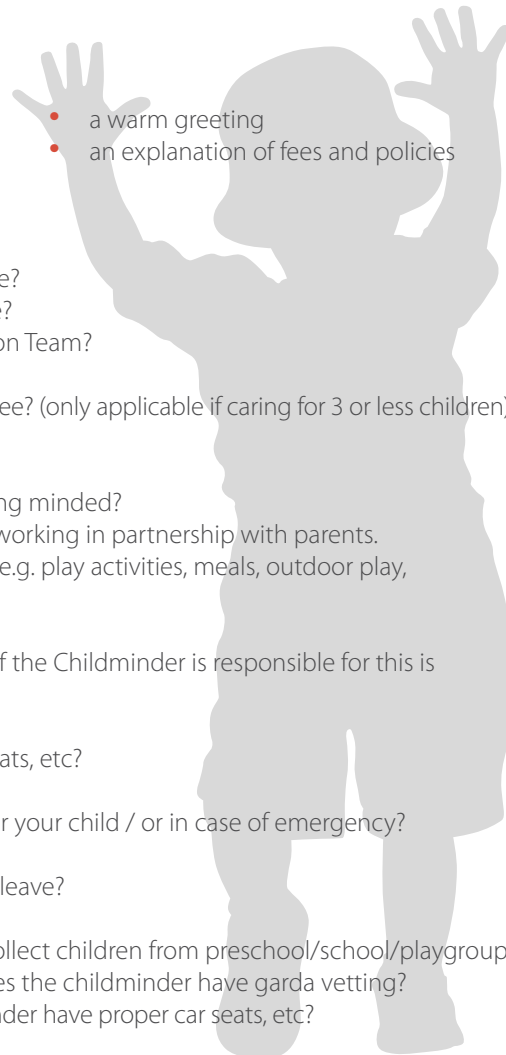
It is best to pre-arrange a visit with a Childminder. It may help to visit the Childminder while children are there or alternatively the Childminder might prefer you to call at a quieter time. You will need to consider accessibility, affordability and quality. Good quality childminding care has many long-term benefits for children and their families. Try and visit a few Childminders to see what setting would work best for you and your child.

### You should expect:

- short introductions to children and any other adults/family members present
- an invitation to stay a while to see the daily routine and children playing
- a brief tour of the house – inside and outside
- a warm greeting
- an explanation of fees and policies

### Questions parents should ask:

- What experience/knowledge/training/qualifications does the Childminder have?
- Do you have policies and procedures for the day to day running of your service?
- Is the Childminder notified to the Health Service Executive Pre-school Inspection Team? (only applicable if caring for 4 or more children)
- Is the Childminder voluntary notified to South Dublin County Childcare Committee? (only applicable if caring for 3 or less children)
- Clarify the number & ages of children currently in the Childminder's care
- Does the Childminder have insurance cover (public liability)?
- Are there other adults working/residing on the premises while children are being minded?
- What is the Childminder's behaviour management policy? This should involve working in partnership with parents.
- What type of care/programme is provided for minded children during the day, e.g. play activities, meals, outdoor play, television, stories, rest?
- Outline details of child's typical daily routine?
- Will the Childminder or parent provide the meals for the child during the day? If the Childminder is responsible for this is the Childminder aware of nutritional needs of young children?
- What toys, play equipment, materials are available to children?
- What baby equipment does the Childminder have/use – high chair, cots, car seats, etc?
- Is the proposed rest/sleeping area and equipment suitable?
- What contingency plan does the Childminder have if they are unable to care for your child / or in case of emergency?
- Does the Childminder have substitute or back-up staff?
- What are the Childminders: - hours of work? - rates of pay? - holiday leave?
- What are parents expected to provide (e.g. nappies, toiletries, etc)?
- What arrangements are in place if a child is sick? • Does the Childminder collect children from preschool/school/playgroup?
- Does the Childminder have pets? Are they appropriately vaccinated? • Does the childminder have garda vetting?
- Outings – What is the Childminder's policy • Car Safety – Does the Childminder have proper car seats, etc?



## Suitable Person

- Genuine love of children
- Good caring relationship with children; kindness
- Be sympathetic & understanding
- Able to play
- Be in good health; lots of energy
- Business like and diligent
- Dedication to the job
- Able to listen to both children and parents
- Have a sense of humour
- Ability to think of others
- Level-headed
- Be able to work in partnership with parents

## Childminders Home – Look for the Following

- Meet the Childminder at his/her home.
- Is there adequate space for indoor and outdoor play, for children to eat, sleep, change nappies, etc?
- Can you visit at any time during the day?
- Are the premises safe?  
**Indoors:** e.g. safety gates; protected range & radiators; safety locks; smoke alarms; toughened glass on low windows, glass doors; attention to hygiene, etc. Includes: eating, sleeping & toilet areas.  
**Outdoors:** e.g. secure area; no access onto road; quality equipment.
- Is the home caring, happy, friendly and stimulating?
- Is the home cosy and warm?
- Is there warm, happy responsive interaction between Childminder and children?
- Ensure the children have access to a variety of equipment, toys and learning materials which they will find interesting and which will contribute to their development i.e. sand / water play, secure outdoor play area, playdough, books, role play / imaginary play opportunities, bricks, colouring / drawing / creativity materials, climbing equipment, balls, bean bags, jigsaws, etc.

## Childminders should keep records:

### On Individual children

- Child's name and address
- Child's date of birth
- Contact details of parents during the day - home & work phone numbers
- Contact number of family doctor
- Name and contact details of whoever is to be contacted in an emergency
- Details of who can collect your child
- Medical & dietary requirements

The Childminder should require the parent to fill an 'Enrolment Form' or 'Child Record Form' including all the above information.

## General

- Daily Attendance Record
  - Accident/Injury Records
  - Signed agreement for Medicine Administration
- Some Childminders may have some information to give you when leaving detailing: opening hours, fees, facilities offered, policies and procedures, etc. This could leave you with fewer questions to ask. Feel free to make notes of things discussed.

## Step 4 - Check References

Don't be shy about checking references. Selecting a Childminder to share the care of your child with is one of the most important things you will ever do. Ask each Childminder for at least two parent references and their phone numbers. Most parents are happy to share information with other parents and can be an excellent resource.

## Step 5 – Make a decision

Remember that it is OK to be choosy. Review the information you have gathered and call back if you have questions that were not answered. Trust your gut instinct. If you are not comfortable with what you have found thus far, keep looking. If a childminding setting you like is full, put your name on a waiting list. Even if you must use another service temporarily, you will have this as an option if things don't work out. Prepare your children by talking positively about the new Childminder and by letting them visit his/her home beforehand. Ask your new Childminder if it would be OK for your child to bring a favourite toy, teddy bear, or blanket to help ease the transition.

South Dublin County Childcare Committee recommends that all Childminders have a written 'working agreement' in place with parents, so that the quality of the relationship between the Childminder, parents and children will not be impaired by misunderstandings. Both the Childminder and the parent should discuss and agree the terms of the childminding arrangement. Both parties should retain a copy of this agreement.

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## Transforming Ireland

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[www.southdublinchildcare.ie](http://www.southdublinchildcare.ie)

