



The **NCMA** guide  
to choosing the  
**right childminder**



# *What is a childminder?*



***Registered childminders are professional daycarers who work in their own homes to provide care and learning opportunities for other people's children in a family setting.***

*Today, 58% of women with children under the age of 5, and 78% of women with children aged 6 to 13, are working outside the home. So childcare has never been in such high demand. It is important that families can get childcare that suits their children's needs at every stage of their life, but with 61% of families working shifts or unsociable hours (during early mornings, evenings, nights and weekends), the demand for flexible childcare is huge. This is where childminding comes into its own.*

*(Statistics quoted on this page were provided by the Daycare Trust.)*



More than 300,000 children in England and Wales are being looked after by childminders – more than by any other sort of childcare arrangement. And no other sort of paid childcare is rated so highly by parents.

By law, all childminders must:

- be **registered** by Ofsted if they live in England, or the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) if they live in Wales;
- have their **home inspected** regularly to make sure it is safe and suitable for young children;
- be **insured** in case a child they are looking after has an accident or damages someone else's property;
- have **first-aid training** which covers giving first aid to babies and young children;
- be checked by the **Criminal Records Bureau**, as must everyone else aged over 16 who lives or works in the childminder's home; and
- take **introductory training** within six months of registering as a childminder.

Childminders are usually registered to look after up to three children under 5 and three children aged 5 to 8, including their own children. They may also look after older children up to the age of 14.



# Reasons to choose childminding

## ■ A personal service

Because registered childminders look after only small numbers of children, they can offer more individual attention than nurseries or kids' clubs. They can easily meet children's individual needs, sleeping patterns or homework projects.

## ■ Brilliant for babies

Childminders can cope with a baby's sleeping and feeding patterns. They can also offer all the time, attention and patience needed when babies are learning to walk, talk, feed themselves or use a potty.

## ■ Consistent care

Children often stay with the same childminder from being a baby to starting secondary school, so they benefit from the kind of stability other sorts of childcare don't provide. Childminding also allows parents to form a stable, ongoing relationship with their children's carer.

## ■ Family-friendly

Because childminders care for children of all ages, brothers and sisters can be looked after together, which makes life easier for the whole family. All children learn from being around other children of different ages, and children from different families who are looked after by the same childminder often form friendships that last into adulthood.



*“She provides just the right environment for our child – we have always felt secure in the knowledge that she is being well cared for. The environment is stimulating and ever-changing.”*

Mr and Mrs D R, Malden

## ■ Flexible

Many childminders look after children early in the morning, late in the evening, overnight and at weekends. This means children whose parents don't work from 9 to 5 can enjoy consistent care with the same carer. Childminders are also willing to take children to playgroups, nurseries, schools and clubs, and to pick them up.



## ■ Adaptable

Because childminders don't follow a strict timetable, they can be spontaneous. An unexpected sunny or snowy day is a great opportunity for outdoor play and learning. And if the children are feeling tired or under the weather, they can curl up and take it easy, just like they would at home.

## ■ Real-life learning

Children looked after by a childminder enjoy real-life experiences like cooking, shopping, gardening, mealtimes and outings to the park and library. From these everyday activities the children can learn basic science, maths, social skills and language skills.



## ■ Part of the community

As childminders live locally, your child can go to nearby toddler clubs, playgroups and after-school clubs with their friends and stay part of the local community. Childminders are part of the local community too and can take account of its varying cultural needs.

# Childminding offers more



All childminders are registered with Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education) if they live in England, or CSIW (the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales) if they live in Wales, have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau, are insured, have first-aid training and have had a health check. But if the childminder you choose is a member of the National Childminding Association (NCMA), you can be sure that they have gone one step further.

The National Childminding Association (NCMA) is the only national membership organisation for childminders in England and Wales. Being a member of NCMA shows that a childminder has a professional attitude to their work and is up to date with the latest developments in childminding.

## ■ NCMA members

If your childminder is an **NCMA member** you know that he or she has agreed to work towards NCMA's 10 Quality Standards (see pages 8 to 10). These standards cover all aspects of childminding, including safety, nutrition, managing children's

behaviour, equal opportunities and good business practice. The Quality Standards state that NCMA childminders must never use physical punishment and must make sure children are cared for in a smoke-free environment.

## ***Children come first* childminding networks**

A *Children come first* childminding network is a formal group of approved, registered childminders who are recruited, assessed and monitored by a network co-ordinator.

### **Early years education**

Some *Children come first* childminders are “accredited” to provide nursery education to 3- and 4-year-olds in the home.

This means that parents have more choice about where their child receives their five free nursery education sessions each week.

## **■ Childminding groups and networks**

About half of all childminders belong to a local childminding group, and more and more are being given the chance to join an NCMA-approved *Children come first* childminding network. If the childminder you choose belongs to a childminding group or network, they are likely to get support from other childminders, attend training workshops, and hold special children’s events and parties. Also, another childminder will be able to look after children in emergencies or, if you agree, when your childminder is on holiday or sick.

## **■ Community childminding**

Childminders are known for their work in caring for disabled children and those in need. Some networks are set up to provide this service and extra training is offered to develop the childminders’ specialist skills.

## **■ Childminder training**

Registered childminders can develop their careers through the three units of the CACHE Certificate in Childminding Practice (CCP). This qualification provides the “underpinning knowledge” for NVQ level 3 in Early Years Care and Education.

## **■ NCMA Quality First**

*NCMA Quality First* is a new quality assurance scheme designed specially for individual childminders. This will help childminders show you the parents the quality of their service.

## **■ Home Childcarers**

Registered childminders can now be approved by Ofsted to work in parents’ homes as home childcarers. Families using home childcarers can apply for help with childcare costs from the Working Tax Credit.

# NCMA's Quality Standards



NCMA childminders aim to meet the following standards so the children they look after receive the best-quality care available.

## 1. Take a professional approach to registered childminding

*NCMA childminders:*

- are registered with Ofsted in England, and the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) in Wales, and keep to the requirements of that registration;
- have suitable insurance cover;
- take relevant training where possible; and
- keep up to date with childminding laws and regulations.

## 2. Manage children's behaviour

*NCMA childminders:*

- never slap, smack, shake, bite, frighten or humiliate a child;
- manage children's behaviour in a positive way;
- set clear boundaries for children's behaviour and discuss these boundaries with the parents;
- give praise and encouragement when children live up to reasonable expectations; and
- respond to unacceptable behaviour in an appropriate way, according to the child's age and level of understanding.

## 3. Promote equal opportunities

*NCMA childminders:*

- treat each child as an individual and with "equal concern";
- give every child an equal chance to learn and develop;
- take account of each child's age, stage of development, gender, ethnic origin, home language and disabilities;
- encourage children to develop a sense of their own identity and culture; and
- help children to learn about a variety of cultures and to develop positive attitudes towards people who are different from themselves.



## 4. Respect confidentiality

*NCMA childminders:*

- do not share information about children and their families without the family's permission; and
- only break this rule to protect a child when they are getting suitable professional advice.

## 5. Promote children's learning and development

*NCMA childminders:*

- provide play activities and learning experiences that are suitable for each child's age and development;
- support and stimulate children's social, physical, intellectual, communication and emotional development (SPICE);
- build learning into everyday activities;
- support and build upon what children learn at home, school and preschool; and
- keep parents informed about their child's progress.

## 6. Work with parents

*NCMA childminders:*

- know that parents are the most important people in a child's life;
- recognise that parents know their own child best;
- exchange information about a child with his or her parents;
- show respect for each family's beliefs, traditions and the way they want their children to be looked after;
- arrange back-up cover to look after children in emergencies;
- review contracts with parents at least once a year; and
- understand children's need for ongoing care with the same carer.



# NCMA's Quality Standards

## 7. Keep children safe

*NCMA childminders:*

- pay careful attention to safety and hygiene;
- make sure there is a smoke-free environment while they are looking after children;
- make detailed plans of what they would do in an emergency; and
- know the signs and symptoms of possible abuse and what to do if they suspect a child is being abused.

## 8. Know about nutrition

*NCMA childminders:*

- discuss children's dietary needs with the parents; and
- give children a healthy, balanced diet.

## 9. Have good business practices

*NCMA childminders:*

- keep organised records of children's attendance, personal details and development;
- keep accurate written records of accidents and incidents in an accident book; and
- keep detailed financial records.

## 10. Get support

*NCMA childminders:*

- get advice from other professionals when necessary; and
- take advantage of the support available from NCMA and local childminding groups.



# Finding a childminder

Your local Children's Information Service can give you a list of childminders with places available. It may also have extra information, such as each childminder's fees, or schools and playgroups they can drop off at and pick up from.

## ■ ChildcareLink

You can find out the contact details of your nearest Children's Information Service (CIS) from the ChildcareLink website at [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk) or by calling them on freephone 0800 096 0296. ChildcareLink can also give you contact details for your local childcare information co-ordinator if you live in Wales.

## ■ Word of mouth

Let colleagues, friends and family know that you are looking for a childminder. They may be able to recommend a childminder or they might know about one who will have a place available shortly but has not yet advertised this through the Children's Information Service.

## ■ Start early

Some parents are lucky enough to find the right childminder almost straight away, but it may take three or four months. You will also want to give your child plenty of time to settle in with their new childminder, so it's wise to start looking early.

*"I have complete faith that my daughter is in great, reliable and experienced hands. My childminder reads with and to her, does cookery, and other activities, and is always there for her when I can't be. I couldn't function without her – she's the best!"*

Ms C D, Biggin Hill



# Making your choice



When you have your list of registered childminders, make a shortlist (start with the childminders nearest to you). Give these childminders a call to find out if they meet your family's needs. Mention the age of your child and the days and hours he or she needs to be looked after. You may also want to ask a few brief questions about things that are important to you, for example whether the childminder has any pets or a garden.

## ■ Contacting the childminder

Remember that if you phone during the day, the childminder is likely to have children around. So you should keep your questions short. If you want to talk about things in more detail, arrange to call back at a quieter time.

If the childminder seems suitable, the next step is to arrange a visit.

## ■ Visiting the childminder

Make appointments to see at least two or three childminders, ideally when other children are there so you can see whether the atmosphere is

happy and busy. If you want to talk about anything in more detail, it may be best to arrange a second visit at a quieter time, maybe one evening or weekend. Many childminders will be able to show you information about the work they do.

Ask the childminder to show you around their house, including the bathroom and the places where your child will eat, sleep and play. Have a look at the toys, books and equipment to make sure everything is clean and safe.

Take your own child along if possible so you can see how he or she is welcomed into the group. And don't forget to take a pen and paper so you can make a few notes.

# Questions to ask



Before you visit, spend some time thinking about all the things you are looking for in a childminder. It's a good idea to make a list of questions. Don't worry, childminders are used to this. Here are a few suggestions.

- Why did you decide to become a childminder?  
*attend workshops on subjects like nutrition, sign language or business management.*
- What do you enjoy most about the job?  
- Do you have any relevant qualifications? *Relevant courses include Introducing Childminding Practice, Developing Childminding Practice, Extending Childminding Practice, CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education or the CACHE Diploma in Nursery Nursing, and NVQ Early Years Care and Education Level 3.*
- How long do you intend to continue childminding?  
- Other than the children, is anyone else regularly at home during the day and, if so, are they also registered to look after children? *Some childminders work with a partner or assistant, or have another family member registered as back-up cover for emergencies.*
- Are you a member of NCMA?  
- Do you belong to a childminding group or network?
- What training have you done?  
*All childminders should have had first-aid training and induction training. Many childminders also*  
- Are you taking part in a quality assurance scheme?

# Questions to ask



- Can I see your registration and insurance certificates?
- Can I see your Ofsted or CSIW inspection report?
- Could I see any references from parents? *If not, you may want to ask the childminder if you could contact a parent.*
- How many other children do you currently look after, how old are they, and how long have you been looking after them?
- Do you have any children of your own and, if so, how old are they?
- Can you describe a typical childminding day or week?

*“From Monday to Friday my daughter is happy and safe and feels at home with my childminder and her family. I know she’s receiving maximum commitment and dedication from a trained and trusted carer.”*

Mr P W, Melton Mowbray



- What arrangements do you have for meals and snacks? What food and drink is offered and when, are there extra costs for this, do I need to provide any food or drink, can you meet special dietary requirements, and what is your policy on sugary and fatty foods?
- What do you consider to be unacceptable behaviour, and how do you deal with this?
- Which festivals and special occasions do you celebrate and how do you celebrate them?
- 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?
- Do you and the children regularly go on outings during the week? For example, to a toddler group, childminders’ drop-in centre, library, swimming pool, soft-play area, park, toy library, and so on.
- Do you ever go on special trips out? For example, to a beach, amusement park, farm, nature reserve and so on. If so, what arrangements do you have if these trips involve extra costs and extra hours of care?

# *Fees and conditions*



All childminders are self-employed. This allows them to set their own fees, hours and working conditions, but they must take care of their own tax and National Insurance contributions. There is no national rate for childminding and NCMA does not recommend a particular fee. Costs can depend on the childminder, the area they live in and the services they offer. Childminding is an important and responsible job and childminders have lots of overheads to cover, including

insurance, NCMA membership, “tools of the trade” (cashbooks, contracts, medication books and so on), safety equipment and the cost of training courses. They must also pay for extra toys and play equipment, food, petrol, toiletries, heating and lighting, and wear and tear on their home.

## ■ Help with childcare costs

You may be able to get help with your childcare fees through the Working Tax Credit. Call the Working Tax Credit helpline on 0800 500 222 to find out more.

NCMA recommends that childminders ask to be paid up-front, and give you a receipt, as this is

standard practice in all other forms of childcare, and it also prevents parents from running up debts. You and the childminder should agree a regular payment date, either every week or every month, and decide whether you will be paying by cheque, standing order, cash or childcare vouchers.

## ■ Retainer fees

Childminders are registered to care for a set number of children. If you want a childminder to hold a place for your child, they may have to turn away other parents who could have taken up the place straight away. So some childminders charge a retainer fee to keep the place available for your child, and to protect them in case you decide not to use their



service after all. While you are paying a retainer fee, the place should be available for you to use. If you do use it, you will have to pay the normal childminding rate instead of the retainer fee. A retainer fee is not taken off future childminding fees.

## ■ Deposits

If a childminder does not have a place available straight away, but one is expected to come up in the near future, you may be able to reserve that place by paying a deposit. In

many cases this would be taken off future childminding fees. If you pay a deposit, you can't use the place until the start date agreed on the contract. If you decide not to take up the place, the childminder can keep the deposit.

## ■ Brothers and sisters

Some childminders offer a discount if they are looking after two or more children from the same family. In this case, the lower rate should be charged for the oldest child. A separate contract should be drawn up for each child.

# Contracts

By law, childminders in England and Wales must have a written agreement with the parents or guardians of each child they look after. This is helpful for all involved as it makes everyone's expectations clear from the start of your working relationship.

So, once you feel you have found the right childminder, take time to discuss and enter into a contract together. If you have a partner or a relative who may sometimes be responsible for dropping off and collecting your child or paying the childminder's fees, they should be involved too. Some of the things you will need to agree when entering into a contract with your childminder are as follows.

- How much the childminder charges each hour, day, week or month.
- Whether there are extra costs, for example, for meals, drinks, snacks, nappies, toiletries, outings and other extras.
- Whether the childminder is available early in the morning, late in the evening, overnight or at weekends and, if so, if there are extra charges for this.





- What happens if you are late picking up your child.
- Whether you have to pay a fee on bank or public holidays.
- Whether you have to pay a fee while the childminder is on holiday or ill and unable to look after your child.
- Whether you have to pay a fee when your child is away on holiday or ill.
- Whether the childminder has back-up cover for times when he or she is sick or on holiday.
- Whether there is a discount for looking after two or more children from the same family.

- Whether the childminder charges a deposit or retainer fee for your child if you do not need a place straight away.
- What notice period you and the childminder need to give to change the terms of the contract.

## ■ Giving notice

Once you and the childminder have signed a contract it is a legally-binding document. If you (or the childminder) want to end the contract, or change the arrangements, you (or the

childminder) should give the other notice in writing. If you (or the childminder) are unable or unwilling to wait for the notice period to end, you (or they) must pay the other the childminding fees that would have been due during that notice period.

## ■ Review your contract

NCMA recommends that you and your childminder review your contract every 6 or 12 months. This gives you and your childminder a chance to talk about your child's needs and how things are going.

# Settling in

Once you have found the right childminder, take some time to allow your child to settle in properly. Try visiting once or twice with your child, just for half an hour or so. Then leave your child with the childminder for half an hour while you pop out, perhaps to post a letter or buy some milk. Always say goodbye and make it clear to your child that you will be coming back. You may want to leave something belonging to you with your child, for example, a glove or a shopping bag. Gradually increase the length of time you are away until your child is happy with the routine of being taken to, and left with, the childminder.

## ■ Each child is different

If the childminder will be taking your child to and from school, it's a good idea to walk with them a couple of times, and to introduce the childminder to your child's class teacher. Young babies often settle quickly, but older babies, toddlers and older children might take a little

longer, especially if they are not used to being looked after by other people.

Your child will need time to form new relationships with the childminder and the other children. There are no hard and fast rules. Each child and childminder will be different, so talk to your childminder about the usual routine.





## ■ Goodbyes

It's very common for children to cry when you leave them for the first time. Although it's difficult, try not to panic or feel guilty. As most childminders will tell you, a child who is tearful when you leave will probably be playing quite happily a few minutes later! Don't put off leaving as this will simply prolong your child's distress. If you are worried when you leave, arrange to phone the childminder later in the day so they can put your mind at rest.



## ■ Settling-in period

It's rare for a child not to settle after a week or two but, just in case, NCMA recommends that parents agree a "settling-in period" of two to

four weeks with their childminder. A separate contract, or separate section of the main contract, should be agreed to allow the childminder or parents to end or alter the arrangements during the settling-in period without giving the usual notice.

*"My childminder started looking after my son after he was diagnosed with cerebral palsy – nearly five years later she is still looking after him. She has always been more than a childminder to my family."*

Ms M D, Northampton

# Keeping a good relationship with your childminder

Regular communication is essential for keeping a good working relationship with your childminder. Start by telling your childminder all about your child. It's particularly important that you tell them about any allergies and medical conditions your child has. Other things you could mention include:

- foods that he or she particularly likes or dislikes;
- favourite toys and comfort items;
- favourite books, videos and TV programmes;
- favourite activities, songs and rhymes;
- sleeping patterns; and
- special words for things.

*(Many families have their own words and phrases, especially for the genitals and going to the toilet*

*– you should let your childminder know about these.)*

## ■ Communicate

When you take your child to the childminder, don't forget to mention anything that might affect your child's mood or behaviour on that day, such as a bad night's sleep or any kind of disruption at home.

## ■ Regular updates

Regularly talk to your childminder about your child's progress. This should be at a time that's convenient for both of you, perhaps one afternoon a week when you collect your child or one evening a week on the phone. You should also plan

longer meetings, maybe every six months or so, to review your contract and talk about any changes that you or the childminder may want to make.

## ■ Keeping a diary

It is useful to keep a diary that goes back and forth with the child so you and your childminder can make notes. A baby's diary might include notes on feeding, toilet training and sleeping, while a school-age child's might contain information about school projects and reading books. Some childminders also have a house diary where parents can read about any special activities their child has taken part in on a particular day.

# Valuing your childminder

Your childminder may become a good friend over time, but always remember that she or he is a professional person doing a professional job. Childminders will feel much more valued if you are polite, punctual and pay on time. If you are likely to be late, or you need to change the childminding arrangements for any reason, remember to give your childminder as much notice as possible.

## ■ What if things don't work out?

If anything is worrying you, you should speak to your childminder straight away as worries can sometimes grow out of proportion. Encourage your childminder to do the same, so small problems don't build up to be big problems. Most difficulties can be settled through a friendly chat, or by referring back to the contract together.

## ■ NCMA Information Line

If a meeting with your childminder does not solve a problem, you may want to call the NCMA Information Line free on 0800 169 4486 for further advice. The helpline is open to anyone who wants information on anything to do with childminding.

It's rare for a childminding arrangement to break down. When there are difficulties, they are far more likely to be between the parent and the childminder than anything to do with the child.





## National Childminding Association of England and Wales

The National Childminding Association provides information about childminding and how to become a childminder. They do not provide details of available places.

Visit the website at [www.ncma.org.uk](http://www.ncma.org.uk) or call the Information Line free on 0800 169 4486.



*All the photographs used in this booklet are of actual childminders and the children they care for.*



For more information contact:

***To find a childminder,  
contact your local Children's  
Information Service (CIS).  
To get contact details of your  
nearest CIS, call ChildcareLink  
on 0800 096 0296  
or visit the website:  
[www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk).***