



A Guide to Childminders

What is a childminder?

A childminder is a self employed person who works from their own home, looking after children of any age. If they care for children under 8 years old, for more than 2 hours a day, and receive a reward for this service (in money or in kind), they are required by law to be registered with Ofsted. For more information on Ofsted please ask for our factsheet, 'A Guide to Registration and Ofsted'

Note:

(1) Carers of a child who is a close relative (e.g. grandchild, niece or nephew) do not, by law, have to be registered. A registered childminder can look after children who are close relatives as long as they also look after other children who are not related. Each child (who is a close relative) will use up one of the carer's registered places.

(2) A person may care for a friend's child/children without being registered as long as no monetary reward is received for this.

Advantages of using a childminder

- Your child will be in a home environment
- Childminders can work flexible hours (often outside of the standard 8.00am – 6.00pm day)
- Low child:carer ratio
- If you have children of different ages a childminder may be able to care for them together (most will be willing to care for children from a few months old until secondary school age)
- Support can be provided to the family for years as the child grows up (many will do 'school runs' and provide before school and after school care)
- A professional childcare service is provided – childminders are expected to follow a training pathway that will offer relevant qualifications enabling them to achieve a Level 3 Childcare qualification within a reasonable timescale
- Tax Credits and Employer Supported Childcare Vouchers can be used to pay for childcare (please ask for our factsheets)

What checks are carried out on childminders?

Childminders are required to register with Ofsted and are currently inspected every 3 – 4 years to ensure they are meeting the minimum standards to provide a safe and suitable environment. Registration involves them having a Criminal Records Bureau check and a health and Social Services check. Checks are also currently carried out on all other members of the household that are aged 16 years or over. Childminders are required to have a current first aid certificate and to have completed a full Registration Package, which includes the 'Developing Quality Practitioners 0 – 8 years' course and safeguarding children training.

Visit First Point 8.30am to 5.30pm or ring us on 275 6699

8am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

First Point is in the city centre at Howden House, Union Street - close to the Peace Gardens.

www.sheffield.gov.uk/firstpoint www.asksid.net



How many children can a childminder look after?

The childminder's registration certificate will tell you how many children they can care for and their ages. Generally, a childminder is allowed to look after up to 6 children under 8 years (including their own). Of these children, not more than 3 can be under 5 years and usually only one of these may be under 12 months. The space in a childminder's home will affect the number of children they can look after. They may be able to care for more children if they have a registered assistant or work with another childminder.

How do you find a childminder?

Lists of registered childminders in Sheffield are available from First Point. We hold details such as their opening hours, costs, schools that the childminder can drop off/pick up from, experience, qualifications, activities and details of current childcare vacancies.

How do you choose a childminder?

Try to visit several childminders before you choose to see if the service they are offering suits yours and your child's needs. Take a list of questions that you would like to ask and make notes when you visit. This will help you make your choice and get your relationship with the childminder off to an organised and professional start.

Some things to consider:

- Always use a registered childminder – ask to see their certificate.
- Take your child with you when you visit. How do they react to the childminder? How does the carer react towards your child?
- If there are children there, are they happy and busy?
- Do they have up to date public liability insurance? Ask to see proof of this. They also need to have Business Use car insurance.
- How many other children do they look after, how old are they and how long have they been looking after them?
- What training or experience do they have – can you obtain references? (e.g. from another parent).
- Who else is in the house when your child is there – can you meet them?
- How would the childminder deal with difficult behaviour?
- What plans do they have in the event of an emergency?
- What happens if your child or the childminder is ill?
- Can the childminder take/collect your child to/from school? If they do, how many other children do they take/collect from school, and how many schools do they cover?
- Are snacks, drinks and meals provided (if so is a Food Hygiene Certificate available)?
- What is the space like? Is there room inside and outside to play?
- Are there toys and books around?
- Does the childminder take the children out (on visits, shopping, to the library, to a toddler group)?
- How do they ensure the children in their care are treated equally?
- Does the childminder's service take into account children's ages, cultural background and any special needs?
- Do you need to provide any equipment, e.g. a buggy or car safety seat?
- Are there any pets that the children will come into contact with?
- Does the childminder drive?
- What is the childminder's attitude towards potty training?
- Do they have regular, structured activities planned (e.g. arts/crafts, outdoor play etc)?

Note: Copies of individual childminders' recent Ofsted inspection reports are shown on Ofsted's website. Reports can be found using the carer's unique registration number. First Point can give you this number.

Quality Improvements/Training

Those who look after children, whether offering childcare, early education or playcare, are encouraged to ensure their services reach a quality standard above basic requirements. There are a number of recognised awards and training courses available to childminders to keep them up to date and improve their skills and knowledge. You may wish to ask a childminder about any awards, qualifications and ongoing training.

Free Early Learning

Some childminders are able to offer places under the Free Early Learning scheme for 3 and 4 year olds. For more information please ask for our factsheet. Childminders who have been accredited to receive this funding must belong to an Approved Home Based Childcarer Network and meet the additional requirements that this entails, which includes an ongoing training programme. They must be able to evidence that they are providing the child with an early years education to Early Years Foundation Stage standard, as recommended by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. More information can be found in our 'Making Sense of Early Learning Goals' factsheet.

Is your child disabled?

SIL provide a specialist information service for families with children who are disabled or have special needs. The service, which is called SIGN, can provide information on services, support and specific conditions and disabilities. For details see 'Useful contacts' section at the end.

Childminder contracts

- It is a requirement of registration that the childminder has some kind of contract or written agreement with the parent/s of the children they look after. This would cover:
- Hours
- Fees (and what is included in the fee)
- Overtime rates
- Fees for non-attendance (including holidays and sickness for both the child and the carer)
- Agreement made regarding any retainer payment
- Notice period to be given for both changes to the contract and to end the contract (four weeks is a reasonable notice period for both parent and childminder)
- The contract should be agreed, signed and dated by the parent/s and the childminder, and each of you should keep a copy. It should be reviewed at regular intervals (say once or twice a year) to respond to any changes. The childminder should be able to provide you with a sample copy of the contract they use. Alternatively, sample contracts are available from the National Childminding Association (NCMA).

How much do childminders charge?

Childminders are self employed and can therefore set their own rates of pay. Costs vary from area to area and are a private arrangement between parent and carer. As a guide, the rates charged in Sheffield are somewhere between £3.00 - £5.00 per hour, per child (although this does vary depending on what is included in the service). There is no national charge. If the childminder wants to increase their fee they should give you reasonable notice.

Points to consider about fees:

- When do you need to pay?
- Are meals, drinks, snacks, nappies, outings, playgroup fees etc included, or is there an extra charge for these?
- Is there a reduced rate for more than one child?
- What happens when you or the childminder have a holiday?
- What happens if your child or childminder is ill?
- Can they work overtime or provide emergency cover? If so, what is the charge?
- Do they accept Employer Supported Childcare Vouchers? These can be purchased from your employer, with a tax and national insurance saving to yourself, if your employer is participating in a voucher scheme. (Please ask for our 'A Guide to Employer Supported Childcare' factsheet).
- If reserving a place with a childminder do you need to pay a retainer fee? (Childminders can only look after a limited number of children, so if they hold a place for your child they may charge a retainer fee. This is not a refundable deposit).

What happens about holidays?

There are no set guidelines about holidays. An agreement should be made between the parent and childminder and the details should be written into the contract. The National Childminding Association suggests that you discuss whether to pay an enhanced rate all year round to take account of holidays, or to pay as and when holidays occur.

What if my child or my childminder is ill?

If your child is ill and does not go to the childminder, you would normally pay as usual. If the childminder is ill and there is no service available, you would not normally have to pay. Again, this may vary and should be agreed and written into the contract.

Settling your child with the childminder

Normal practice is to arrange several visits. The initial visits should be short to allow your child to become familiar with the carer and their new surroundings. The visits should get longer as your child becomes more settled.

Working together with your childminder

Discuss any difficulties with your childminder as soon as they arise – often a lack of communication leads to misunderstandings which can easily be avoided. Keep the carer informed of any changes in your or your child's routine. Ensure that your childminder is kept updated with the contact details for your workplace, doctor or health visitor and has an emergency contact number. If you are unable to resolve your difficulties with a childminder and they relate to the quality of care, you can contact Ofsted's complaints line (see 'useful contacts' below).

Note: Ofsted will not get involved in disputes over fees or contracts – it is important to ensure that the contract clearly states what has been agreed and that both parties are happy with the contract.

Useful contacts and information

Sheffield Information Link

Tel: 0114 249 8271 (out of hours answerphone)

9 Leopold Street, Sheffield, S1 2GY

Email: info@sheffinfoolink.org.uk

Website: www.sheffinfoolink.org.uk

Sheffield's Family Information Service. Additional support for families requiring childcare and other services for children and young people in Sheffield.

SIGN (Sheffield Information Giving Network)

Tel: 0114 266 9476 (out of hours answerphone)

Ryegate Children's Centre, Tapton Crescent Road, Sheffield, S10 5DD

Email: sign@sheffinfoolink.org.uk

Monday – Friday 10.00am – 3.00pm, drop in and phone service

Free information for parents and carers with children or young people with special needs or disabilities.

OFSTED

Tel: 0300 123 1231 - Helpline

Tel: 0300 123 4666 – Complaints and Concerns

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Access to inspection reports and useful publications for parents/carers.

National Childminding Association (NCMA)

Tel: 0845 880 0044

Email: info@ncma.org.uk

Website: www.ncma.org.uk

For support and advice and a variety of useful publications.

***The information on this factsheet is developed and maintained by Sheffield Information Link
© Sheffield Information Link 2011***