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FIRST STEPS

A GUIDE TO CHILDMINDING

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INTRODUCTION

Childminders offer a flexible and homely service to parents. Real life learning experiences, continuity of care, key workers and vertical learning are all features of a childminding service, no wonder it's the primary choice of childcare in Ireland.

First Steps is designed to support you to set up and develop your professional childminding service. Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo and Roscommon County Childcare Committees have developed this publication in collaboration. We recognise and promote childminding as a professional and effective early education for children.

First Steps is a starting guide for childminders who care for children in their own home. It supports you to organise a professional childminding service which adheres to good practice guidelines, provides information on notification, both voluntary notification to the your local County Childcare Committee (CCC) and Health Service Executive (HSE) notification. The follow up childminding publication titled *Next Steps, Good Practice Guidelines* will support you in operating your childminding service and how to meet the requirements of notification.

First Steps will provide practical information and easy to follow guidelines to become a childminder, such as tax relief, health and safety awareness, childminding insurance, Garda vetting and lots more.

SÍOLTA

Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, has been designed to assist all those concerned with the provision of quality early education in Ireland.

Síolta is a framework which is made up of sixteen standards which define quality practice in a childcare setting. Each standard has components which holds information and easy to follow tips to assist childcare practitioners to implement quality practice in their childminding setting. Your local CCC strongly encourages all childminders to engage with Síolta, and your local Childminding Advisory Worker/Officer (CAW/CMAO) will support you in doing so.

The Síolta website (www.siolta.ie) contains the introductory handbook, a childminding manual, and a complementary resources section. This manual contains the Principles, Standards, Components of Quality and Signposts for Reflection which make up the main body of Síolta.

AISTEAR

Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, supports practitioners in planning for and providing challenging and enjoyable learning opportunities for children from birth to six years. The aim of **Aistear** is to help every child to grow and develop as a competent and confident learner within loving and nurturing relationships with adults and peers. Detailed information on Aistear can be found at www.ncca.ie/earlychildhoodframework. The NCCA have published practical planning tools and tip-sheets to support childminders in becoming familiar with *Aistear* and in beginning to use it in their work with children.



WHAT IS A CHILDMINDER?

“Childminding service” means a pre-school service, which may include an overnight service, offered by a person who single-handedly takes care of pre-school children, including the childminder’s own children, in the childminder’s home for a total of more than 2 hours per day, except where exemptions provided in Section 58 of the Child Care Act 1991 apply. (Contact your local County Childcare Committee (CCC) for information on ‘Exemptions’)

Childminders are self-employed and take care of their own tax and national insurance payments. They are not ‘employed’ by parents but they negotiate a contract for their service for which they charge a fee.

The Explanatory Guide of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 provides the following definition of a childminder:

CHILDMINDERS CAN PROVIDE:

- Safe, clean, homely environment where the children are comfortable and secure
- Nutritional meals, meeting individual dietary requirements and cultural practices
- A flexible service to parents, which can include before and after school care, drop off/pick up children from local school, some offer overnight care
- Stimulation for children through a range of activities and fun learning, and offer toys and resources that are age related and will contribute to the overall care and development of the child
- Understanding for the rights and needs of the child and respect for their race, gender, religion and culture
- A close working relationship with parents and families, where continuity of care can be offered.



GETTING STARTED

INSURANCE

Many home insurance policies may be extended to cover childminding for up to 2 additional children, some provide cover for up to 5 children in total. If you currently have home insurance cover it is advisable to consult with your own insurance provider. If you do not have home insurance, the policy offered by *Childminding Ireland* would cover such situations as well as cover for those childminding in rented accommodation. Childminders are encouraged to explore all of their options in terms of obtaining insurance for their Childminding service.

NOTIFICATION

There are two notification processes available to childminders. Voluntary Notification to the local CCC is available for those minding 3 or less pre-school children. Notification to the Health Service Executive (HSE) is the requirement under the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 for those minding more than 3 pre-school children. Notification will be discussed in more detail under the *Next Steps, Good Practice Guidelines for Professional Childminders*.

LEGAL ASPECTS OF CHILDMINDING

All persons operating a business in Ireland fall under other legislation including:

Fire Service Act

www.irishstatutebook.ie/1981/en/act/pub/0030/index.html

Food Hygiene Regulations

www.fsai.ie/legislation/food/legislation_foodhygiene.asp

Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act

www.oireachtas.ie/iewdoc.asp?DocID=4305

Tobacco (Health Promotions) Regulations

www.otc.ie/legislation_national.asp

Finance Act

www.finance.gov.ie

Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act

www.foi.gov.ie

GARDA VETTING

Barnardos has been contracted by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to act as the vetting agency for applications for Garda vetting. The Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 and Child Care (Pre-school Service) (No 2) (Amendment) Regulations 2006 provide that vetting is required for staff, Voluntary Notified & Notified childminders, students and volunteers of pre-school services. Barnardos will be the authorised signatories for those who are not members of the IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation or the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA).

The vetting unit will be based in Cork, in a stand-alone unit and it will be supervised by Barnardos HR Department.

Contact Barnardos for details on (021) 454 7060 E-mail: www.barnardos.ie

QUALITY AWARENESS PROGRAMME (QAP)

The QAP is delivered to childminders and potential childminders by your local CCC. It is a great introduction to childminding. The training comprises of 5 modules covering: Why choose childminding?; Child Development; Hygiene, Health & Safety; Wellbeing of Children; and Play. It is a ten hour programme usually delivered over 5 evenings or 2 Saturdays. Participants do not require any previous qualifications to attend and there is no examination on completion.

FUNDING

The Childminders Development Grant is designed to assist childminders, already providing a childminding service in their own homes, to enhance safety and quality in the service through the purchase of small capital items, such as, equipment, toys or minor adaptation costs. It may also give financial assistance to new or prospective childminders with their initial set up costs. All applicants must be committed to maintaining/improving the quality of their childminding service and, except where they are already notified as childcare providers to the relevant HSE Pre-School services, they will be required to complete the QAP (Quality Awareness Programme). The Childminders Development Grant is administered by your local CCC.

SAFE & SECURE ENVIRONMENT

Children require challenges and a wide exposure to a variety of experiences in order that their development can be nurtured, within an environment that is safe creative and stimulating.

The provision of a child safe environment, where children are protected from known dangers and identified hazards, fosters independent creative play with reduced need for adult intervention. Such an environment requires careful planning and appropriate organisation. Such planning can include:

- Maintaining a safe environment. Ensure all hazards are removed and have a procedure to identify, assess and manage any risks associated with ensuring a safe environment for children
- Children's toys and equipment – for example, ensure toys are developmentally and age appropriate and are in good condition
- First Aid equipment – for example, ensure the box is readily available and keep it stocked and have no out-of-date items
- Storage – medication/ poison or dangerous substances – for example, keep containers labelled, stored in a safe secure place, out of children's reach
- Fire Safety – for example, provide fire safety equipment. Ensure flammable items are away from heat sources, have an emergency and evacuation plan.

EQUIPMENT / TOYS

Setting up a childminding business is just like setting up any kind of business in that you will need to purchase the basic equipment. If you already have young children of your own you may well have most of the equipment already needed to start. It may be a case of ensuring that what you do have is appropriate, and in good state of repair. Basic equipment may include, a cot and new mattress, clean sheets, pushchair, highchair, car seats, changing mat, potty seat, bibs, plastic bowls, cups and cutlery and safety equipment like window locks and socket covers.

The basic toys you will need if you are caring for babies and young children are, clean rattles and soft toys, games and puzzles, building bricks and construction toys, books with paper and cardboard pages, paper, crayons, paints and dressing up clothes and role play accessories.

Some childminders may only wish to provide care for school aged children and obviously the toys and equipment needed for this age group will differ from that of a childminder providing care for babies and young children. Careful attention should be given when choosing the type of resources and toys needed. Encourage imaginative play with natural, homemade toys. Gardens and backyards provide plenty of natural material to create imaginative playthings for children.

TAX INFORMATION

The Childcare Services Relief allows childminders who have 'Voluntary Notified' their local CCC of their childminding service to avail of tax relief on their childminding income. For more information on self-employment, tax, PRSI etc. please contact your local County Childcare Committee or local Revenue Office.

WORKING WITH PARENTS

It is important to establish a professional relationship as well as a friendship with the parents of the children you mind. Information sharing between parents and childminders is important in keeping both parties up-to-date with the progress and development of the children. Family values and beliefs can be understood and taken into account by the childminder. Childminding is very much a partnership and you must learn to work with the child's parents in order to provide the best care for the child so that they feel happy and secure.



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