

# Choosing a childminder

Childminders offer a flexible, secure childcare service from their own home. This is a guide to choosing the best childminder for you and your child.



Family  
Information  
Service

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Lewisham

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## Did you know?

It is illegal for an unregistered person to look after children aged under eight for reward.

An unregistered person who is a close relative of the child is not officially a childminder.



## Childminders – an overview

Registered childminders look after children in the childminder's own home. Every childminder is different, so look for someone who will suit your family.

### Plus points of using a childminder

- ▶ Your child will be in a home environment.
- ▶ Childminders can support families for years as children grow up.
- ▶ Children have the opportunity to socialise with other children going to the same childminder.
- ▶ Childminders can often be flexible about the hours they work and they should provide your child with lots of care, fun and learning in a safe environment.

### How will I know my child will be safe and secure?

You know your child best – look for a childminder you feel will be suitable for your child.

#### What is Ofsted's Role?

- ▶ Ofsted carry out checks to make sure the childminder is suitable to care for children.
- ▶ People living in the childminder's household (aged 16 and over) are also checked to make sure they have not carried out any offence against a child.
- ▶ A check on the childminder's home is carried out to make sure it is safe and suitable for children.
- ▶ After a childminder is initially registered, their first inspection as a registered minder, is carried out within six months and then approximately every three years to make sure the childminder is continuing to provide a safe and suitable service.
- ▶ If following an inspection they are found to be unsatisfactory, more frequent inspections will follow.
- ▶ To see a childminder's inspection report, you can ask the childminder for a copy or contact your Lewisham Family Information Service (FIS) who can provide links to their inspection report. They should also make available their Public Liability Insurance Certificate.

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### How many children will there be with a childminder?

Childminders can care for up to six children under the age of eight at any one time. Of those six children, only three can be aged under five years old. Of these three, they are usually limited to one baby under 12 months at any one time.

The childminder's own children who are under eight are always taken into account and counted in these numbers. Depending on the size of their property, childminders who work with an assistant may look after larger groups of children.

### How old are the children with a childminder?

Children can go to a childminder from birth right through until they reach 18 years of age.

### What hours does a childminder work?

Childminders are self-employed and so they decide on their working hours. Most childminders will provide you with childcare between the hours of 8am to 6pm. Some childminders will work early mornings, evenings, overnight and weekends as well. You will need to negotiate hours, terms and conditions with the childminder.

### What about part-time childcare?

Many childminders are happy to provide families with part-time places for children. They often drop children off at school and pick them up. Childminders can also take your child to a pre-school playgroup as part of the routine.

### How much does a childminder cost?

Childminders set their charges themselves and so there is no national rate. Most childminders charge an hourly rate, a daily rate, overnight rate and a weekly rate, depending on the hours required. All charges can be obtained from the childminders within your area or areas you would consider. Please contact them direct.

### How can I find a childminder?

Contact Lewisham Family Information Service (FIS) 0800 085 0606 for advice about childminders in your area. Any matters that you may feel strongly about, such as smoking or pets, can be checked by the FIS.



Also, many childminders throughout the borough attend drop-in sessions on a weekly basis and may be able to offer advice. Contact FIS for more details of when and where these sessions take place.

Visit [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk) for a list of childminders in your area.

### Reaching an agreement

It is advisable that you reach an agreement with your childminder and include a discussion on all aspects of care, which should be included in your contract and cover the following:

- ▶ hours that care is required.
- ▶ charges
- ▶ period of notice
- ▶ diet and provision of food
- ▶ provision of equipment (e.g. cot, car seat)
- ▶ dropping off and collecting your child
- ▶ any medical requirements
- ▶ management of behaviour
- ▶ any other special requirements
- ▶ holiday and sick pay

If you find that you have a difficulty that you can't resolve please contact the Network Child Minders Association on 0800 169 4486

Please note: Your childminder will have a policy and procedure document which you should agree to before signing your contract.



## Choosing the right childminder for you and your child



### When should I start looking?

Usually no more than three months in advance, but depending on your circumstances you may wish to start enquiring sooner. Childminders only advertise current vacancies and therefore will be unable to help you if you are looking for care months into the future.

### How should I choose a childminder?

For a full list of childminders you can contact the Lewisham Family Information Service (FIS) who will provide you with an up to date vacancy list for the area where you need care. It is advisable to telephone all potential childminders, to establish whether they are able to offer the type of care that you need, thereby enabling you to make the appropriate choice for your family. More often than not, the best childminder for your child will not be in the next street – so it's worth looking around. FIS offers a brokerage service to all carers that do not readily find childcare that supports their needs.

### Visit a few

Arrange appointments to visit at least two or three childminders, ideally when the children are there. This will enable you to see how the children are behaving – if they seem generally happy, calm but busy then you'll know that they are happy in their environment.

Ask the childminder to show you around their house, including the bathroom and where your child will eat, sleep and play. You could also ask the childminder about their daily routines, outings, opportunities for social activities and the arrangements for meals. Have a look at the toys and books available.

Try to take along your own child – and you will be able to see how children are welcomed into the group. Take along a list of questions – childminders are used to parents asking lots of question and will not be surprised. There are suggestions for questions to ask at the end of this pack.

#### Network Childminder

Some childminders belong to a network. To become a Network Childminder they must complete an NCMA Quality Assurance Scheme and they will have regular monitoring visits from their local network co-ordinator.

## Pay and contracts

Once you have chosen your childminder, the question of contracts and payments will arise. Negotiating a contract can be viewed by some as difficult, but there is no need to feel like this as long as you have prepared yourself. The most important factor to remember is that your childminder is a childcare professional and the negotiation of your contract is key to the success of your business relationship.

#### The contract

The contract will help your professional relationship with your childminder develop and will prove vital if you should have to resolve any disagreements.

The contract should be a negotiation between you and the childminder, and you should both agree to the specifics of the contract. The contract is usually provided by the childminder. A childminding contract should be established even if your arrangement is short term. If you have more than one child with the childminder, it is an Ofsted requirement to have a separate contract for each child.



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Your contract should be written, and should set out the terms of the relationship clearly. The contract is a legally binding document, and both you and the childminder should have a signed copy of your current contract. It is vital that all parties read, understand and agree to the document before they sign.

Here are a few points that should be included in your contract:

### Hours

Detail the hours that care is required. Are the hours realistic? Remember to give yourself time, at the beginning and end of each day for any delays and to receive an update how the day has gone.

### Pay

Are you happy with the pay? Bear in mind that childminders often stay with the same family for years, caring for siblings and even taking the child to school. You should be aware that the childminder will expect a pay rise at some point in the future. It is advisable to discuss this prior to the arrangement and to detail it on your contract. Agree to a review date, when the pay rise will come into force, and how much it will be.

### Deposit/Retainers

Retainers can be held against a future childcare place. The deposit acts as a safety net for the childminder and it demonstrates your intent to fulfil the agreement. Usually, if you then decide not to use that childminder they keep the deposit.





## Questions to ask a childminder

This questionnaire may be useful to you if you take it along with you when you visit your childminder. This could be done either at the very first visit, or just prior to you agreeing a contract. Don't feel embarrassed about taking along a questionnaire, most childminders will have experienced parents with lots of questions before!

### Questions to ask the childminder about themselves

- ▶ How long have you been a registered childminder?
- ▶ Is there anyone else registered to care for children in your home?
- ▶ How many children are you caring for and what are their ages?
- ▶ Do you have any children of your own, and how old are they?
- ▶ Other than children, who else is in your home during the day?
- ▶ Are you a Network Childminder Association member?

### Safety

- ▶ Do you drive?
- ▶ Do you have business insurance that covers you taking children in the car?
- ▶ What safety restraints are in the car – are they suitable for the children being cared for?
- ▶ Do you have appropriate equipment for children such as fire-guards, stair-gates etc.?
- ▶ What procedures do you have in place in the event of an accident or emergency either to you or my child?
- ▶ Do you have any pets and will my child come into contact with them?

### Pay and conditions

- ▶ What are your hours of service?
- ▶ What are your rates of pay for – hourly care, daily care, overnight care, weekly care, before or after school care, holiday care?
- ▶ Would you ever be prepared to work over the set hours?
- ▶ What is your overtime fee and when would it come into effect?

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- ▶ Do you need a retainer if care is not needed immediately?  
How much would it be?
- ▶ Is there a fee payable if you take a holiday?
- ▶ Is there a fee payable if I take a holiday?
- ▶ Is there a fee payable if my child is sick?
- ▶ Is there a fee payable if you are sick?
- ▶ Do you offer a reduction for two or more children from the same family?
- ▶ What are the fees if I am late to collect?
- ▶ How much notice do I need to give?

### Activities and services available

- ▶ Do you attend any of the local toddler/childminding groups?
- ▶ Do you go anywhere during the week (for example to parks, swimming, the library, shopping etc.)?
- ▶ Is there a separate resting place for my child?
- ▶ Would you provide meals and snacks?
- ▶ Are you able to meet our dietary needs?
- ▶ What toys, books and other facilities are available?
- ▶ Can my child bring their own toys?
- ▶ Is there a garden that is safe and registered for the children to play in?
- ▶ Does it have outdoor equipment available?

### Discipline

- ▶ What do you consider to be challenging behaviour?

### Training & References

- ▶ Have you had any recent training in childcare?
- ▶ Do you hold a childcare qualification?
- ▶ Do you have any references from previous or current parents that I could see?
- ▶ If not, could I speak to the parent of a child that you are currently minding?

This guide has been produced by Lewisham Family Information Service and the information above is correct as of July 2009. If you require further information or have any other childcare related questions please contact 0800 085 0606 or email us at [fis@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:fis@lewisham.gov.uk)

For information on activities and services for children and young people visit [www.lewisham.gov.uk/fis](http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/fis)