

Marketing Your Childminding Service

Advisory Guide



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I. Introduction

Results from the National Survey of Childminders (2010) conducted by Childminding Ireland show that Childminding is by far the most popular form of non-parental childcare in Ireland. Over 55 % of pre-school children are minded by a Childminder, and 85% of after-school care is provided by a Childminder.

Historically this child care option has ensured economic survival for two families – the childminder’s as well as for a family of minded children. Today Childminding continues to deliver much needed supports to many families that choose this type of a childcare option for their children.

The popularity of this service is attributed to the benefits that Childminding provides to parents, children, and communities. Research clearly indicates that children greatly benefit from the small group family setting. Low child to adult ratio is crucial to the individualised attention that children need to thrive. Childminding also offers a continuity of care. One person – a Childminder – often meets family needs by caring for the same children from infancy through secondary school. Like in most families, the minded children in a childminding setting vary in age and siblings may spend time together which is generally not available in other childcare settings.

Children experience a home from home setting, with regular everyday activities and outings, which provides children with opportunity to experience the world in a very real way. They get to know their locality and become a part of a local community. They can develop lasting friendships with the Childminding family and other minded children. Parents benefit from flexibility and individually tailored childcare arrangements and supports. Childminding offers one to one communication and opportunities to fully meet the needs of each individual child.

Childminding as a Career Option

By choosing Childminding as a career option, you benefit by being a self-employed person. You are able to use your own home to provide a service, earn an income, and still care for your own children. By making annual payments to RSI under Class S, you can avail of certain State benefits, principally the Contributory Pension entitlement. Childminders can earn up to €15,000 exempt from tax under the Childminders Tax Relief Scheme.

Marketing your service is an important part of your success as a childminder. Childminding is a unique business that greatly differs from other small businesses. Unlike other businesses, you do not have a shop front or expensive office to let people know you are open and available for business. Your business is your own family home. Therefore, you have to find ways to reach parents and let them know about services you offer.

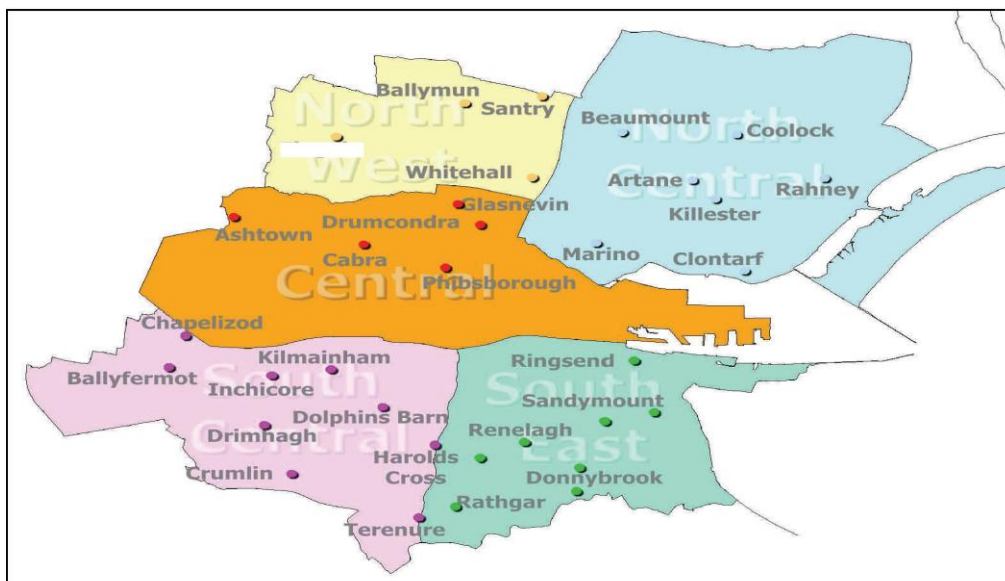
This guide is designed with you in mind. To successfully market your service, you need to know your strengths and your selling points. Below are some ideas for you to think about and to choose from when marketing your Childminding service.

II. How to Get Parents into Your Childminding Service?

Childminders often ask, “How do I get the information about my childminding service out to parents in the community?” Some childminders experience difficulty getting children in after opening their service. The following are some helpful ideas for marketing your service:

- ✓ **Get to know your locality and develop a “Marketing Plan”:**
 - Find out who your potential clients may be. *For example, do you have a primary school nearby or a further education college? Do you live en route to some major business in the area?*
 - Assess the need for childminding in your area. *(e.g., average age of children needing care, average cost for childminding, and shifts and days clients will need childminding service.)*
 - Make a list of your goals with deadlines to keep yourself on task.
 - Think about the costs involved in some of your marketing techniques. *(e.g., consider costs of printing informational leaflets, business cards, and transportation for distribution).*

- ✓ **Regularly update your information:**
 - Voluntarily Notify your City/County Childcare Committee (CCC) or get in touch with a Local Childcare Resource Service (LCRS) in your area. *See map of LCRS areas below.* This will add you to CCC/LCRS’s database and provide the CCC/LCRS with accurate information about your service.
 - Call CCC/LCRS to report any vacancy or other information updates. When parents call CCC/LCRS, this information is used to search for childminding service that meets the needs of a specific family.
 - If you’re not getting the number of calls you would like, talk to a Childminding Advisor at CCC/LCRS to get more ideas about attracting parents.
 - Take advantage of training/workshops and networking opportunities offered through CCC/LCRS. By being involved and meeting other childminders you may hear what they have done and their ideas may work for you.



- ✓ **Advertise to schools, community centres, area businesses or neighbourhood sites:**
- ✓ Make sure your advert is brief, easy to read, and is easy to understand. Don’t forget to include your name and phone number. *(Hint: Use no more than 3 different fonts. Fonts like Times New Roman or Ariel are more reader friendly than some of the fancier types.)*

- Send your flyers or business cards with a cover letter to the managers or owners of local businesses. Include hairdressers, churches, dentists, gym, doctor's surgeries, etc. Ask them to share it with their clients and employees.
- Put up flyers in areas where parents will see them, like petrol stations, pharmacies, shopping centres, etc.
- ✓ **Hold an Open House for Potential Clients.**
 - Place an advertisement about your event in the community newspaper, or neighbourhood newsletter. Make up and distribute some flyers.
 - Organize your home and have it set-up with a few choices of small activities for children to do.
 - Have plenty of copies of important information regarding hours of operation, tuition fees, insurance, special services you offer, etc.
 - Have a Policy and Procedure Handbook ready for parents to review.
 - Display a book/album of pictures showing activities you've done with children or create a wall space with pictures from your day-to-day activities.
 - Laminate and display your Voluntary Notification to City/County Childcare Committee or HSE certificate.
 - Laminate and display certificates you have received from any training you have attended.
 - Give parents extra business cards or flyers when they leave. Ask them to share your information with their family members and friends.
- ✓ **Put a sign in your garden or on your car:**
 - Put the sign in a location where people coming from any direction can read it.
 - Use bright colours in your sign.
 - Make sure the lettering contrasts sharply with the background of the sign, and make it big enough to read easily.
 - Put as little information as possible so it can be read quickly (e.g. service name and phone number for a contact).
 - Have T-shirts, hats or any other small promotional items printed or homemade with your service's name. Children wearing your service T-shirts or hats will also promote your service when you go on field trips or outings.
- ✓ **Use Business Cards to help get your name out into community:**
 - Make your card stand out. Have a logo with you service's name on it. Keep the same logo for all your paperwork (fliers, policies, payment invoices and receipts, mailings, etc.).
 - Include many ways for people to contact you (mail, phone, mobile phone, e-mail).
 - Use the back as well as front of the card to promote your service.
 - Give the cards to parents to pass on to friends and co-workers.
 - Hand out the cards to everyone at various meetings, businesses, fundraisers, and other events.

III. The Enquiry Call. Are You Ready?

The enquiry call often provides the first impression a parent receives about your service. A positive first impression will allow setting a date for a visit. If you cannot accommodate the child, refer the parent to City/County Childcare Committee or Local Childcare Resource Service for other childcare referrals. If the parent retains a positive feeling about your service, he/she may recommend you to others or be happy to have you call them if your circumstances change.

Ideas for a successful inquiry call:

- Develop a professional message for your answering machine or voice mail. It should be brief and to the point.

Basic Elements of Good Voicemail Greetings:

- Greeting
- Your Name and/or your Service Name
- Statement that you cannot take their call right now
- Invitation to leave a message
- When they can expect a return call

- No longer than 20 - 25 seconds
 - Avoid giving out too much information and making an overly long greeting.
- Treat each call as being of great importance to you. When the phone rings, take a deep breath, smile, and focus. Be enthusiastic about your service. This is the first time **this** parent is hearing about it.
 - Be aware of background noise. If it is not a good time for you to talk, let the caller know and politely request the caller's phone number and ask for the best time for **YOU** to call back.
 - Since you are using your home to provide a childminding service, decide who is going to answer the phone. Teach your family members to answer the phone in a friendly and professional manner, and give the right information to the calling parent.
 - Have a note pad readily available next to the phone or create an inquiry form to take notes. *See sample below.*
 - Use the parent's name and the child's name in the conversation. Your conversation will be more personal that way.
 - End the conversation by giving the customer a choice of convenient times to visit the service.
 - Offer to post each caller more information about your service. If they have not set a time to visit, tell them you'll give them a few days to look over the information and **YOU** will call **THEM** back.

Sample Inquiry Form

Date & Time of call: _____

Parent Name: _____

Notes: _____

Contact Information:

Work Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Child's Name: _____ Age: _____

Child's Name: _____ Age: _____

Child's Name _____ Age: _____

Child's Name: _____ Age: _____

Days and Hours Service is required:

Mon. from _____ to _____
 Tu. from _____ to _____
 Wed from _____ to _____
 Th. from _____ to _____
 Fr. from _____ to _____
 Sat. from _____ to _____
 Sun. from _____ to _____

Notes: _____

Date and time of visit: _____

IV. Your Service Information Leaflet

Your Service leaflet can be a valuable marketing tool. When people enquire about your service, a leaflet is an easy way to get your information out and invite them to learn more about the service you provide.

Some ideas to think about when creating and designing your leaflet:

- **Message: *What do you want the leaflet to say?***
 - What image of your service do you want to communicate?
 - Educate people about the unique features of your service, e.g. weekly field trips/outings, a second language offer, etc.etc.
 - Invite people to visit - start selling your service on the cover, educate the reader about your service, then invite them to visit (e.g. include a “call-to-action”: “Call now to schedule your visit”).
 - What are the benefits of your service? Are you Voluntary Notified to City/County Childcare Committee or HSE? Do you have childminding insurance?
 - What are the basic services you provide? What hours are you open? For what ages of children do you offer care? Do you close for specific holidays? Do you offer transportation to specific schools?
 - What makes your service a quality setting for children? List your educational credentials if appropriate or your work experience.

- **Appearance: *Presentation: How will it look?***
 - Keep it simple. Put important points in headlines, avoid unnecessary details, and be consistent with your design and overall appearance.
 - Things to consider: size, paper, colour, photos or graphics.
 - Things to include: your logo, contact information, a map.

- **Budget: *How much will you spend to print, mail?***
 - A quality piece communicates quality image.
 - You can spend as little or as much as you can afford. Shop around and compare prices or
 - Print your own.

- **Use: *How will you use it?***
 - As an informational piece included in a packet for visitors (along with parent handbook).
 - As a handout or mailer to other businesses in a community.
 - How long will you use it? For long term use do not include rates or specific dates (items that could change frequently).

V. The Visit

As a follow up after the initial phone call, parents may choose to visit your service. That first visit can make the difference as to whether or not a parent chooses your service. It is important that parents as well as children are made to feel welcome to your home.

Here are some ideas that can help you to achieve a positive first impression:

- Make sure your property is appealing. First impressions begin to form before the parent ever gets out of the car.
- Does the front look tidy and tended for? Is there evidence that children play outdoors?

- Greet the parent and child at the door warmly. Smile and invite them in. Be available at the time you have scheduled. Don't make them wait for you.
- Be aware of all senses. Does your home smell of cooking or nappies? Is it seen as clean and organized? Are the surfaces and toys/equipment clean and pleasant to touch?
- Be welcoming. Make sure that the areas of your home used for childminding reflect your love of children and your work. Include some children's artwork and pictures, add a few suitable houseplants. Have some children's books, toys, puzzles, stickers etc., for the child to use while you are talking to the parent. Have adult sized chairs available for your meeting.
- Be prepared for the visit in advance. Have information packets and forms ready when they arrive. Avoid having the parent sit and wait while you gather these things. It impresses parents when you value them enough to do some advance preparation.
- Make sure your interaction with parent and child(ren) are professional, warm, and respectful.
- Inform and prepare your family members for the visit. They should send a message of acceptance of partner's work. They may politely excuse themselves and leave you to attend to the business.
- Give the parent a prepared list of questions and things to watch for as they tour your home. Parents will find it useful and be impressed that you are prepared to answer questions they may not have thought of themselves. (*'Parents' Guide to Choosing Childminding Service'* leaflet is available from DCCC).
- Be aware of a professional appearance. However, a childminder will look very different than other professionals. A childminder should always be dressed for comfort and should wear clothes that say he/she is ready to participate fully with the children without fear of getting dirty. This simply means clean yet casual.
- Highlight your commitment to continuing professional development - make certain that parents are made aware of your commitment to the profession of childcare by mentioning any degrees or other training you may have completed or are planning to complete in the nearest future.
- Be aware of the latest developments in the early years sector – have a general understanding of Síolta, National Quality Framework and Aistear, National Curriculum Framework. Post a poster of Síolta Principles and Aistear themes on the wall. Ask your City/County Childcare Committee or your Local Childcare Resource Service for assistance in locating these resources.
- Introduce your entire service - create and maintain a scrapbook of daily activities and field trips or have a photo album of your daily activities on display. Parents who visit after hours will benefit from seeing this evidence of your work.
- Highlight the unique qualities of your programme. Why should they choose you over the other places they have visited?
- Welcome parents to return for another visit. They should be welcome to come during your working hours. Let them know they can stay while the child participates in the activities.
- Welcome them to call with further queries.

VI. What Is Unique About Your Service?

What are the unique features of your service that can make parents choose you over another one? Take another look at your service. Each childminding service is very different; therefore it is important that those features would reflect your uniqueness and your personal values. Consider the following ideas:

- Have a parent board with service information in the entryway or by the sign-in table. Post menus, special activities for the day, field trip reminders, etc.
- Put up children's art work or have a few picture frames with children's art on display.
- Display pictures of the children and families or create special 'My Family' books for each child in your care.
- Create small scrapbooks/folders of treasured items (art work, photos, and special notes) to pass on to a child when they move on and leave your service.
- Share educational information on parent interests, e.g. school readiness, discipline.
- Have a "family evening" at the beginning or the end of your programme year.
- Designate a few days during the year, when parents can come and have breakfast/lunch with their children (Mother's Day, Father's Day).
- Have a take home bag or a folder for each child to take home their art work and notes to parents at the end of the week.

- Think about what kind of things might make the lives of your parents just a little easier. Would staying open later one night a week or on a Saturday during the holiday season be appreciated by your parents? How about staying late several nights a year for a “date” night for parents?
- Send a “welcome” card to a new child starting in your service.
- Celebrate birthdays of the children in your service.
- Have a lending library of parenting/children’s books or DVDs that could be checked out.
- Have resource kits available for families in stress. Families that might be experiencing divorce or a death in the family would benefit from a list of topical resources, or a list of children’s books. Ask your City/County Childcare Committee or your Local Childcare Resource Service for assistance in locating these resources.
- Make extra efforts to include children with special needs or from different cultural backgrounds.

VII. Is Your Service Family Friendly?

The main goal of any childcare provider and especially a childminder is to create service that is family friendly. Family friendly service refers to policies and practices that create a true collaboration between families and the childminder with the well-being of the child as the focus.

Below are some ideas for you to consider when creating family friendly policies:

- Do you offer flexible scheduling?
- Do you offer easy ways to communicate—such as a daily activity sheet (*see a sample below*) or by emailing or texting parents information they might need right away?

Communication means caring. Communication can range from sharing an observational anecdote how a child’s day was to offering information about typical milestone in child development or to informing parents about changes in service policy. Below are some examples of communication:

- *Cards, notes, phone calls, text messages, and e-mails: write “welcome” notes to new families; “special notes” about a child’s day; birthday cards mailed home; holiday greeting cards; quick naptime e-mail or text notes; sympathy or congratulation notes in recognition of specific events.*
- *Child and family related information: create a regular informational page for families about coming events in the city or neighbourhood; post notices or simple reminders on entrance and exit doors about upcoming events in your service.*
- *Business information: let families know well in advance of any changes that will affect their finances or their children’s service. Most people need time to adjust to changes and make different arrangements if needed. Announce raises in tuition fees or the addition of new fees **at least** a month in advance.*

- Do you offer referral discounts?
- Do you celebrate families by offering family nights or special days?
- Does your service accommodate the needs of all families?
Whenever possible and within a reason, give parents what they want. Will ideas listed below meet the needs of parents in your service?

- *Provide accommodations for breastfeeding mothers.*
- *Schedule occasional family get together nights. Provide a hot dish and ask parents to bring a simple side dish to share.*
- *Give parents a chance to meet each other and relax instead of rushing home to fix a meal.*
- *Stay open extra hours during holiday shopping season.*

- If you charge a registration fee is it reasonable for most families? Consider one registration fee for multiple children from one family.
- Do you have a service policy on terminating care for children with aggressive behaviours? Is it realistic? Does it take in account behaviours that could be corrected and also behaviours that may need assistance from a professional?

A Day In The Life Of ...

Childminding Service name/
logo and address

Child's Name: _____

Date: _____

Today I had fun when we:

Today I was: Happy Sad Tearful Tired

Today I ate:

Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
<input type="checkbox"/> All	<input type="checkbox"/> All	<input type="checkbox"/> All
<input type="checkbox"/> Some	<input type="checkbox"/> Some	<input type="checkbox"/> Some
I ate _____	I ate _____	I ate _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

My nappy changes/toilet times were:

_____ AM/PM BM

_____ AM/PM BM

_____ AM/PM BM

_____ AM/PM BM

_____ AM/PM BM

_____ AM/PM BM

_____ AM/PM BM

_____ AM/PM BM

_____ AM/PM BM

Other drinks/snacks I had today: _____

At naptime, I slept from:

_____ : _____ until _____ : _____
&
_____ : _____ until _____ : _____



Notes about nap time: _____

I need: (circle one)

Nappies Wipes

Change of Clothes

Other: _____

Reminders, Special Notes & Comments:

VIII. Childminding Service Is Your Profession.

- By choosing to provide a childminding service, you are choosing to contribute to the level of quality of child care being provided to children in your community and giving parents options to make up their own mind. **Be vocal about your service.** Let parents know that they're getting a high-quality service and keep them informed about the benefits of the quality care you provide. Make sure parents know when you attend a professional development conference, training, workshops or start a college course in child development.
- **You are your own advocate!** Be passionate about your service and your work. Let parents know that you love your job and are proud of the service you provide.
 - Let parents know that you care about them and the well-being of their children.
 - Make it your business to know every parent, where they work, what their hobbies are, what they want for their children.

- Involve parents in special activities. For example, ask to share their talents with the children in your care or ask to collect some recyclables for a special art project.
- **You have many hats to wear.** Think about the helpful roles you can play for families in your service:
 - You are an early years professional when you listen to parents' questions about child development or child guidance problems and offer helpful information, suggestions or resources.
 - You're an advocate when you speak out about the importance of quality childminding services or further professional development for all involved with children.
 - You are a friend when you lend a listening ear to a parent concerned about his/her ailing parent.
 - You are an information officer when you can give family the names of the local community and family services which have resources for their needs. If you need help locating some of those resources, contact your local City/County Childcare Committee or your Local Childcare Resource Service for assistance.

You are much more than a childminding service provider for the families. You are a part of the village that helps to raise a child.

Be creative with your marketing efforts, and your service will be full in no time!

IX. Useful contacts.

Local Childcare Resource Services:



**Rathmines
Pembroke**
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

**South East Local Childcare
Resource Service**
Rathmines Pembroke
Community Partnership,
11 Wynnefield Road,
Rathmines,
Dublin 6

T: 01 496 5558
F: 01 496 5590
E: teresa@rpcp.ie



**northside
partnership**

a partnership of communities, state, employers,
trade unions and elected representatives

**North Central Local Childcare
Resource Service**
Northside Partnership
Coolock Development Centre
Bunratty Drive, Coolock
Dublin 17

T: 01 848 5630
M: 087 264 1058
F: 01 848 5661
E: childcareinfo@nspartnership.ie



South Central Local Childcare Resource Service
Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Partnership
4 Drumfinn Park
Ballyfermot,
Dublin 10
T: 01 623 5612
M: 087 251 5262
F: 01 623 0922
E: childcare@ballyfermotpartnership.ie



Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership opportunity : renewal : progress

North West Local Childcare Resource Service
Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership,
North Mall,
Ballymun Town Centre,
Dublin 11
T: 01 842 3612
F: 01 842 7004
E: childcareinfo@ballymun.org



Tolka Area Partnership
Central Local Childcare Resource Service
27/28 Annamoe Terrace,
Cabra,
Dublin 7
T: 01 868 3806
F: 01 868 6134
E: breda.kenny@tap.ie



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

HSE Childminder's Advisory Service:

Liz Butler, Childminders' Advisor
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