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‘Choosing a Childminder’ guide launched

NICMA publishes childcare advice booklet

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NICMA – the Childminding Association is today [Wednesday, 6th August] launching a new guide for parents in Northern Ireland who are trying to find and select a childminder.

The publication of the booklet, *Choosing a Childminder*, follows the findings of a recent local survey, commissioned by NICMA, which found that 30% of parents questioned who had recently looked for childcare had found their search difficult, with 17% describing their search as ‘very difficult’.

More than half (52%) of all parents questioned said that quality of care was an important consideration in seeking childcare, compared to 26% who said cost was an important factor.

“Given that so many parents are having difficulty in finding childcare and that quality is so important to them, we felt it would really help if we produced a clear, accessible guide,” explains NICMA’s Director, Bridget Nodder.

“The whole process of finding and selecting a childcare provider can seem overwhelming – ‘Choosing a Childminder’ contains simple advice in an accessible format.

“We hope parents who use the guide will feel more confident that they can make the right choice.”

Registered childminding is the most popular form of childcare in Northern Ireland - it accounts for 63% of full-time daycare places and 37% of all childcare places here.

But NICMA’s recent survey also revealed a strong preference among Northern Ireland parents for word of mouth recommendations about childcare providers. Parents were more wary about using formal sources of information about childcare.

“We entirely understand why many parents prefer to find a childcare provider through personal recommendation,” says Ms Nodder.

“But those who use word of mouth recommendation should still make their own assessment before reaching a decision – ‘Choosing a Childminder’ will help them to make an informed judgement.”

NICMA is also urging parents to ensure they use a childminder who is registered with their local Health and Social Care Trust.

“It can be tempting to use a friend or neighbour on a paid-for but informal basis – but such arrangements are actually illegal if they involve paid care for more than two hours a day,” explains Ms Nodder.

August is NICMA’s busiest month – staff will handle around 1,000 calls from parents seeking childcare during this month alone.

“Believe it or not, many parents who call us at this time of year are looking for a childminder from the start of the new school year,” says Irene Bell, NICMA’s Information Officer.

“While we’d obviously advise parents not to leave it to the last minute, we would also say don’t panic if you have!”

“There are usually some registered childminders who have vacancies and we will certainly do our best to help.”

If you would like a copy of the booklet or any help on looking for childcare, please call NICMA on 0871 200 2063 or visit its website at: www.nicma.org

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Editor’s notes:

1. NICMA – the Childminding Association is a charity, and is the sole organisation representing childminders in Northern Ireland. 74% of registered childminders here are members. For more details about NICMA, please go to: www.nicma.org
2. The *Choosing a Childminder* booklet was funded by the Southern Childcare Partnership, and Cow & Gate.
3. A list of ‘top tips’ for finding a childminder is available with this release.