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Fees

If you are self-employed and run your own business it will be up to you to set your own fees, there is no set rate.

You may charge an hourly, daily or weekly fee for each childminding place that is used, so how much you earn depends on the number of children you look after and the number of hours you work. It is a good starting point to look at what other childminders are charging in your area. You can find this information at www.childcarefinder.direct.gov.uk

You may want to calculate the actual cost to you of looking after a child. This will help you to set a fee which will cover your costs and allow you to make a profit. It is worth considering whether you intend to charge for optional extra services, such as meals and transport.

Working Tax Credits

Working Tax Credits are payments from the government, which can help with the cost of childcare.

If a parent or carer works, but earns low wages, they may qualify for Working Tax Credit. This is a payment which provides financial support for single people and couples who work 16 hours or more each week. If the parent or carer works and pays for childcare they may be able to get tax credits to help with the cost, providing they are using a registered childcare provider.

A factsheet giving more information about Tax Credits is available at www.devon.gov.uk/cypsfactsheets or you can contact the Tax Credit Helpline on **0845 300 3900** or visit www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxandBenefits

Childcare Voucher Schemes

Childcare vouchers offer a cost effective way for employers to help their staff with paying for childcare.

The salary sacrifice scheme, where payment for childcare vouchers is deducted through the wage packet, is a practical means of demonstrating work-life balance practice to employees and providing actual cost benefits to both employer and employee on National Insurance Contributions.

How does it work?

The employer makes an agreement with one of the childcare voucher companies.

Benefits to employers

- Part of a company's work-life balance programme to enable parents to manage their work and home commitments.
- Support and assistance from the voucher company with publicity and payroll.

Benefits to parents

- Maximum savings on childcare costs through their pay packet.
- Savings of up to 11% on childcare costs.
- Easy to use.
- Childcare costs stopped directly from salary – guaranteeing payment.
- Effective way to manage and budget for childcare costs.

Voucher companies

- Accor Services
- Busy Bees
- Sodexo Pass
- Faircare
- Virtual Vouchers
- Imagine Co-operative Childcare

This is not a complete list. There may be other companies offering childcare vouchers. Further information can be found at www.devon.gov.uk/disc

Early Years Funding Entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds

What is the Early Years Entitlement?

At the moment, from the term after a child's third birthday until they start school, they are entitled to up to 12.5 hours of free early learning and childcare each week for up to 38 weeks a year during school term time. The hours can take place in nurseries (including school nursery classes), playgroups, and pre-schools or at certain childminders.

From September 2009 the entitlement will increase in some early learning and childcare settings, and will be available in all settings from September 2010. The increased entitlement will be 15 hours of free early learning and childcare each week for up to 38 weeks a year during school term time and the hours can be used more flexibly.

The scheme promotes parental choice in the type of setting their children may attend including maintained nurseries attached to infant and primary schools, nursery schools, pre-schools, private day nurseries, independent schools and Specialist Childminders in Early Learning.

The funding is paid directly to you as the provider. For three year-olds the eligibility is:

Third birthday falls:	Eligible from:
1 April and 31 August	1 September after their third birthday until they go to school
1 September and 31 December	1 January after their third birthday until they go to school
1 January and 31 March	1 April after their third birthday until they go to school

Once a parent has chosen a childcare provider the child must be registered and in attendance with you by the headcount date. It is important you meet these deadlines or you will not be funded. Contact the Early Years Education Funding (EYEF) Helpdesk on **01392 385530** if you are unsure of the headcount dates.

The funding is claimed by the parent completing a Children's Information Form to register the child with you. Parents will also be asked to produce an original birth certificate and a copy of this must be sent with the Children's Information Form to the EYEF Team.

Early Years Education Funding
01392 38 5530 www.devon.gov.uk/eyef

Future funding entitlement for 2 year olds

A pilot was started in September 2009 to explore the possibility of extending the entitlement funding to include 2 year olds. Future developments will be publicised on the website at www.devon.gov.uk/eyef

Marketing

Devon Childminding Association (DCMA) provides a range of business publications to help registered childminders conduct their business professionally. You can get further information at www.devonca.org

The following advice is taken from the National Childminding Association (NCMA) publication **Mastermind your Business Marketing** and forms part of the wide range of advice offered by the NCMA to childminders on marketing their business.

Marketing your business is an important part of your childminding success. Unlike other businesses, you don't have a shop front or high street presence to let parents know you are open and available for business! Instead you have to find ways to reach parents and let them know what a good service you offer.

Consider your unique selling points

Every business has unique selling points – things that make them stand out from the crowd. Before you start promoting your business, take time to consider what your unique selling points are. They could be things that make you different from other forms of childcare, or things that set you apart from other childminders. Knowing your strengths can help you explain to others why your service is so good. For example:

your home

- safe and secure
- homely environment
- part of the local community
- no-smoking environment
- good transport links

- a large and child-friendly garden
- near to a park, playground, beach, leisure centre
- close to local schools. Which ones do you already do school runs to, and which other ones could you?
- a dedicated playroom
- plenty of parking for parents
- registered and checked for children to stay overnight
- plenty of space for children's activities

your qualifications, skills and training

- current paediatric first-aid certificate
- initial training in childminding
- further qualifications, for example, the Diploma in Home-based Childcare
- further training, such as messy play, child protection, health and safety
- belong to a childminding group
- belong to the Devon Childminding Network
- speak more than one language
- health checked
- have had an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosure — the most stringent available
- able to offer early years education
- many years of childminding or other childcare experience
- experience of particular forms of care, for example cared for triplets, a child with additional needs
- parent and or grandparent
- previous childcare experience, for example nursery worker, nanny
- previous jobs if relevant, for example, nurse, teacher

your service

- registered by Ofsted and regularly inspected
- able to offer care in the early morning, late evenings, overnight care or at weekends
- able to accommodate the childcare needs of parents who work shifts or irregular hours
- low ratio of children to carers
- have back up cover for sickness or holidays
- have references available
- work with an assistant
- offer regular outings to the park, local shops, library
- don't use physical punishment
- can care for siblings of different ages
- prepared to do drop-offs and pick-ups at after-school activities such as Brownies or swimming
- fees include meals, snacks, nappies
- can offer a special diet or freshly-cooked food
- have special skills, such as sign language
- regular visits to drop-ins for children to mix with larger groups
- care for a mix of different age children
- one of only a handful of childminders in the area
- only form of childcare in the area
- links to your local children's centre
- links to other local projects

- provide educational toys
- access to a toy library for large items
- provide a creative and enjoyable learning environment
- offer lots of activities — arts and crafts, reading, outdoor play, dressing up, imaginative play
- have a pet
- eligible childcare for tax credit claims
- hold public liability insurance
- vehicle insured for business use
- house insured for damages
- all household members over 16, including assistants, have had Criminal Records Bureau disclosures
- Good or Outstanding Ofsted grading
- offer children activities meeting national frameworks — EYFS; Foundation Phase.

Promoting your business

You should try to promote your business even when you don't have a vacancy, so, when you do, you are already well-known and highly regarded. Try some of these ideas.

Regularly update your details with DISC. Make sure that you complete any forms sent to you and aim to answer every question. If something changes about your service, for example you gain a qualification, remember to tell DISC.

Talk to others about what works for them. DISC, childcare support workers, and other childcarers will be able to let you know what type of advertising is successful in your area and how they fill vacancies.

Find out what parents want. Talk to parents you know, about what families would like from their ideal childcare service. Ask the parents you already work with how they found you and what attracted them.

Get involved in local projects. Try contacting your local authority, children's centre, or childminding development worker to see if there are any projects you could get involved in, for instance, offering respite care. As well as helping to fill places, these projects give you experience in different types of work that can lead to future interest in your service.

Turn your successes into news stories. If you have some good news, share it! Contact your local paper, radio station or childminding newsletter, or produce your own newsletter for the families you work with.

Always display best practice. Wherever you are make sure that people remember you for the quality of care you give the children.

Joining a childminding network or group is one of the best things you can do to promote registered childminding and your own business. By working together you can reach a much wider

audience. As a group you can:

- exchange information, let one another know when you have vacancies to fill
- appoint a vacancy co-ordinator, many networks and groups have a vacancy co-ordinator whose contact details are put on publicity materials
- hit the headlines - it's easier to get publicity as part of a group, so organise lots of events and invite the papers along, or send them photos afterwards
- produce leaflets, posters and a website holding your group's details. This can be cost effective and some places will only display general group adverts. You could even invest in a radio advert
- attend events, arrange stands at school events or shopping centres, or give a talk at a children's centre. Some groups arrange drop-ins where parents looking for childcare meet childminders
- reach employers, make a list of employers in your area then share them out and contact their personnel departments to find out if your group could have its vacancy co-ordinator's details put up in the staff room or in the office newsletter.
- get yourself heard, nominate group members to attend local authority meetings, take part in early years forums and respond to any consultations to make sure childminding is on people's minds.
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Promotional material

This can include leaflets, posters and business cards. Pass promotional materials to:

- your family (who can mention it to their friends and colleagues)
- friends
- neighbours
- the parents of the children you already care for
- other childminders and nursery staff (if they can't meet a parent's childcare needs they may pass on your details)
- childcare support staff, midwives, health visitors, social workers, staff at schools and pre-schools, crèche managers, people who run parenting classes, people who run exercise classes for pregnant women and new mums
- other people on the school run
- anyone else who may come into contact with parents, such as activity group leaders.

Think about placing adverts in business directories, such as, Yellow Pages, in free ads papers, in local evening papers, in parish newsletters, school fete programmes, activity group newsletters, on the internet — either with your own website, or part of your childminding group's (if it has one) and on the local radio station.

You could also consider wearing promotional clothing, such as a childminding group t-shirt, pinning on a promotional badge, putting a sign up in your garden, carrying business cards with you wherever you go, or a small flyer with details of what you can offer, putting a window sticker in your car, or front porch, creating a website, attending any 'meet the minder' sessions with parents and going to drop-in sessions run for parents.

You could also consider producing a leaflet and distributing it to:

- schools and playgroups
- doctors, dentists and clinic waiting rooms
- baby changing rooms
- church halls and community centres, where parents may attend drop-ins
- sports clubs and leisure centres
- independent baby equipment and children's wear shops
- toy shops
- libraries
- newsagents
- hairdressers
- offices and factory staff rooms
- colleges, adult education centres and other training providers
- anywhere else you can think of that parents may visit regularly!

Advertising vacancies

When you have a vacancy you can start to advertise and let people know that you have a space. Many childminders find that an advert in the local newspaper or in local shops or surgeries generates a number of enquiries. Others rely on word-of-mouth and recommendations.

You can advertise details of any vacancies you may have on the DISC website. Update forms are sent out on an annual basis by DISC to check that all the details about your provision are still up to date. These will be pre-printed with the information you have previously provided, for you to check. Any amendments that you wish to make or additional information that you would like added to your listing can be written directly onto the form, which then just needs to be signed and returned.

In between these annual updates someone from the DISC team will aim to contact you, either by email or telephone, every three months. This is to make sure that the details held about any vacancies you have available are kept up to date. If you have an email address that you are happy for the team to use, even if you would prefer it not to be made available to the public, that would be very helpful for them to know.

If you want to make any changes DISC are more than happy to be contacted by you at any time. Call **0800 056 36 66** and ask for the DISC office or email discinfo@devon.gov.uk