



Choosing Quality Childcare

A Parents Guide



Introduction

Roscommon County Childcare Committee is committed to developing a co-ordinated approach to quality childcare service provision in the county.

As one of 33 County Childcare Committees set up under the National Development Plan and Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000 -2006 and subsequently the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006 - 2010, Roscommon County Childcare Committee aims to:-

Improve the quality of Childcare Services
Increase numbers of Childcare places
Co-ordinate Childcare Services

With these aims in mind Roscommon County Childcare Committee are aware that there are many different types of quality childcare services available for you to choose from but only you as a parent will know what is right for your child.

Roscommon County Childcare Committee would like to extend their sincere gratitude to Wexford County Childcare Committee who gave permission for their publication 'Choosing Childcare A Parents Guide' to be adapted for use in Co. Roscommon.

This booklet has been produced for parents by Roscommon County Childcare Committee to inform and support you in making the right choice for you and your child.

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There are six main types of childcare a parent can choose from:

1. Sessional services
2. Part-time day care
3. Full-day care
4. Pre-school services in a drop-in centre
(and pre-school services in a temporary drop-in service)
5. Childminding service
6. School age childcare

What are my options?

1. Sessional services

Sessional pre-school service means a pre-school service offering a planned programme to pre-school children * for a total of not more than 3.5 hours per session.

2. Part- time day care

Part-time day care service means a pre-school service offering a structured day care service for pre-school children for a total of more than 3.5 hours and less than 5 hours per day and which may also include a sessional pre-school service for pre-school children not attending the part-time day care service.

Services covered by the above definitions may include pre-schools, playgroups, crèches, Montessori pre-schools, Naoinrai, Steiner, High scope, notifiable childminders or similar services which generally cater for pre-school children in the 0-6 year age bracket.
(see page 12)

* A pre-school child is a child under six years of age who is not attending a national school.

3. Full-day care

A full-day care service means a pre-school service offering a structured day care service for pre-school children for more than 5 hours per day and which may include a sessional pre-school service for pre-school children not attending the full-day care service. Services such as those currently described as day nurseries and crèches are included in this definition.

4. Pre-school service in a drop-in centre

A pre-school service in a drop-in centre means a pre-school service offering day care which is used exclusively on an intermittent basis.

Pre-school service in a temporary drop-in centre means a pre school service offering day care on a temporary basis.

5. Childminding Service

A 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 childminders own children, in the childminders home for a total of more than two hours per day, except where exemptions provided in section 58 of the Child Care Act 1991 apply (see page 13)

{All of the above definitions are taken from the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006}

6. School Age Childcare

This type of service cares for children who are of school going age. It may be for a time in the morning before school begins or in the afternoon when school has finished or both. The service may also care for children during school holidays. These services, at present, are not covered by the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No.2) Regulations 2006.

General questions you should ask in all services?

- * What type of daily curriculum is in place? (see page 12)
- * What is the weekly menu like?
(Does the service provide food or must you provide your own?)
- * Is the food preparation area clean & hygienic, do staff wear clean protective clothing during food preparation?
- * Is there a designated sleep area?
- * Is there a safe and clean area for nappy changing?
- * What type of observation policy is in place?
- * Can you view the policy and procedure handbook and the health and safety statement?
(see page 7)
- * Can you check references and garda clearance forms?
- * What happens when your child is sick?
- * Do you have to pay for days that your child does not attend the service?

The building and equipment?

- * Is the building in good repair?
- * Is there enough space indoors for your child to play freely and safely?
(Is there room for messy play?)
- * Is there a safe/secure out door play area with suitable equipment?
 - * Is there a designated sleep area?
(How are the sleep rooms monitored – are they well ventilated?)
- * Is there an adequate security system in place to prevent visitors from entering freely or without permission?
- * Is the food being prepared in a clean/safe environment?
- * Is there adequate fire safety equipment and a first aid kit?
- * Are windows and doors secure and fitted with safety locks?
- * Are there locks on cupboards and are all toxic materials stored out of reach?
- * Is there a good variety of toys/equipment to suit the ages & abilities of all children?
(Are the toys/equipment in good repair?)
- * Are the art materials used non toxic?

The staff?

- * What qualifications, training, and experience do the owner/manager and staff have?
- * Does the owner/manager and staff have garda clearance?
- * What is the ratio of adults to children? (see page 9)
- * Are the staff friendly and welcoming?
- * Do the staff communicate with the child at the child's level?
- * What are the roles of the staff in the service?

Policies and Legal Requirements?

- * If the service is caring for four or more children is it notified to the HSE?
(if so you may ask to view their inspection report)
- * Does the service have appropriate insurance?
- * If bringing or collecting children from school does the service have adequate car insurance?
- * Does the service have policies and procedures in place? (see page 7)
- * Does the service have relevant details regarding the children in their care (e.g. dietary requirements, allergies) and are they stored in a secure place? (see page 8)

Other

- * Does the service cater for children with additional needs?
- * Does the service open during school holidays?
- * What weeks/days does the service close?

Types of policies and procedures

you should check for

Child protection

Health and safety

Confidentiality

Behaviour management

Medicinal administration and records *

Control of infectious diseases

Outings policy

Fire safety

Partnership with parents

Equal opportunities

* if your child requires medicine daily, you should sign a record to allow staff to administer it and remember to name the medicine, dosage to be given , method of administration and frequency to be given.

Child's registration form

– details you may be asked to give:

Every Child Care service should have a record securely kept of each child attending their service. All registration forms differ, therefore, the following is simply an example of the type of questions you may be asked to answer on completing your child's registration form...

- a) Child's name, address and date of birth.
- b) Who the child lives with.
- c) Emergency contact person/number.
- d) Names of people who are permitted to collect your child.
- e) Your child's doctor's name and number.
- f) Vaccinations your child has received.
- g) Dietary requirements, allergies, likes and dislikes.
- h) Sibling's names or people close to your child.

You may also be asked to sign permission slips as part of the registration process allowing the service to:

- i. contact a doctor in the case of an emergency.
- ii. take your child on outings (note: you should ask staff what this entails)
- iii. take photographs of your child (these photographs should be for use within the service only – should an occasion arise whereby the children are being photographed by a newspaper you should be asked by staff to sign another slip. You should ask staff about their policy on photograph taking)

Useful tips

- * Visit as many services as possible with your child
- * Visit the service at a time when there are other children there
 - * Chat to other parents who use the service
- * Do not be afraid to ask the owner/manager questions

Adult/Child Ratios

The following adult/child ratios are recommended
by the Child Care (Pre-School Services)
(No. 2) Regulations 2006:

FULL-DAY CARE SERVICES – (5 HOURS OR MORE)

AGE RANGE	ADULT/CHILD RATIO
0-1 YEAR	1:3
1-2 years	1:5
2-3 years	1:6
3-6 years	1:8

PART-TIME DAY CARE SERVICE – (3.5 – 5 HOURS)

AGE RANGE	ADULT/CHILD RATIO
0-1 YEAR	1:3
1-2 years	1:5
2-3 years	1:6
3-6 years	1:8

SESSIONAL PRE-SCHOOL SERVICE – (NOT EXCEEDING 3.5 HOURS)

AGE RANGE	ADULT/CHILD RATIO
0-1 YEAR	1:3
1-2 years	1:5
2-3 years	1:6
3-6 years	1:8

Pre-school service in a drop-in centre and in a temporary drop-in centre

Pre-school service in a drop-in centre means a pre-school service offering day care which is used exclusively on an intermittent basis.

Pre-school service in a temporary drop-in centre means a pre-school service offering day care exclusively on a temporary basis.

A pre-school service in a drop-in centre refers to a service where a pre-school child is cared for over a period of not more than two hours while the parent/guardian is availing of a service or attending an event. Such services are mainly located in shopping centres, leisure centres or other establishments as part of customer/client service.

A pre-school service in a temporary drop-in centre refers to a service where a preschool child is cared for while the parent or guardian is attending a once off event such as a conference or a sports event.

ADULT/CHILD RATIOS FOR DROP IN CENTRES

AGE RANGE	ADULT/CHILD RATIO	GROUP
Full age integration 0-6 years	1 : 4	24

1 – 4 children (no more than 2 children < 15 months) – 1 adult

Maximum group size – 24

All of the above is taken from the *Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006*

Points to remember in relation to the above

- * Always leave a contact number with the service and an emergency contact number in the event that you are unattainable.
- * Inform staff at the service of any relevant medical issues or special dietary requirements that may be of importance for the duration that your child will be attending the service.
- * Ensure that staff have everything they need in order to care for your child as best they can e.g. Nappies, drinks, food, comfort toy etc.

How will I find out about services being offered in my area?

Roscommon County Childcare Committee

HSE

National Children's Nursery Association

IPPA (The Early Childhood Organisation)

Golden pages

Newspaper advertisements

Word of mouth

Types of curriculum/programmes being offered in pre-school services:

The following is a short explanation of various terms you may hear being used in relation to pre-school services

Playgroup

Play is the core focus of a playgroup's daily curriculum where the children learn through play activities. There is an element of free choice involved in the daily plan whereby the children choose what area they wish to play in including: construction, messy play, dress up, home area etc. The children learn to socialise, share and solve problems together with the aid of trained staff.

Naíonraí

The Naíonraí programme is quite similar to that of the playgroup. However, the Naíonraí incorporate the Irish language into their daily plan.

High scope

'Plan – do – review' programme is central to the high scope curriculum. The children plan their activities together as a group, telling staff what their plans are, the children then carry out their plan with staff supervision and finally as a group they discuss how it went. The children also learn to problem solve by sharing and listening to others feelings.

Montessori

In Montessori pre-schools... "The role of the adult is to provide a planned environment that will allow the child the opportunity to develop skills and concepts...central to the Montessori method are the didactic (teaching) materials. These consist of blocks, beads, cylinders and rods provided for the children to play with" (Beaver et al 2001)

Steiner

"The Steiner method encourages creativity and self expression through activities such as drawing, dancing, music, movement and all kinds of fantasy and pretend play...Steiner believed that children learn through imitation and interaction" (Beaver et al 2001)

CHILDMINDING SERVICE

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 childminders own children, in the childminders home for a total of more than two hours per day, except where exemptions provided in section 58 of the Child Care Act 1991 apply. (See below)

This service refers to pre-school children looked after in the childminders home. This service is offered for the full working day or for different periods during the day.

Section 58 exemptions as from part vii of the Child Care Act 1991

- The care of one or more pre-school children undertaken by a relative of the child or children or the spouse of such relative.[i.e. a brother, sister, uncle, aunt, grandparent or step-parent of the child]
- A person taking care of one or more pre-school children of the same family and no other such children (other than that person's own such children) in that person's home.
- A person taking care of not more than three pre-school children of different families (other than that person's own such children) in that person's home.

{All of the above definitions are taken from the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006}

What should I look for...

In a childminder?

- * S/he should have a genuine like for children and understand their needs and development.
- * How did they greet your child?
- * S/he should be in good health
- * S/he should be notified to the HSE if caring for more than three pre-school children
- * Be business like in their approach to their childminding service. – do they have records, information on the children being cared for, daily routine and a parent/childminder agreement?
- * S/he should have policies and procedures in place around behaviour management, child protection, health and safety, confidentiality, fire safety etc. (see page 7)
- * Ideally s/he should have undertaken some childcare training including first aid training and child protection.
- * S/he should have adequate insurance to care for children in his/her home.
- * S/he should have appropriate car insurance and car seats if using the car while your child is in their care.
- * S/he should avail of the support of his/her Childminder Co-ordinator.
- * S/he should have garda clearance or be in the process of obtaining garda clearance.

A childminders home?

- * Should be warm, inviting and clean.
- * Should be structurally sound.
- * Should be safe and secure with all possible measures taken to limit dangers (stair gates, smoke alarms, fire blankets, fire extinguisher, safety glass fitted etc)
- * Should be big enough to cater for the childminders own children as well as the children being cared for.
- * Have a safe and secure out door play area
(ensure that the children do not have access to unsafe areas).
- * Have a separate sleeping room
- * Have a clean and safe designated area for nappy changing
- * Have a range of toys and equipment age appropriate for the children being cared for.
- * Have enough space to allow the children to take part in messy play, painting, water play, sand play etc.
- * Have a safe and secure area for animals if they are kept on the premises.

Questions to ask your childminder...?

- 1) Is there an emergency plan in place, if the childminder has to leave the premises?
- 2) Who else is in the house while the childminding is taking place?
(If there is someone else present during childminding times do they have garda clearance also?)
- 3) What are the ages and numbers of the other children being cared for?
- 4) Is the childminder willing to collect your child from playschool/national school or bring them to after school activities? (If so remember to check they have adequate car insurance)
- 5) What happens if your child is sick will they be able to attend the service?
- 6) Do you have to pay when your child is not attending?
- 7) How many weeks in the year does the childminding service operate and do you have to pay when you or the childminder are on holidays?
- 8) Is there a reduction for a second child?
- 9) What time does the service begin and finish at?
- 10) If your childminder is caring for 3 or fewer preschool children - have they taken the decision to voluntarily notify Roscommon County Childcare Committee.

*It is recommended that all of the above be written in a **contract** before the childminding arrangement begins, therefore no mis-understandings over money, holidays or late collection can occur. This contract should be reviewed on a regular basis.*

How do I find a childminder?

Contact your Childminder Advisory Officer through Roscommon County Childcare Committee.

Advertise in your local shops, library or schools.

Check notice boards in your local shops, library or schools.

Advertisements in national and local papers or newsletters.

Local parent & toddler groups

Talk to local crèche and playgroup owners.

Word of mouth from friends, family and colleagues.

REMEMBER!

If you are happy with the choice of childminder you have made, give your child a settling in period before you return to work/training.

Good communication is the key to a good childminding arrangement so work in partnership with your childminder.

Adult child ratios in relation to childminding

[As set out in the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006]

A childminder should look after not more than five pre-school children including their own pre-school children.

No more than two children should be less than 15 months. Exceptions in relation to numbers under 15 months can be made for multiple births or siblings.

Note: where a childminder is caring for more than three preschool children including their own children they must notify themselves to the HSE.

Settling your child into a childcare/childminding service

Take your child along with you when visiting the service and allow them to familiarise themselves with its surroundings and the staff.

Have open chats with your child about the fun things they do in the childcare/childminding service

Use the owner or staff members name when talking about the service as this makes it more personal and familiar.

Take time on the child's first few mornings, to accompany them to the service, reassuring them that mum or dad will be back to collect them soon.

In the case of young babies/toddlers it may be a good idea to spend some time with your child at the service before leaving in order to allow time for them to relax.

Find out what the daily routine and activities are so you can chat to your child about their day.

Try to allow time, on collection of your child from the service, to talk about their day.

Finally

Remember there are advantages associated with all of the childcare services mentioned, therefore, it is your individual prerogative to decide what best suits you and your children's needs.

Take time to check out various services

Check references, curriculum and policies

Always ask questions

Your child's welfare and

happiness is paramount so always

listen to their opinion and check their reaction.

**Should you require any further
information on choosing
childcare for your family, you should
contact**

**ROSCOMMON COUNTY
CHILDCARE COMMITTEE.**

*This information is to be used as a guide only.
Parents and childminders need to make their own arrangements to meet their own needs*

OTHER USEFUL PUBLICATIONS

NCNA – 7 Steps to Choosing Childcare, available to download from www.ncna.ie

DISCLAIMER

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Department of Health and Children (2006) *Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 and Explanatory Guide to Requirements and Procedures for Notification and Inspection*; Dublin: Stationary office

Useful Contacts

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Knock Road
Castlerea
Co. Roscommon
Tel: 094 9622540
Email: info@roscommonchildcare.ie
www.roscommonchildcare.ie

Pre-School Services Officer (HSE)

HSE Office
Abbey Street
Roscommon
Tel: 090 6626732

National Children's Nurseries Association

Unit 12c
Bluebell Business Park
Old Naas Road
Bluebell, Dublin 12
Unit 12c
Tel: 01 4601138
Email: info@ncna.ie

IPPA – The Early Childhood Organisation

Unit 4
Broomhill Business Complex
Broomhill Road
Tallaght, Dublin 24
Tel: 01 4630010
Email: info@ippa.ie

Barnardos National Children's Resource Centre

Christchurch Square
Dublin 8
Tel: 01 4530355
Email: info@barnardos.ie

Childminding Ireland

9 Bulford Business Campus
Kilcoole
Co. Wicklow
Tel: 01 2878466
Email: info@childminding.ie



If you would like further information on Childcare Services in County Roscommon please contact:

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Email: info@roscommonchildcare.ie
www.roscommonchildcare.ie



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