

Let's talk about...

doing chores

Are childcare workers any different from other workers where seeing to their own personal needs during the day is concerned? **Annette Rawstrone** spoke to childminders

ILLUSTRATION BY CLAIRE NICHOLS

Q Is it acceptable for childminders to do chores during working hours?

'Yes, but the childminder should know why they are doing a certain task, and if it doesn't fit in the child's day, they shouldn't do it.'

'Generally we don't think it's acceptable to do chores during working hours. It is our job to be working with the children and that's what the parents pay us for, not for doing housework. One parent even asked when we did our housework, as he was concerned we would be doing household tasks rather than caring for his child – a fair question.'

'It's important that childminder's homes reflect those of the children's families. In a normal home setting, a parent would carry out chores and include the children.'

'It depends on the chores, the age and stage of development of the children and whether children can take part. Chores should not be detrimental to the time and attention children need and deserve. There may be times when the children are sleeping where most chores, including record keeping, can be performed.'

'I would say that anything educational is fine. I think we should be challenged to justify how our activities meet the children's needs.'

Q What jobs would you do while caring for children?

'A good childminder uses every opportunity to create a learning experience – even walking to the shops. Many childminders have shopping lists with pictures on for the children to use.'

'We rarely do chores during working hours other than those that arise directly out of childminding, such as cooking, washing up or tidying toys. We encourage the children to help with these, as it helps them develop personal and social skills.'

'Outdoors, we may tidy the garden and water the plants, but again this benefits the children and develops knowledge and understanding of the world.'

'On a nice sunny day we wash the cars. A bucket full of soapy water and a big sponge is one of the things the children like best. We usually wash their play cars at the same time.'

'Our playroom was built for the children. When the toys need cleaning and when the windows have to be washed, we have a playroom cleaning day'

and we all do it. It's fun and messy.'

'I have a child with a disability, which means he has a huge amount of washing. I have spoken to parents about doing washing during the day and they are all fine with it. I involve the little ones in passing pegs, talking about colours and shapes.'

'We go to the greengrocers and farm shop and the children collect eggs from the hens, pick fruit for a kebab and handle the vegetables. We also visit the fishmongers and go to the butchers most weeks.'

Q How do the children benefit from this?

'Most people who choose a childminder over a nursery do it so that their children could experience a

positive home environment with all these fab daily tasks part of the scene.'

'We may tidy the garden and water the plants, but the children benefit by helping, and it develops their knowledge and understanding of the world.'

'It's important that children learn how to do chores – it gives them skills they will need later in life. It also helps them to develop a sense of ownership and value for the setting they are in.'

'We meet all six areas of learning and development, plus most of the principles of the EYFS during all our activities or I wouldn't do them. I show compliance with the EYFS in a series of continuous provision plans I have written.'

'Chores done well have a fantastic learning component – matching socks in the laundry, weighing and measuring, hanging things on the clothes horse, deciding what belongs to who.'

'Children benefit from the jobs done. They help them develop a sense of responsibility and encourage self-worth. They provide opportunities for hand-eye coordination, development of both fine and gross motor skills, thinking and reasoning skills, development of language, confidence, reliability, perseverance, knowledge and understanding of how things around them work and what matters, health and hygiene, and the people who help us.'

Q What chores should childminders not do with the children in tow?

'A good childminder wouldn't do chores at work like ironing, a large shopping trip, cleaning the loo. Like any other worker, they do that after hours.'

'Sometimes a crisis may occur where childminders have to do some chores with the children present because it is difficult to have time off at short notice. But unacceptable tasks are those that could be dangerous, such as ironing or DIY, or unsuitable for children, such as a long shopping trip.'

'There are a few chores I will not do when children are present. These include ironing, deep cleaning such as major hoovering, oven cleaning,

AN EXPERT'S VIEW



Susanna Dawson, registered childminder and chair of NCMA

There is no formal policy on this matter. Most registered childminders use their common sense when deciding what will

be appropriate to do around the house while they are looking after children.

Registered childminders are professional childcare providers, paid by parents to care for their children and to give them educational experiences and help them to learn through play. Learning experiences may take place by children getting involved in visits to the local shops or the post office, or helping with fun tasks around the house and garden.

Childminders are also bound by the statutory requirements to ensure that children are kept safe and that health and safety is a priority within the setting. I ask children to help me put away an activity or tidy up toys during the day to make sure the

floor does not become littered with trip hazards.

Childminders also ensure that kitchen surfaces are kept clean and clear during the working day and that the floor is also clean and dry. These could be described as 'chores' but are a necessary part of running a clean and safe childminding setting.

There is also the opportunity for the children to get involved in the daily routine and learn how to set the table for lunch, or help wipe the table clean before we use it.

As childminders are based in their local community, they have lots of opportunities to take the children to their local farm shop or supermarket. While childminders would not do their weekly shop at this time, buying a few items can serve as a learning experience for the children. I give the children a simple list, such as four green apples or a loaf of bread. It encourages children to find the right fruit and count each apple as it is put into a bag. We can learn about bread and also weigh food – all examples of fitting in learning experiences while getting the odd essential item that you may need.

the cleaning of toilets and bathrooms, unless there's been an accident.'

'I knew one childminder who took in ironing to supplement her income and often ironed while she had children in the house. I thought that was very wrong.'

'We have to be careful that we are not dictating here. Childminders work long hours with lots of children and are entitled to short breaks just like in any other profession. So if we want to take a ten-minute break while the children are playing happily, then I think we should be entitled. I spoke to Ofsted about this and they agreed that we cannot work ten-plus-hour days without a break.'

'We should also be entitled to do some paperwork during the working day – again, if children are happy, safe and busy. There needs to be a balance, though, because everyone has different ideas of what is acceptable and what is too much.'

Q Should there be guidelines on this issue?

'No, just the excellent training that goes on now and good pay, which values the childminder and her practice.'

'There are certain things I would not be happy seeing a fellow childminder doing'

'I know we all say that we have so many guidelines and requirements already, but there are certain things I would not be happy about seeing a fellow childminder doing. If there were guidelines and I saw her, I might challenge it, whereas now she would just tell me that she wasn't breaking any rules.'

'Then, of course, you get into the realms of the childminder who does her weekly grocery shop online or the childminder who sends texts all through the day. Any guidelines would need to cover so many things that you wonder if they would be feasible.'

'Practicalities and common sense should prevail. It is impossible to foresee all the possible eventualities and document them. For example, a seven-year-old child will enjoy making cement and laying bricks for a garden wall. This isn't an appropriate shared task for a nine-month-old, but where would the line be drawn? It all depends on the age and stage of development of the child and the childminder's skills of engagement.'

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