



A quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors:

Childminding quality indicators

September 2025



The structure of the quality indicators

These quality indicators are childminding-specific and cover all childminders including those who deliver funded ELC.

Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate agree that for childminders who deliver funded ELC, the quality indicators in this section should be used for self-evaluation, and the quality indicator play and learning should be used to satisfy the National Standard. This means that childminders providing funded care do not need to self-evaluate against any additional quality indicators from elsewhere in the wider framework or other sector specific content.

Childminders delivering care to children of school age can also self-evaluate their service using the four headings and quality indicators within the childminding sector specific content.

Heading	Quality Indicator
Leadership	<u>Leadership and management of staff and resources</u>
	<u>Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment</u>
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	<u>Children experience high quality spaces</u>
Children play and learn	<u>Playing, learning and developing</u>
Children are supported to achieve	<u>Nurturing care and support</u>
	<u>Safeguarding and child protection</u>

This table shows the quality indicators for childminding across the four headings of the framework.

Illustrations of practice

All quality indicators have themes to support your self-evaluation. There are illustrations of practice for each theme. These describe what we might see in a setting where the quality of provision is 'very good' or 'weak'.

Leadership and management of staff and resources

Leadership and management of staff and resources is a 'leadership' quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practices and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations of leadership and management of staff and resources are also available for [early learning and childcare settings](#) and [school age childcare](#).

Themes for leadership and management of staff and resources

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- vision, values and aims
- self-evaluation, quality assurance and implementing change
- staff recruitment and induction

About leadership and management of staff and resources

This indicator highlights the need for childminders to ensure they have an ambitious, shared vision that focuses on improvements and positive outcomes for all. There should be a strong ethos of continuous improvement which enhances the delivery of high-quality practice. It focuses on accountability, responsibility and shared values as important features of building and sustaining a highly professional service.

The importance of partnership approaches to self-evaluation and continuous improvement are highlighted. There is an emphasis on the need for a shared understanding of strengths and areas for development between the childminder (and where applicable, assistants), families and children. The impact of self-evaluation and quality assurance leads to improved and sustained positive outcomes for children and families.

This indicator focuses on the management of staffing decisions when employing assistants, and the importance of this on the quality of children's overall experiences and outcomes. It supports values-based, safe recruitment procedures that ensure trained, competent and skilled assistants (where applicable) are employed to promote positive outcomes for children. This includes a comprehensive induction programme to support and guide assistants in their roles and responsibilities.

There is a clear focus on aligning practice with national policy, legislation and rights-based frameworks and standards. This includes the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of](#)

[the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) and the [Health and Social Care Standards](#) which can support childminders and assistants (where applicable) in delivering safe, nurturing, and responsive care that meets the individual needs of children.

Illustrations of vision, values and aims

'Very good' vision, values and aims

Childminders promote, sustain and are highly committed to a shared vision for their service that reflects the highest possible standards for children, families, partner professionals and the wider community. Children and families are actively included in the design and review of the service vision, values and aims. This ensures any planned developments or improvements take due account of children's rights, interests, curiosities, needs and preferences.

Childminders create conditions where all those involved in the service feel confident to initiate well-informed change and share responsibility for the process. Effective communication ensures a clear view of the service's vision, values and aims so that children and families are included in achieving them.

The values are embedded in the everyday life of the service and inform practice. The ethos of the service is clearly founded on principles of high-quality childcare and learning, active engagement with children and their families, and a quality culture.

'Weak' vision, values and aims

The vision, values and aims for the service are unclear or are not effectively communicated to children, families, partners and the wider community. There is a limited focus on the importance of improvement.

Children and families do not experience a service which reflects their shared aspirations. Not everyone involved in the service is aware of the vision, values and aims, or their role in promoting these. Changes made to practice, routines and the service have little impact on children and families. The childminder shows a resistance to change which negatively impacts their ability to deliver improved outcomes. Opportunities to reflect and bring about positive change for children and families are missed.

Illustrations of self-evaluation, quality assurance and implementing change

'Very good' self-evaluation, quality assurance and implementing change

Well considered, purposeful self-evaluation enables the childminder to deliver high-quality care and learning tailored to the needs and choices of children and their families. The importance of using the views of children, families and partners to inform improvement is central to the self-evaluation process. The childminder can evidence where these views are used to inform change, secure improvement and positive outcomes for all children and families. Quality assurance supports childminders to improve and sustain high-quality care for children. Childminders ensure that high-quality care, play and learning are at the heart of improvement planning.

Highly effective practice is identified and shared beyond the service to promote improvements which have led to positive outcomes for children. Continuous improvement, success and achievement for all children are central to the planned implementation of strategies for improvement. These are relevant to local, national and international advice and best practice guidance is used effectively to support thoughtful changes.

'Weak' self-evaluation, quality assurance and implementing change

Self-evaluation for improvement is at an early stage of development or has not resulted in sustained improvements. Children and families are not meaningfully involved in the process of self-evaluation. As a result, they do not feel well informed about changes or why they are happening.

Children and families do not experience quality care, as improvement planning is not used consistently or effectively. There is insufficient skill and capacity to support effective improvement. Childminders may not enable assistants (if applicable), children or families, to confidently highlight complaints or areas for improvement. They fail to respond promptly to feedback and therefore improvements cannot be identified or progressed.

Opportunities to engage a range of relevant professionals or partners have not been taken or used to inform improvement planning. There are significant gaps in the areas covered by the quality assurance systems in place. Children's experiences and outcomes are poor, as inconsistencies in care are not fully identified and do not highlight areas for improvement.

Illustrations of recruitment and induction

'Very good' recruitment and induction

Childminders who employ assistants understand that a stable and skilled team is essential for the wellbeing of children. Assistants are recruited in a way that has been informed by all aspects of [safer recruitment practices](#).

Childminders ensure new assistants are safely recruited and that they understand their responsibilities. When recruiting, childminders clearly communicate the core values of their service and evaluate if the assistant's values are a good fit. They ensure assistants have the right skills and are suitable to work with children. Children and families have opportunities to be involved in the process in a meaningful way. They are kept informed and introduced to any new or temporary assistants.

Induction programmes are thorough and personalised to support assistants and ensure they are confident in meeting the needs of individual children. Childminders utilise a range of resources, including the [Early learning and childcare: national induction resource](#), to equip newly recruited assistants with the knowledge and skills necessary for providing high quality care for babies and children.

There is a clear process for mentoring and supporting assistants, with time allocated to take this forward. These approaches support high-quality outcomes for all children.

'Weak' recruitment and induction

The recruitment procedures may compromise the welfare or safety of children. Important elements of the process may be ignored. For example, exploring gaps in employment history or disclosure records; or allowing assistants to start working before all the required checks have been undertaken or received.

The approach to induction is limited to a one-off event focused on policies and procedures. Little consideration is given to the care, support and learning needs of children. As a result, new assistants do not have all the information they need to safely care for and support children. Childminders do not support assistants to better understand their role.

Challenge questions for leadership and management of staff and resources

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How effectively do I engage others to develop a shared vision and purpose for my service?
- How well do the vision, values and aims inform how the service is delivered?
- How do quality assurance processes improve outcomes for children and families?
- How does self-evaluation help me to make improvements for children and families?
- How has the use of best practice documents and guidance led to improvements in children's experiences and outcomes?
- How have I used children's voice to evaluate and inform my practice and provision?
- How are children and families enabled to have a key role in the continuous improvement journey?
- When employing assistants, how does my recruitment process reflect current best practice and national guidance?
- How do I ensure I employ assistants with the right values, skills and knowledge to support me to provide a high-quality service?
- How do I ensure that the induction process supports my assistants to understand their role and responsibilities and ensure children's needs are met?

Staff skills, knowledge, values and staff deployment

Staff skills, knowledge, values and staff deployment is a 'leadership' quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practices and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations of staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment are also available for [early learning and childcare settings](#) and [school age childcare](#).

Themes for staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- staff skills, knowledge and values
- staff deployment

About Staff skills, knowledge, values and staff deployment

This indicator focuses on the ability of the childminder to build strong relationships with children, families and assistants, when applicable. It highlights the importance of skilled interactions to promote children's confidence and to have a positive influence on their lives as they develop and learn.

Professional learning and development is promoted through training and reflective practice. This is well planned and linked directly to enhanced outcomes for children, their individual needs, and the service improvement plan. A positive, compassionate and responsive culture where children thrive should be evident.

It focuses on childminders making informed decisions about how to effectively use their own time and resources, and, where applicable, those of assistants. This highlights the importance of these decisions on the quality of children's overall experiences and outcomes. It recognises the need for responsive deployment to meet children's needs across the day.

Illustrations of staff skills, knowledge and values

'Very good' skills, knowledge and values

Childminders have a clear understanding of how children develop and learn. They have high aspirations for children's achievements. Children benefit from high-quality care as the childminder's practice reflects current best practice documents and guidance materials. They make good use of professional development opportunities that link directly to enhanced outcomes for children, their own individual learning needs and their improvement plan.

Childminders use a variety of sources to shape their skills, knowledge and values. These include professional reading of best practice guidelines, national and local policies, and underpinning legislation. They also refer to the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) and the [Health and Social Care Standards](#).

A wide range of opportunities is available for childminders to hold professional discussions, and they use these to inform practice. They are highly reflective in their practice and engage in professional discussion to build knowledge and effectiveness. Shared values with assistants and partners guide their work and result in improved outcomes for children.

Childminders maintain effective records of the impact of their learning and development. They can talk with confidence about the difference this has made to experiences and outcomes for children. Celebrating success and learning from mistakes is integral to a culture of openness.

'Weak' skills, knowledge and values

The quality of outcomes and experiences for children and families is negatively impacted as the childminder fails to engage in professional learning to improve their practice. Where learning needs are identified, these are not fully taken forward. This results in gaps in professional knowledge and skills, which impacts negatively on the quality of children's experiences.

There is an absence of professional discussion to support children's development and learning. As a result, children do not benefit from high-quality care based on the latest best practice and guidance.

Illustrations of staff deployment

'Very good' staff deployment

The approach to deployment ensures children experience responsive care that meets their needs. Arrangements are in place to promote continuity of care across the day and ensure positive transitions and communication with families.

Children are kept safe and are effectively supervised by childminders and their assistant, should they have one. This is well-considered when children are moving between the childminder's home and another setting or educational establishment. This supports children to feel confident and secure when in the childminder's care.

When an assistant is employed, the childminder supports the sharing of skills and knowledge to ensure they and the assistant are working well together.

'Weak' staff deployment

The approach taken by childminders to keep children safe and effectively supervised does not support children to feel confident and secure. Gaps in supervision and opportunities to improve are missed. The lack of reflective practice, and ineffective deployment, significantly compromises the quality of experiences and outcomes for children. This has the potential to lead to harm to children.

Arrangements for busier times of the day, such as mealtimes and transitions to and from the home, are ineffective in ensuring that childminders can fully meet children's needs. Activities become task-oriented rather than opportunities for high-quality engagement and interaction. Children's routines and experiences are disrupted due to poorly managed arrangements for planned transitions.

Challenge questions for staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How do I use self-evaluation to ensure that I have all the appropriate knowledge and skills to support children to be the best that they can be?
- How well does professional learning impact positively on outcomes for children and in what ways?
- How do I build on individual skills and interests which lead to improvements for children?
- How do I ensure I reflect on my practice and service to enhance outcomes for children?
- How do I ensure I am in the right place at the right time to support all children in my care?
- How do I ensure continuity of care for children throughout their day?
- How do I consider my own wellbeing and the wellbeing of my assistants, if applicable, to ensure my service provides safe, high-quality care and the best outcomes for children?

Children experience high-quality spaces

Children experience high-quality spaces is the 'children thrive and develop in quality spaces' quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations of children experience high quality spaces are also available for [early learning and childcare settings](#) and [school age childcare](#).

Themes for children experience high-quality spaces

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- quality, safety and maintenance of spaces
- children influence and affect change
- information management

About children experience high-quality spaces

This quality indicator highlights the importance of having a safe, secure and inspiring home, where children feel welcomed. Whatever the style or size of the childminder's home, the childminder enables very good use of the available space indoors and outdoors to enhance children's experiences. Indoor spaces benefit from natural light and effective ventilation.

The quality indicator encourages that a childminder's home should be inclusive and celebrate diversity, including differences in speech, language and communication. When designing and evaluating spaces for children, careful consideration is given to current research and best practices. [Realising the Ambition](#) could be used as a key resource. There is a recognition of [children's right to enjoy outdoor play](#) and the importance of outdoor play for children's health and wellbeing.

This indicator notes the importance of the childminder's home being well-maintained for children. It highlights the need for regular maintenance of the home, resources and equipment used. It supports an appropriate level of risk assessment to minimise potential risks and keep children safe from harm, including the need for rigorous infection prevention and control. There is recognition that whilst [children must be kept safe](#), children's play provides an opportunity to take and learn from measured risk.

All aspects of security should be considered, including the security of the home and the storage of confidential records and information.

Illustrations of quality, safety and maintenance of spaces

'Very good' quality, safety and maintenance of spaces

The childminder's home is welcoming, fully meets children's needs and is maintained to a very high standard. It gives a strong message to children that they matter. Childminders are confident in making best use of available spaces and resources to create, sustain and enhance a motivating environment for children.

Childminders recognise the importance of [daily outdoor play](#) and its benefits for enhancing children's wellbeing. They support and encourage children to explore and build independence, helping them to actively learn about the wider world. As a result, the physical environment supports children to feel safe, secure and loved while they experience play and learning centred on their needs and interests.

Childminders take prompt action to ensure the safety and security of children, visitors and each other. They, and their assistants where applicable, undertake, understand and share appropriate risk assessments. Childminders keep children accounted for by remaining vigilant to risk, whether they are indoors, outdoors or in the wider community. As a result, children are safe and their opportunities to enjoy challenging and fun play experiences are not compromised.

Childminders prioritise children's safety whilst embracing a positive, balanced approach to risk in children's play. Children engage in a broad range of challenging and interesting play opportunities that support and extend their development and learning. Through these experiences children build self-confidence. They learn to assess and manage risks for themselves, developing essential skills and resilience.

Childminders have completed robust training on infection prevention and control measures. There is a clear understanding and confidence to provide and promote a high-quality, clean and safe environment. This includes understanding of the arrangements for cleaning as well as in practising food safety. Where children require personal care, arrangements are effectively planned, and high levels of infection prevention and control are implemented. Children's privacy, dignity and preferences are fully respected and there are appropriate spaces to support their care needs. Arrangements for monitoring,

maintenance and repair of the physical environment, equipment, and any vehicles function well and are consistently implemented. Damaged items are promptly replaced.

'Weak' quality, safety and maintenance of spaces

The childminder's home and resources to support play, may look or feel neglected, rather than warm and welcoming for children. There is limited attention to detail such as homely touches, decoration, and the quality of furniture and resources is poor. There may be unpleasant smells or intrusive noise levels.

The breadth and balance of resources do not sufficiently meet children's development needs or offer challenge and opportunities for exploration. The physical environment, furniture and fittings are inadequate.

The physical environment does not enable children to lead their own play and learning. The resources provided do not support children to achieve. Childminders demonstrate limited understanding of the benefits of the outdoors to children's play and learning. Children's views do not influence their access to outdoors. Current best practice is not used effectively to increase knowledge in this area. The childminder does not always recognise when children need more energetic experiences. Potential barriers to outdoor play and learning have not been recognised or given adequate consideration. This means that the physical environment does not meet children's needs.

Childminders do not always promote a safe environment for children. They may have limited understanding of children's development and may not recognise when everyday items can pose risk. As a result, children may be at risk from avoidable harm.

Childminders may unnecessarily limit children's experiences and children's confidence may be affected. Excessive restrictions may be placed on their play and learning opportunities, compromising the quality of children's experiences. Procedures for infection prevention and control are not robust and heighten the risk of infection.

Arrangements for security in the home, outdoors and in the wider community may not be well considered and there is the potential for children to leave the home or be unaccounted for across the day, exposing them to risk of harm.

Illustrations of children influence and affect change

'Very good' children influence and affect change

Childminders use their home well to promote high-quality experiences for children. They actively engage with children to enable them to direct their play and experiences in the way they choose. Children are listened to and know that their views are respected. Childminders understand the capabilities of all children, including babies.

Childminders provide opportunities for children to make decisions and act independently within the safe boundaries of their home. They are encouraged to lead most aspects of their play and are guided to take on responsibilities at times like snack or when they are in the garden. Through outdoor play, children are learning about sustainability, gaining a deeper understanding of how to care for and preserve their natural environment. The childminder's approach keeps children engaged and increases their confidence.

Carefully selected and well positioned furniture and resources support all children to feel included, make choices and freely play. Resources and materials available to children are varied, adaptive and responsive, catering to children's individual abilities, needs, and interests. Childminders understand the positive impact that rich, multi-sensory play has on children's resilience, wellbeing and their learning.

Children are valued and celebrated. High-quality resources and spaces within the childminder's home promote diversity, equity and inclusion. Children, their families, and wider communities are positively reflected in the resources, spaces and experiences available. Children are supported to develop their knowledge, respect and understanding of their community and wider world.

'Weak' children influence and affect change

Children's needs and views are not consistently sought or taken into consideration when developing resources, planning experiences and shaping daily routines. Children's independence is not supported, and they are unable to direct their own play and activities in the way they choose. Children are not engaged and motivated enough in their play, which compromises their wellbeing and their progress in learning.

Practice related to caring for resources including the natural environment, does not take account of sustainability. Very few, if any opportunities are provided for children to learn about sustainability and caring for their natural environment, encouraging poor habits in respect of reducing waste and the impact of our use of natural resources.

The provision of play resources and equipment is limited and, in some cases, outdated and inappropriate. Children lack motivation and interest due to the lack of stimulating resources and activities to choose from. Those available lack breadth and balance and do not sufficiently meet children's development needs or offer challenge and opportunities for exploration.

Children and their families may experience discrimination as a result of outdated, inappropriate resources. This has the potential to negatively influence children's self-esteem and their knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

Childminders demonstrate an approach to risk that is either risk averse or not well considered. This is evident in their daily routines and experiences provided indoors and outdoors. This may result in the potential for harm. Childminders may not engage effectively with families to deepen their understanding of the benefits of riskier outdoor play and learning experiences.

Illustrations of information management

'Very good' information management

The childminder's home provides security and safety while respecting children's rights and reflects the service's aims and objectives. Any use of CCTV is lawful, fair and proportionate and protects their dignity. It is only used for purposes that support the delivery of safe, effective and compassionate care for children.

Protection of children's personal information is paramount and complies with relevant best practice and legal requirements. Childminders and assistants, where applicable, are well informed about their responsibilities and have the skills to carry these out robustly. Efficient and effective record keeping systems are in place and this includes the management of electronic information in line with general data protection requirements and advice on cyber threats.'

'Weak' information management

The use of CCTV is not well understood. Childminders and assistants, where applicable, are not well informed about their responsibilities and infringements of the rights of children and families may occur as a result. Families may not have been consulted about any CCTV or informed of their rights. The arrangements for CCTV do not meet the requirements of current legislation.

Arrangements for the storage of and processing of children's personal information are poorly managed and do not comply with relevant legislation and best practice. Where electronic systems are in place, they are not suitable or secure.

Challenge questions for children experience high quality spaces

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How can I be confident that the physical environment is maintained to the highest standards, ensuring a welcoming and healthy environment for children?
- How do I provide a wide range of challenging outdoor play and learning experiences which support children's health and wellbeing?
- What steps are taken to ensure the physical environment is safe?
- How do I ensure the service is secure and that children cannot leave unsupervised?
- How do I ensure children's privacy, dignity and preferences are fully respected?
- In what ways are children enabled to be independent and make choices, shaping their individual play and learning needs?
- How well are children enabled to select and make use of high-quality resources which meet their needs, interests and development?
- How inclusive is my service for all children and families?
- How do I promote diversity, equity and inclusion and how are these positively reflected in the resources, spaces and experiences available?
- How are children's files and information stored to ensure they are secure?
- Do I demonstrate an understanding of how data protection laws operate?

Playing, learning and developing

Playing, learning and developing is a 'children play and learn' quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practices and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations of playing, learning and developing are also available for [early learning and childcare settings](#) and [school age childcare](#).

Themes for playing, learning and developing

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- children's engagement
- quality of interactions
- child-centred planning and assessment

About playing, learning and developing

This indicator focuses on children's right to play, emphasising that they should have fun, experience joy and have high-quality learning experiences indoors and outdoors. It is essential that children are meaningfully and actively involved in leading their own play and learning.

There is an expectation that childminders recognise how playing helps children develop skills for life and learning. Interactions, experiences and spaces should successfully enrich play and learning, taking into account the needs, interests and development of each child. Children should make sustained progress in their learning through responsive planning approaches.

The indicator highlights the importance of childminders using observations effectively to recognise and extend children's knowledge, understanding, skills and achievements. These should inform next steps in planning to support children's development, learning and wellbeing, enabling them to progress well. Childminders should skilfully engage in [quality, child-led interactions](#), using a balance of comments and developmentally appropriate questions to enhance and extend children's thinking. Children are supported to recognise, enjoy and celebrate their successes.

Illustrations of children's engagement

'Very good' children's engagement

Childminders have a strong understanding of how children develop and progress in their learning. They skilfully use relevant theory and practice to support their delivery of high-quality play and learning experiences that excite and engage children. Children are successful, responsible and confident in their play as a result of the high-quality experiences childminders offer. They are highly motivated and fully engaged by the range of rich, challenging, planned and responsive experiences both indoors and outdoors.

Well-considered innovations and creative approaches successfully engage children's imagination and enrich their play and learning. A broad range of skills, including language, literacy, and numeracy, are enhanced through a balance of child and adult-led interactions, and playful experiences. Childminders consider how children can deepen their experiences and learning with and through digital technology.

Childminders work effectively with families to support their understanding of the benefits to children of play-based learning experiences which challenge and delight them. This partnership approach fosters the development of trust and cooperation which supports children's wellbeing and development and gives them opportunities to flourish.

Children make informed choices about their play and their learning within a creative, challenging, and enabling home. Childminders give them the time, space and support they need to make decisions and use their voice. They are skilled at using high-quality interactions, spaces and experiences to extend and sustain children's interests.

'Weak' children's engagement

Children have limited opportunities to lead their play and learning or to influence the range of spaces and experiences available to them. The play and learning environment overall lacks inspiration. There is little to challenge or ignite children's imagination and curiosity, or to encourage them to explore their ideas.

Childminders' understanding of child-led play is underdeveloped. Children's individual development needs and their interests are not reflected within interactions, experiences and spaces. As a result, children are not engaged. They miss opportunities to learn, build confidence and make choices. Children therefore lack interest and motivation and may experience boredom, become upset or frustrated.

Children have few opportunities to access their own or wider communities. This limits access to a wide range of resources and experiences to enhance their play and development opportunities.

Illustrations of quality interactions

'Very good' quality of interactions

Careful observations are used to interpret children's interests and provide opportunities to extend their thinking without directing their play. Childminders use a variety of approaches to respond to children's cues to support development of self-regulation, empathy, confidence, creativity and curiosity.

Responsive and caring interactions support the development of communication, language, movement and social development through effective modelling of these skills.

Childminders support children using concepts such as sustained shared thinking, wondering aloud, developmentally appropriate questioning, commenting, extending and explaining.

Childminders support children through approaches such as sustained shared thinking, wondering aloud and balancing comments with developmentally appropriate questions to extend and expand their thinking. Childminders understand that interacting and exploring with children is a valuable way to build vocabulary and foster understanding, and a sense of wonder and excitement about the world. They enable next steps and give praise for trying things out.

Children have frequent, appropriate opportunities to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills through imaginative play and storytelling. This helps children to extend their own thinking, practice new skills and consolidate their learning in ways which are meaningful to them.

Childminders enable children to play and learn at their own pace, having fun as they explore the world around them. They take time to understand children's verbal and nonverbal communication which helps to judge when to interact and when to wait and observe. Childminders encourage children's interactions with each other. This enables children to make the most of their interactions and experiences.

'Weak' quality of interactions

Childminders do not demonstrate an understanding of how children learn and develop, or the support strategies which best enable children to learn as they play. Interactions and conversations with children lack warmth or are directive, and do not build on their emotional security or interests.

Childminders do not identify children's early communication and language cues or do not support their preferred ways of communicating. This results in missed opportunities for children to make progress at their own pace and can mean children become passive, upset or frustrated.

Childminders are not child-focused during interactions and fail to recognise and value children's thoughts and processes during play. They narrowly focus on only one or two elements of children's learning, which fails to reflect a true, holistic picture of each child's development and their achievements. Children are not fully supported to extend their play and learning, and their need for support, reassurance or intervention is often missed.

Illustrations of child-centred planning and assessment

'Very good' child-centred planning and assessment

Children are at the centre of all planning. Childminders are skilled in recognising the different stages in children's play and learning. These are thoroughly considered when planning new experiences and opportunities. They use observations of individual children's patterns of play to plan, support, challenge and extend their learning. This enables children to make progress at their own pace.

Children are highly motivated and fully engaged by the range of rich, challenging play and learning opportunities, offered through a balance of intentional and responsive planning. Experiences reflect children's ideas, aspirations, curiosities and meaningful next steps in their learning. Careful observations and effective assessments recognise and promote children's progress and achievements. Any additional supports are identified, planned for and implemented. This highly responsive approach ensures children are developing a broad range of knowledge, understanding and skills for life and learning.

Childminders work together with children, families and partners, inviting them to share their knowledge. This deepens their understanding and planning for each child's learning journey. They share updates on children's progress and celebrate their successes and achievements regularly.

'Weak' child-centred planning and assessment

Childminders miss important opportunities to observe and assess children during their play. This leads to gaps in their understanding of what children can do, their interests and how they are developing. Childminders also fail to use the information that families and partners share with them. This makes it difficult to plan effectively to meet each child's unique needs and interests, including any additional supports required. As a result, some children are not getting the right learning opportunities through play and are not being challenged at the right level.

There are inconsistent approaches to evaluating children's progress and achievements. This information is not consistently used to plan for next steps, including next steps in learning. Information gathered is not individualised or used effectively to plan the spaces, experiences and interactions each child needs to thrive. This results in a lack of understanding of progress over time. Families are not involved or given high-quality information on their children's care and learning, which results in a lack of consistency and continuity.

Challenge questions for play and learning

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How well is children's natural curiosity, creativity and problem solving encouraged and supported in the service?
- What approaches am I using to promote children's developing skills over a broad range of areas, such as emotional and social development, emergent language skills, literacy and numeracy?
- How can children be supported to have confidence in leading their own learning?
- How do I ensure I keep up to date with relevant theory and demonstrate how our understanding of child development supports high-quality play and learning experiences?
- How do I ensure my approach to children's needs recognises the independent thoughts and feelings of children as individuals?
- How do I approach support for children to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills?
- How effective are my processes to evaluate children's development, progress and achievements? How well does this information gathered about children's progress inform planning and reporting to parents/carers or others?
- How do I maximise opportunities for children to be challenged, creative and engaged in their play and learning?

Nurturing care and support

Nurturing care and support is a quality indicator for 'children are supported to achieve'. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practices and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations of nurturing care and support are also available for [early learning and childcare settings](#) and [school age childcare](#).

Themes for nurturing care and support

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- nurturing care
- personal planning
- connections with families

About nurturing care and support

This indicator focuses on how well children are nurtured, cared for and supported. Children's care and learning routines are individualised to meet their needs and should be delivered with kindness and compassion.

There is a focus on [personal planning](#) that reflects the holistic needs of each child, promotes their wellbeing and supports positive outcomes. The indicator highlights the need to [involve children and their families](#) in making decisions about their care and support. Importance is placed on planning for safe and supportive transitions between different care settings, such as the childminder's home, the child's home or school.

This indicator highlights the importance of a childminder connecting with children and their families. They should create a welcoming environment and consider each child's unique circumstances to ensure smooth transitions and positive experiences. Fostering strong connections with children's families can have a significantly positive impact on a child's wellbeing

Illustrations of nurturing care

'Very good' nurturing care

Practice is built on the understanding that nurturing relationships are essential for children's growth and development. As a result, children experience warm, consistent and responsive care that fosters their wellbeing. They are safe, sensitively cared for and skilfully helped to express their needs.

Childminders recognise the importance of supportive transitions and understand that their significance can vary for each child. They regularly assess each child's individual needs and evaluate the effectiveness of the transition strategies in place. They ensure consistent relationships to support smooth transitions and to minimise disruptions to children's care and their experiences. Guided by best practice, such as [Realising the ambition](#), childminders evaluate their approaches and continually strive to improve practice. The varied age groups of children positively impact transitions because older children are encouraged to welcome, support and guide younger or newer children.

Children's privacy and dignity are respected. Childminders balance promoting children's independence with providing support where it is needed. They continually reflect on their practice to ensure it adapts to children's evolving needs and development. They create diverse spaces within their home that support children to socialise, play in small groups or alone if they wish. This positively impacts children's ability to regulate their emotions and build social skills.

Children's food choices are nutritious, culturally appropriate and safely prepared to account for any specific dietary needs, allergies or intolerances. They are aligned with current dietary guidelines including [Setting the table](#) and [Food matters](#). Fresh water is readily available throughout the day. Childminders consider daily routines, such as mealtimes as valuable opportunities to promote children's involvement, independence and enhance their experiences.

Consistency in routines such as mealtimes, nap times and personal care provide children with a sense of safety and security. Childminders recognise these daily routines offer time to connect with children and support their growth and development. Childminders work closely with families and, when appropriate, [administer medication safely](#). Childminders are committed to the safety of all children and ensure their care and support approaches align with current best practice, guidance and policy.

‘Weak’ nurturing care

Responses to children's verbal and nonverbal communication is inappropriate. The rushed nature of interactions can lead to a tone and manner that conflicts with children's needs. This often results in children not seeking comfort or support compromising their wellbeing.

A rigid approach to daily routines limits children's opportunities to build confidence and grow through their own experiences. Strategies for smooth transitions have not been developed or evaluated and do not meet the needs of individual children.

Children's preferences and needs are often overlooked. Food choices are not healthy. Meals and snacks are not planned in line with current nutritional guidance. There is limited understanding of children's individual cultural and dietary needs, making it challenging to keep them safe and respected. During mealtimes, childminders are focused on tasks, resulting in children receiving limited supervision and interaction to enhance their experience and keep them safe.

Children's access to water is limited. Childminders fail to recognise signs indicating a child might need a drink of water. They do not understand the importance of supporting children to stay hydrated.

Illustrations of personal planning

‘Very good’ personal planning

Children’s wellbeing is supported through effective personal planning. All children, regardless of their personal characteristics, are recognised as capable individuals who are listened to, valued and respected. Personal plans promote children’s rights and value the individuality of each child and their family.

Personal plans are tailored to each child's individual strengths, needs and interests. Achievable goals are set, and childminders regularly review progress to ensure plans are suitable and effective. Children and their families are meaningfully and sensitively involved in their plan. Childminders work proactively with children, families and other professionals to identify support needs and have clear strategies in place to ensure that children’s wellbeing is sustained.

When a child requires support from multiple agencies, other professionals contribute to children’s personal plans. Each child's personal plan is achievable, adaptable and includes strategies for care, learning, support and protection, as necessary.

Approaches to personal planning consider best practice guidelines and is grounded in the [Getting it Right for Every Child \(GIRFEC\) framework](#), utilising wellbeing indicators to assess and plan for children's overall wellbeing. The indicators provide a common language for assessing and discussing children's strengths, needs and progress with families and other professionals.

A child-centred approach guides strategies for transitions. Childminders place children and families at the heart of any decision-making process. This includes when a child starts in the service or moves between services. Key information to support continuity and progression in a child’s care, support and/or learning is shared appropriately, securely and in good time. Childminders use well-planned and flexible approaches to enable children to feel safe and secure with any changes.

‘Weak’ personal planning

Personal plans are not individualised or meaningful and do not effectively meet the needs of each child. Children requiring additional support, whether short or long term, are not receiving adequate care. This has the potential to adversely impact children’s development.

Childminders place an overemphasis on what children cannot do and have limited consideration of their strengths and interests, leading to unrealistic and ineffective goals and strategies of support.

Opportunities to work collaboratively with other professionals to achieve positive outcomes for children are missed. When childminders do collaborate, they do not effectively share information, update children’s written plans or improve their care. This adversely impacts on the consistency and quality of care and support provided.

Personal plans do not comply with national guidance or legislation. Childminders do not have opportunities to reflect on personal plans to help develop interactions, experiences and spaces to meet children’s needs. This means opportunities to make children feel comfortable, safe and appropriately challenged are missed.

Approaches to transition do not consider the needs and views of individual children and families. This means key information to help planning for any changes to care, play and routines are missed, resulting in distress and/or a sense of insecurity for some children.

Childminders do not include the voices of children and families. This means their views have not been valued or used to plan for children. This contributes to a lack of continuity and consistency in children’s care and support.

Serious inconsistencies in information sharing and record-keeping have put children’s safety at risk. Childminders do not always have the information or knowledge needed to keep children safe, nurtured and supported. This has resulted in oversights, such as frequent errors in the timing or dosage of medication administration, jeopardising children’s wellbeing.

Illustrations of connections with families

‘Very good’ connections with families

Childminders know their children and families very well. They strive to create a warm and welcoming environment where [children and families feel valued and supported](#). The care they provide children is deeply influenced by the insights gained from their family. This supports them to create spaces which are culturally sensitive, accessible and inclusive for all.

Connections with families increase their engagement in the service, positively impacting the quality of children's experiences. Childminders recognise, learn from, and build upon the strengths that families bring, while sensitively responding to individual needs and circumstances. This collaborative approach allows them to learn from families, share insights on their child's development, and ensure their care remains responsive to children's unique needs.

Families have regular opportunities to informally and formally discuss their children's care, development and learning. Childminders have systems in place to support regular communication with families, both verbally and in writing. They recognise and address many of the potential barriers that can make it difficult for families to be involved in their child's experiences.

Childminders understand that each child's development is shaped by their family, friends, community and experiences. They warmly welcome families into their home to share in their child's experiences and encourage updates about children's hobbies and interests. This impacts positively on the quality of children's care and support, both at home and when in the care of the childminder.

'Weak' connections with families

Engagement with families is not planned or purposeful. As a result, there is little evidence of the impact on, or benefits to, children's care or development. Consultations with families fail to gather their views on what matters to them or their children. The childminder rarely provides follow up responses to requests for further information. As a result, many families feel unheard.

Childminders place little value on building trusting relationships with families to improve children's wellbeing. Early opportunities to respond effectively to the needs of children and families are missed. This means that families are not always understood and treated with dignity and respect. Families tell childminders they do not feel welcome in their service.

Childminders have limited understanding of the strengths and knowledge that families can contribute. There are no opportunities for families to engage in shared care or play experiences with their child and the childminder. This contributes to children feeling unsettled and can restrict their experiences.

There is a lack of quality feedback given to families across all aspects of their child's care, support and learning. Childminders have few informal interactions with families during key times such as drop-off and pick-up of children. Opportunities for regular information exchanges are limited. By not actively seeking to build strong relationships with children's families, childminders miss opportunities to keep children safe and to enhance their care and/or learning experiences.

Challenge questions for nurturing care and support

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- What best practices, theories and guidance underpin my care and support of children?
- How do my observations and knowledge of a child influence the routine of the day?
- Does my approach to transitions help children to feel safe and secure? How do I know my approach is effective?
- What systems, processes and approaches do I have in place to keep children safe? How do I know they are effective?
- How do I ensure the voices of all children, both verbal and nonverbal, are heard and responded to?
- What are my approaches to ensuring inclusion, equity and the celebration of diversity?
- How well do I understand and champion the rights of care experienced children and families?
- What do I do to promote sociable and healthy eating experiences?
- In what ways do I communicate with children, families and/or other professionals to jointly plan children's care and support?
- When children and their families arrive at my home, how do I know they feel welcomed?

Safeguarding and child protection

Safeguarding and child protection is a Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland quality indicator. There are illustrations for practice and challenge questions below. As part of your self-evaluation, these themes can help you reflect on your current practice and identify areas for development. Illustrations are also available for [early learning and childcare settings](#) and [school age childcare](#).

Themes for safeguarding and child protection

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- culture of safety and wellbeing
- legislation, policy and guidance in practice
- empowerment of staff and children

About safeguarding and child protection

This indicator relates to the range of responsibilities of childminders, assistants (where applicable) and partners to ensure that children are safe, well cared for and protected from harm. It highlights the need for everyone to foster a culture that values, upholds, realises and promotes children's rights. There is an emphasis on the need to establish and maintain a shared commitment to promoting children's welfare and protection that is woven into the culture of safety, security and wellbeing.

It highlights the need for careful attention to children's wellbeing and safety as part of robust approaches to self-evaluation. It emphasises the need for a current understanding and implementation of relevant legislation, [policy and guidance](#) that is informed by high-quality, evidence-based professional learning. The indicator recognises the crucial importance of robust processes that underpin and direct assistants (where applicable) to recognise, respond to, record and report wellbeing, child protection or safeguarding concerns appropriately.

This indicator focuses on the significance of building positive relationships and effective partnerships to safeguard children. It recognises the importance of supporting assistants (where applicable), children and families sensitively to learn about children's wellbeing and right to be safe and heard. It emphasises the need to ensure all children and assistants (where applicable) are supported well to access the support they need, at the right time, to ensure children are protected.

Illustrations of culture of safety and wellbeing

‘Very Good’ culture of safety and wellbeing

The childminder’s ethos sensitively and effectively promotes children’s rights and equality. Childminders and, where applicable, their assistants are motivated to continuously improve safeguarding and child protection practices. Childminders understand their responsibility in ensuring that babies and children live safely and are supported to thrive.

Childminders effectively support assistants (where applicable) to ensure they have a deep understanding of their shared responsibilities. They ensure any volunteers or covering assistants are fully aware of our arrangements for safeguarding and child protection. Childminders have a culture of accountability and continuous learning, driven by robust reflective practice. They understand that transitions for children, as part of daily routines or periods of significant change, can affect children in different ways. Childminders’ strong rights-based and trauma-informed practice ensures they anticipate and respond promptly and sensitively to safeguard children.

Childminders understand the needs and experiences of children and families are varied. They prioritise fostering partnerships within their community and with families to ensure that they work well together to keep children safe. Childminders proactively share information about available family supports that can offer early help in a sensitive way, to prevent escalating needs and risks to children.

‘Weak’ culture of safety and wellbeing

The childminder’s ethos does not effectively uphold or promote children’s rights. Approaches which enable them to actively listen to children and develop trusting relationships are not embedded. Children’s views are not taken into consideration or respected. Children and families do not feel listened to.

Childminders have not identified or addressed their own training needs, or those of their assistants (where applicable), in relation to wellbeing, safeguarding or child protection. Shared responsibility for continuous professional learning and self-reflection is not in place. When training is provided, they do not effectively apply new learning or update practice. Concerns that arise may not always be recognised or responded to in a timely or sensitive manner. Childminders have not yet established consistent approaches to uphold children’s rights to safety and protection.

Illustrations of legislation, policy and guidance in practice

‘Very good’ legislation, policy and guidance in practice

Childminders have a comprehensive understanding of their safeguarding policies, which they apply consistently across their practice. Childminders and assistants (where applicable) work closely to identify, record and respond to concerns effectively. Safeguarding arrangements are well implemented and monitored. They use their knowledge of best practice and internal procedures in areas such as recruitment and whistleblowing to keep children safe.

Childminders are committed to protecting children from harm. They have well established and clear procedures that enable assistants and volunteers to report concerns about a colleague or the childminder themselves, if they pose a risk to a child. Policy and procedures empower everyone to escalate child protection issues that are not being handled appropriately.

Childminders’ robust approach to self-evaluation fully informs their arrangements for recognising, responding to, recording and reporting concerns about children’s wellbeing or safety. Childminders use legislation, national guidance and policies to support their self-evaluation. They proactively take account of new information, policy developments and emerging issues to improve their practice.

Childminders have highly effective safeguarding and child protection processes to support their communication with other agencies. They are confident in using these procedures. Childminders have a clear understanding of their role and responsibility to keep children safe and when to share information with others.

The childminder’s proactive approach carefully considers the strengths, needs, risks and protective factors for individual children and their families. They pay particular attention to the unique needs of individual children, including those with additional support needs or who are care experienced. Childminders consistent application of clear procedures supports them very well in developing and sustaining effective partnerships. Children’s and families’ views fully inform their well-judged decisions and actions.

‘Weak’ legislation, policy and guidance in practice

The childminder’s limited understanding and ineffective implementation of national guidance mean that policies and legislation are not applied effectively. A lack of clearly defined roles and shared responsibilities in safeguarding and child protection has the potential to compromise children’s safety and care.

The safeguarding and child protection policy does not clearly outline how to manage allegations or concerns made against any adult in the childminder’s home, including the childminder, their family members or any assistants. Families that use the service and (where applicable) assistants are also unclear about what to do if a child protection issue is not being handled appropriately.

Childminders’ record-keeping practices are inconsistent and fail to adequately capture how different types of harm can create or heighten risk to a child. Opportunities to ensure support is in place, or appropriate action is taken, are missed. Agreed next steps are not consistently followed through, which limits improvements to children’s wellbeing.

Information required to keep children safe is not available to assistants (where applicable) or shared appropriately with partner agencies. These gaps may place children’s safety and care at risk.

Illustrations of empowering children and assistants

‘Very good’ empowering children and assistants

Childminders apply a trauma-informed lens to all of their practice and interactions with children, their families and people within or outside of their team. They nurture trusting and respectful relationships with children, families and the local community. Childminders’ interactions are underpinned by children’s rights. They know individual children very well. Childminders communicate respectfully with families and one another to develop a holistic knowledge of children and their wellbeing needs. This enables them to identify children and families who may be at risk of harm and respond appropriately.

Childminders are highly skilled with a deep understanding of safeguarding and child protection practice, which they use to create a safe and trusting environments for all. Children feel secure in expressing their views, sharing worries and asking for help. Childminders prioritise listening with sensitivity and responding with care. They are empathetic leaders who encourage openness and value the importance of their own wellbeing and that of any assistant.

Childminders regularly provide motivating opportunities where children assess and manage appropriate risk and learn about how to keep safe. Through their responsive interactions and well-judged support, they help children build skills and learn to keep themselves safe. Children develop their resilience and their understanding of physical and emotional safety very well.

The childminder’s thoughtful approaches support families well to learn about safeguarding and children’s rights. This includes high quality opportunities for children and parents/carers to develop their cyber resilience and internet safety skills.

‘Weak’ empowering children and assistants

The childminder does not understand or respect the different ways children communicate their views and experiences. They rarely notice what children express through their actions, as well as their words. As a result, important signs that a child may need protection or support may not be identified or acted upon.

The childminder does not recognise their role in supporting children to build resilience. Stable, consistent routines are undervalued. Frequent changes to assistants and inconsistent approaches can make it difficult for children to form secure, trusting relationships with assistants (where applicable).

The childminder does not consistently demonstrate a working knowledge of safeguarding or child protection practices. They are not proactive in recognising, responding to, reducing, or removing potential harm to children. Processes for escalating concerns are unclear or not consistently implemented.

Challenge questions for safeguarding and child protection

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How effectively do I implement national guidance and take account of legislation to keep children safe, secure and protected from harm?
- To what extent do my relationships with children, assistants, families, partners and the local community promote children's welfare and safety?
- How well do my self-evaluation and quality assurance processes support improvements in safeguarding? To what extent do they strengthen areas such as assistants and volunteer recruitment, personal planning, and practice in place to keep children safe during play and learning?
- To what extent does regular, high-quality, professional learning improve my practice?
- What changes have I made as a result of professional learning? How do I know practice changes have had a positive impact for children and/or assistants?
- How effectively do I identify and support children at risk of harm, including those who are on, or were previously on, the child protection register?
- How effectively do I identify and support children who are care experienced and living with kinship, foster or adoptive families or in residential care?
- "How well do we use risk assessment tools, such as chronologies, to inform our actions and improve outcomes for children and families?"
- What evidence tells me that I am effectively using a trauma-informed approach?
- How effectively do I support children, parents/carers and one another to develop their cyber resilience and internet safety skills?
- How well do our child protection policies and procedures support us to keep children safe from harm?
- How effectively do I support children to learn how to recognise and manage risk as they play and learn?
- How well are assistants wellbeing needs recognised and supported within my child protection practice (where applicable)?

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[The quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors](#) is also available online.

