

THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

The professional voice of the UK fire and rescue service



FIRE SAFETY IN HOUSES OR FLATS USED FOR CHILDMINDING



INTRODUCTION

This guidance is to help childminders make sure that their houses and flats are safe from fire and that they are complying with the law.

Childminding in houses or flats does not normally present a high risk to life from fire and it is important that a homely environment is maintained. Fire and Rescue Services will not normally undertake proactive visits to childminders. However, if

you provide childminding services for large numbers of children or are in complex or unsuitable premises then the Fire and Rescue Service may want to carry out an inspection. If Ofsted are concerned about the fire safety in your premises they are likely to ask the Fire and Rescue Service to carry out a visit.

It is important that childminders think about how they can reduce the risk of a fire starting, how they will be alerted if a fire starts. They should also know the importance of keeping escape routes unobstructed, how to draw up an escape plan and how to call the fire and rescue service in the event of fire.



REDUCING THE RISK FROM FIRE

HEATING

Portable heaters are not regarded as safe forms of heating for childminding and their use should be prohibited except in exceptional circumstances (e.g. power cuts etc.). On such occasions, the heater should be securely anchored in a safe and suitable position and away from draughts.

A substantial fireguard constructed and securely fixed in position should enclose any open fires.

COOKING

Children should not be allowed in the kitchen area unless constantly supervised. In open plan arrangements cookers should be switched off at the main switch except when being used.

Do not use deep fat fryers that go on the cooker top. Purpose built electric ones are OK.



GENERAL

Children should not have access to matches or lighters. Be particularly careful that there are none available in rooms where they are sleeping.



Do not use candles when looking after children.

Paper waste, such as newspapers or wrapping paper should be kept to a minimum.

Flammable liquids such as white spirit should be stored out of reach of children.

If your electrical system is old you should get it checked by an electrician. The use of multi-point adaptors should be avoided.

Only furniture that conforms to the Furniture and Furnishing Regulations (Fire Safety) 1988 should be used. There will be a special label attached stating that it is fire resistant.

SMOKE ALARMS

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Smoke alarms give an early warning of fire and should always be installed and working in places used for childminding.

- Smoke alarms need to be installed in circulation areas, usually the hall and stairs, only.
- In a house that has more than one storey where children are looked after, there should be at least one smoke alarm at each storey.

- Do not put smoke alarms in or very close to the kitchen.
- All smoke alarms should be tested each week and if battery-operated make sure you know how long the battery lasts. Every six months gently use the vacuum cleaner hose to clean away dust.



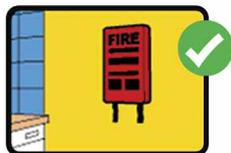
- In larger houses, you should consider connecting them together so that they all operate their warning signal if any one detector operates. (Any electrician can do this).
- If you live in a flat you will probably have smoke alarms fitted already. You should talk to your landlord about testing these alarms.
- Battery operated smoke alarms are OK but mains wired ones are best.



FIREFIGHTING EQUIPMENT & ESCAPE ROUTES

FIREFIGHTING EQUIPMENT

Childminders should keep a fire blanket in the kitchen. It should be marked as made to British Standard 6575. Other fire fighting equipment is not normally necessary and childminders should know that their first priority is the safe evacuation of the children.



stairs increase the risk of being cut off by a fire and usually a smoke alarm is needed in the room next to the hall or stairs. You should never have to go through two rooms to reach the hall or stairs.

Do not store things in halls and stairways, such as pushchairs. These could obstruct your way out in an emergency.



ESCAPE ROUTES

The escape routes from one or two storey houses are generally straightforward. Few other provisions are necessary other than ensuring that each room used for childminding opens directly onto a hall or stairs leading to the entrance of the house or flat, or it has a window or door through which escape can be made.

Most houses and flats built in the last twenty years will have a suitable design and layout, as long as unauthorised alterations have not been carried out, because they will have been built to modern building standards. Older houses and flats may still be suitable but more thought about where children are looked after will be necessary. Rooms that require you to go through another room before you reach the hall or

If your house has more than two storeys then you will probably need to make your staircase route fire resisting. In most flats this will already be the case.

Normally, all exits should be able to be easily opened by adults, preferably without the use of a key. A simple 'Yale type' lock is probably best. If children are likely to be able to reach this and could be in danger outside then a simple bolt at higher level may be acceptable.

ESCAPE PLAN

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You should have an escape plan ready. Ask yourself a number of questions.

- Will everyone be alerted in time?
- How would you get out if you could not use the stairs?
- Can the windows be opened?
- Are there any dangers underneath the window such as steps down to a cellar?
- Is there a phone upstairs? Could I alert neighbours?
- If you look after children with disabilities you may need to take special precautions

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR OVERNIGHT CARE

The risk of a fire trapping you is greater at night when you are asleep.

A bedtime routine should be followed;

- Ensure that gas and electrical appliances are turned off .
- Make sure that any cigarettes have been put out properly. Never smoke in bed.
- Close all doors. By shutting doors you can keep your escape route free from fire.
- Check that your escape route is clear of obstacles and make sure door and window keys are in the right place.

There should be enough adults to ensure you can safely escape especially if you may need to carry children.

LEGAL ISSUES

The legal position for childminders is clear. You must comply with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This requires you to carry out a fire risk assessment for your house or flat, and record and act on any significant findings. You should review your fire risk assessment if anything changes, such as looking after younger children.

There is advice on how to do this available on the government web site www.fire.gov.uk and a short booklet designed for small businesses available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1500383>



It is however considered unlikely that the full weight of the legislation will be used in childminding settings. Fire and Rescue Services will normally give advice on dealing with fire safety issues and reserve formal enforcement action for extreme cases. You can contact your local Fire and Rescue Service for advice but they will not be able to come and do your fire risk assessment for you. You should not need to employ a specialist to do your fire risk assessment unless your house is very large or complex.



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