

## **Parent questionnaires**

It is not a requirement of the EYFS 2012 to write to parents and ask them to comment on the service you offer - and many parents are 'too busy' to respond anyway - so why do childminders send out questionnaires?

It is a requirement of the Ofsted self evaluation form (SEF) to include information about how you have changed the ways you work after input from parents (and children, other agencies, other professionals etc)... and it is good practice to show evidence to Ofsted that you are constantly evaluating and improving your service. This is confirmed in the EYFS which further strengthens the requirement to involve parents in various aspects of your business.

Personally, I know that my current parents are not keen on filling in forms. Most of them will do it for me once every 3 or 4 years before my Ofsted inspection, but beyond that they are reluctant. So... to make it work for me, I ask parents 'focussed' questions at collection time and write down their responses myself! I can then waffle on in my SEF (I use the Ofsted version) about how they have helped me to improve my business.

Using my own experience as a guide, I feel that before giving parents a form and asking them to fill it in, you should consider verbally surveying them on their thoughts about receiving the actual form! Some parents might not write well - or read well - or speak English well - and may feel threatened by receiving a form. Similarly, some parents might not understand the important part Ofsted expects them to play in your business and you might need to explain it to them first.

I have also found that it can be a mistake to ask too many questions! Parents get bored very quickly if given a long form to complete - they usually prefer to answer 1 or 2 questions at a time.

**What do you call your questionnaire?** - 'Questionnaire for parents' can feel quite formal so think about your title. Maybe 'please give me your views' or 'your opinion matters' might be more parent friendly.

**Introducing your questions** - explain to parents that you are committed to self improvement and that their opinion counts. For example you might say... 'Dear parents, I am committed to constantly improving my business and, as part of this, I want to know what you think about the service I offer.' You then need to add the date, the name of parents and the name of the child.

**Setting out your questions** - open questions eg 'are there any ways..?' or 'please tell me about...' are much better than questions which are closed and only encourage parents to answer using one word eg 'yes' and 'no' questions.

There are lots of different ways of setting out your questions. You might have a form with numbers so parents can grade your service and make a comment eg...

<p>My childminder has shown me my child's learning journey and I have enjoyed reading through it</p>	<p>1 = yes / 2 = maybe / 3 = not sure ... and any comments you want to make ...</p>
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You might target your questions, linking them to a recent change in provision eg...

- We have recently changed our menus. Please comment on the menu items.
- What is your child saying about our new menu at home?
- Are there any new foods your child now eats?

Leave a space for parents to write their comments under each question.

Other childminders have a list of questions eg...

- Are you happy with the ways we communicate with you?  
Yes / no / comments -
- Do you have any comments about how we support your child's learning and development?  
Yes / no / comments -
- Do you understand the things we do with your child and how they contribute towards your child's learning and development?  
Yes / no / comments -

However, these questions do not necessarily encourage parents to make comments because they might just circle yes / no and move on to the next question.

**Dealing with the replies** - you have to be prepared for the fact that some parents might not give you the feedback you want to hear! It is always possible that they will say 'no, we are not happy' or 'we want more of xx'.

It is very hard not to take these comments personally! It is, after all, your business that they are criticising. However, you have asked for their feedback - and they are only trying to be helpful - so you will need to take a step back and carefully consider your response. It is important that you reply as professionally as possible - remember at the end of the day if you cannot make changes to accommodate their wishes then they might need to consider an alternative setting for their child...

So take a deep breath, thank them for their comments and calmly explain your reasons for doing things - make changes if possible or meet them half way - and ask again for their feedback.