

home from home



How important is it that young children experience 'normal' domestic goings-on during their time away from parents?

When being cared for by mum and/or dad, a large part of a baby's day is naturally spent observing and 'participating in' necessary household chores. Moreover, whilst child-focused activities both in the home and beyond are likely to feature regularly, these are balanced with more adult-led outings, such as meeting friends for a coffee, or non-essential shopping. How far, then, should a daycare setting attempt to imitate this kind of domestic ebb and flow? Is it OK for a childminder to deal with the laundry or chat with chums whilst being paid to look after her charges, for example? Is it a problem if babies in nursery never see how their food is prepared? Might childcare professionals even be spending too much time concentrating on proactive infant development? Parents and practitioners share their views...

THE CARERS

1

Gemma Smith, childminder

"From my point of view as a childminder, I think the key is working in partnership with parents and discussing with them what you do in your usual daily routine. I personally do carry on with some daily chores whilst childminding – obviously not a full house clean, but I will sort the laundry in the same room as the children, for example, and I go to the supermarket at least once a week, too; everything can be turned into a learning experience for babies. I fit domestic activities into my routine as well as attending daily groups. I think that very young children benefit from doing these things as it is very similar to what they would be used to at home, and all the parents I work with are happy with the balance I provide."

2

**Emma Price, nursery manager,
Just Learning, Colchester**

"I believe that having a balance between child-initiated activities and adult-led activities best suits the child working in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage. Obviously babies are not going to be able to initiate their own play without some interaction from an adult; therefore supplying babies with rich resources is paramount for their development. The types of stimulation babies 0–1 years need are items that encourage curiosity, for example, treasure baskets, feely boxes, natural and wooden objects – all of which spark the differing types of senses needed to explore and expand their development. Taking this into consideration, I feel that with the variety of activities and materials the babies are accessing at nursery they are no worse off; however there does need to be a balance of parental/nursery care, enabling children to access the fundamental domestic duties undertaken at home."

THE PARENTS

1

Elaine, 38, has two children; Rowan (6) was in childcare from six months and Daragh (2) has been in full-time childcare since 11 months

"My children love attention most, whether it's singing to them while doing the washing up or dedicated playtime. Babies and toddlers are fascinated by domestic chores, so allowing them to see a snack prepared is fun as well as useful. Being child-led doesn't mean that children are always in the spotlight, although I would like there to be a balance. And I do hope that in daycare, they have more fun and less domestic drudgery!"

2

Cathy, 37, has a six-year-old, Charlie, who attended nursery part-time from six months

"For me the most important thing was that I felt the nursery staff wanted to be with the children and enjoyed spending time with them, in the same way that I enjoyed being with my son on the days he was at home. Looking back there's every possibility that Charlie saw more 'domestic life' at nursery as I was never a great fan of housework on my days off!"

3

Amanda (35), has two sons: Ethan, six (with a childminder from nine months), and Matthew, 22 months (started nursery at 11 months)

"I expected my first's childminder to include him with her day-to-day activities and relished that he was in a homely environment with 'normal' life going on. Had my second's nursery afforded him the same treatment, I would not have been pleased! Ultimately it's about balance – a childminder needs to spend some time on child-focused activities, and a nursery needs the right level of educational play alongside less structured life experiences."