

talking point

OTHER PEOPLE'S BABIES

TN asks practitioners and parents what should happen when family wishes clash with the ethos or practical needs of a care setting...

No one knows a baby like his parents; no one knows a setting like the people who work in it every day. So who is best placed to make the decisions with regard to the most basic elements of everyday care, and what happens when there is a conflict of ideals?



THE CARERS

1

Stephanie Mathivet, curriculum and standards manager, Pre-school Learning Alliance (pre-school.org.uk)

"Clearly there are some matters to do with a child's well-being, health needs, and cultural/religious upbringing, which have to be followed to the letter of the parent's instruction. Other parental wishes that a setting should always go along with as far as possible would include care routines of infants – sleeping or feeding times and weaning patterns, or matters such as how a baby is comforted.

"It's possible for a parent to raise a request that makes sense to them, but impacts negatively on their child in the setting. Practitioners need to have the confidence to be able to not go along with something that they know will not be in the child's interest. It requires tact and the ability to talk to the parent respectfully – not down to them with the tone of 'the expert'."

2

Cathy James, childminder and mother (nurturestore.co.uk)

"It's so important to work with parents; for a baby, especially, consistent care is vital. I am very much child-led – and I have a brochure with my written policies that families read before they come to see me, so they already have an idea of my approach and are broadly comfortable with it. It gives us a framework to chat through.

"I gather lots of information from them, too – they fill out a comprehensive questionnaire initially, then another after a month or so, to make sure we're all still happy. This is our 'getting to know you period', during which the parents or I may choose to finish the relationship if it's clearly not going to work.

"I also keep a daily diary for each child, and ensure there is time at drop-off and/or pick-up to discuss situations as and when they arise."

THE PARENTS

1

Kirsty (25) is currently looking for a nursery place for her daughter Mia, for two or three six-hour days a week, from the age of 12 weeks.

"Mia is breast fed, so I would be expressing for her. I want her weaning to be baby-led, and for her to be comforted when she cries. I have noticed some of the managers smile and nod their head. They do seem to listen to your wishes, but might not agree with them, and I feel they think you will be causing them extra work."

2

Mary (35) has a son, Tommy, who is 19 months old and started nursery at six months, gradually building up to five mornings a week.

"I asked every place about their attitude to 'discipline', and I was surprised at the differences. Most give lip service to the idea that you shouldn't use the word 'naughty' to describe babies' behaviour, but some clearly hadn't internalised it – e.g., they still had a corner they'd separate them to sit in when they did something bad. Whereas the one we went with just said, 'Of course they can't be naughty at that age. We just distract them and remove the cause'."

3

Natalie (29) has just moved her son, Casimer (20 months), to a Montessori nursery, after issues around allergy management and basic care in his previous setting.

"With the first place, though he was assigned a key worker, we never really chatted – he didn't seem to be available when we were there. Most of the rest of the staff were quite quiet and withdrawn, perhaps lacking in confidence to converse with parents? At the new nursery, they are more friendly – and the children, too, seem happier and more confident."