

# A Shared VISION

Many childcare providers feel anxious when it's time to be inspected. How can you prepare without feeling huge pressure?

**I**nspections provoke anxiety because we're being judged," says Janine Goddard, a childminder in Hertfordshire. "Someone is coming into our homes and watching everything we do."

It's difficult for practitioners to feel relaxed and confident about inspections. "[There is] fear of the unknown, the stories told by others

who have been inspected and the hundreds of myths floating around," says Jamie Victoria Barnes, early years specialist at The Childcare Guru.

"It's natural to worry because we all want to do well, but inspections can create this absolute fear and dread for some which takes over. Often the concept that the regulator is an 'authoritative' figure can alone create fear and worry," she adds.

## Inspections in England and Wales

Wendy Ratcliff HMI Principal Officer, Early Education at Ofsted, explains that when the regulator speaks to early years providers, it encourages them not to prepare for inspection.

"Our inspectors are interested in finding out what it is like to be a child at each individual setting. We want providers to have the confidence to do what

they do every day for the children in their care and not to do anything special for Ofsted.”

Ceri Herbert, Senior Manager in the Childcare and Play Team at CIW, adds: “Our inspectors are aware that inspections can make people feel nervous so we try our best to put providers and practitioners at ease.”

Childminders having their first inspection since registration may be nervous because inspections are “unknown” to them, she explains. “Others may have had inspections previously and be very keen to maintain or improve their judgements or ratings.”

CIW has a pilot project in Wales to develop a new inspection regime where improvement meetings are held with providers midway between scheduled inspections.

They aim to understand what practitioners have done to develop and improve provision and practice since the last inspection

and their plans to continue this ahead of the next.

“This enables us to signpost providers to sources of additional help and support, as well as providing the opportunity for providers to ask questions and gain some reassurance around their direction of travel,” Ceri adds.

CIW plans to run annual improvement conferences where common themes from the improvement

### JAMIE'S TIPS TO PREPARE MENTALLY FOR AN INSPECTION

- Always ask yourself: “What is the impact for the children?” This should be at the heart of everything you do.
- Get support where you need it.
- Focus on what you can change and do ahead of an inspection.
- Focus on your strengths, so you can show the inspector what you’re proud of.
- Believe in yourself and your abilities as a carer and educator. Your professional judgement is enough.



discussions can be shared widely. “We hope to offer providers the opportunity to share experiences, successes and good practice tips. Peer support is so important and who better to learn from and share ideas with than those doing the same job as you?” Ceri says.

In England, Ofsted regularly updates its guidance and handbooks to ensure its approach to inspection is as clear as possible for early years providers, Wendy explains. “We maintain an open dialogue with the early years sector and are always looking for ways to improve our work. For example, we announced changes to our complaints process following a consultation where we heard views from the sector,” she adds.

### Improving

Even though CIW’s inspections can be unannounced, inspectors are “not there to catch people out or to ask difficult or challenging questions”, Ceri explains. “Any discussions are designed to help us to better understand how things work at the setting and how providers and practitioners work to meet

the needs of the children in their care. CIW’s primary concern will always be the safety and wellbeing of children.”

If a practitioner has had a low rating previously, they will receive feedback from the inspector and a copy of the inspection report, with actions or improvements that take priority and best practice recommendations.

“Providers should work to implement the required improvements within the timescales and ahead of the next inspection so that outcomes for children are improved. This is likely to have a positive impact on their ratings,” Ceri says.

“Of course, all providers should be working to foster an ethos of continuous improvement at their setting to ensure children

## GETTING THE BEST OUT OF AN INSPECTION

- Read and prepare using CIW or Ofsted guidance.
- Keep policies and procedures to hand and have complete and easily accessible records such as attendance.
- Explain why you are doing something, such as an activity – the inspector can only judge on what they know about or see.
- Don’t change your routine – if it’s naptime let the children nap – inspectors aim to observe without causing disruption.
- Don’t be afraid to change an activity on the day if it’s not going well. Show your talents as a carer and educator and adapt.
- Show you know the children – talk to them as you would normally. Communication and language underpin all learning.
- If you’re unsure about a question, ask the inspector to clarify.
- Make sure the inspector leaves knowing what you want them to know about your setting.



## “REMEMBER YOU’RE DOING WHAT’S BEST FOR THE CHILDREN IN YOUR CARE”

Childminder Janine Goddard looks after children before and after school. She describes her last inspection. “The inspector introduced herself, went through things, and asked some questions. Did I find it hard to get on courses since Covid? How do I share information with parents?” Janine says. “She asked me about safeguarding, how I report issues, and how I talk to children about online safety.”

“When I picked the children up from school, she introduced herself and said she was here to see what fun things we did after school. This put the children at ease straight away.”

“She asked them what sort of snacks they had after school and which was their favourite. I was hoping they would say fruit

but they said the homemade cake I make for them on special occasions! My inspector was great – she joked she’d come on the wrong day.”

Janine also showed the inspector photos of art projects, and the inspector asked the children if they could remember how they did them. “They chatted away about what we had done, then told her they had been decorating plant pots and that we were going to plant sunflower seeds.”


“My inspector was lovely. I will still probably have sleepless nights before my next inspection – but it’s important to stay calm, remember you’re doing what’s best for the children in your care.”

are fully supported to play, learn, develop and thrive,” she adds.

### Empowerment

At root, CIW, Ofsted and childcare practitioners have the same goal – seeing the best outcomes for children. “Your inspection is your opportunity to shine and showcase the amazing things you do to support your children to learn and develop, which will be different from what other settings you know are doing,” Jamie says. “Ensure you have rationale for why you do the things you do.”

Ceri agrees: “Settings where children are engaged, excited, stimulated and nurtured often receive good ratings. At any stage, keeping the children at the centre of what you do and engaging openly with the inspection process to address any areas for priority action or improvement will support better results.”

Ultimately, inspectors want practitioners to succeed. Ceri concludes: “The vast majority of providers do a really great job – keep doing what you do best!” 

## Resources

### Wales

- CIW’s childcare provider guidance: [bit.ly/CIW-provider-guidance](https://bit.ly/CIW-provider-guidance)
- CIW – How we inspect childcare and play services: [bit.ly/CIW-inspect-childcare](https://bit.ly/CIW-inspect-childcare)
- CIW pilot news: [bit.ly/CIW-improvement](https://bit.ly/CIW-improvement)

### England

- Ofsted’s EY inspection handbook: [bit.ly/ofsted-handbook](https://bit.ly/ofsted-handbook)
- Ofsted inspections: what EY practitioners need to know: [bit.ly/ofsted-need-to-know](https://bit.ly/ofsted-need-to-know)
- Ofsted FAQs for early years providers: [bit.ly/ofsted-ey-faqs](https://bit.ly/ofsted-ey-faqs)