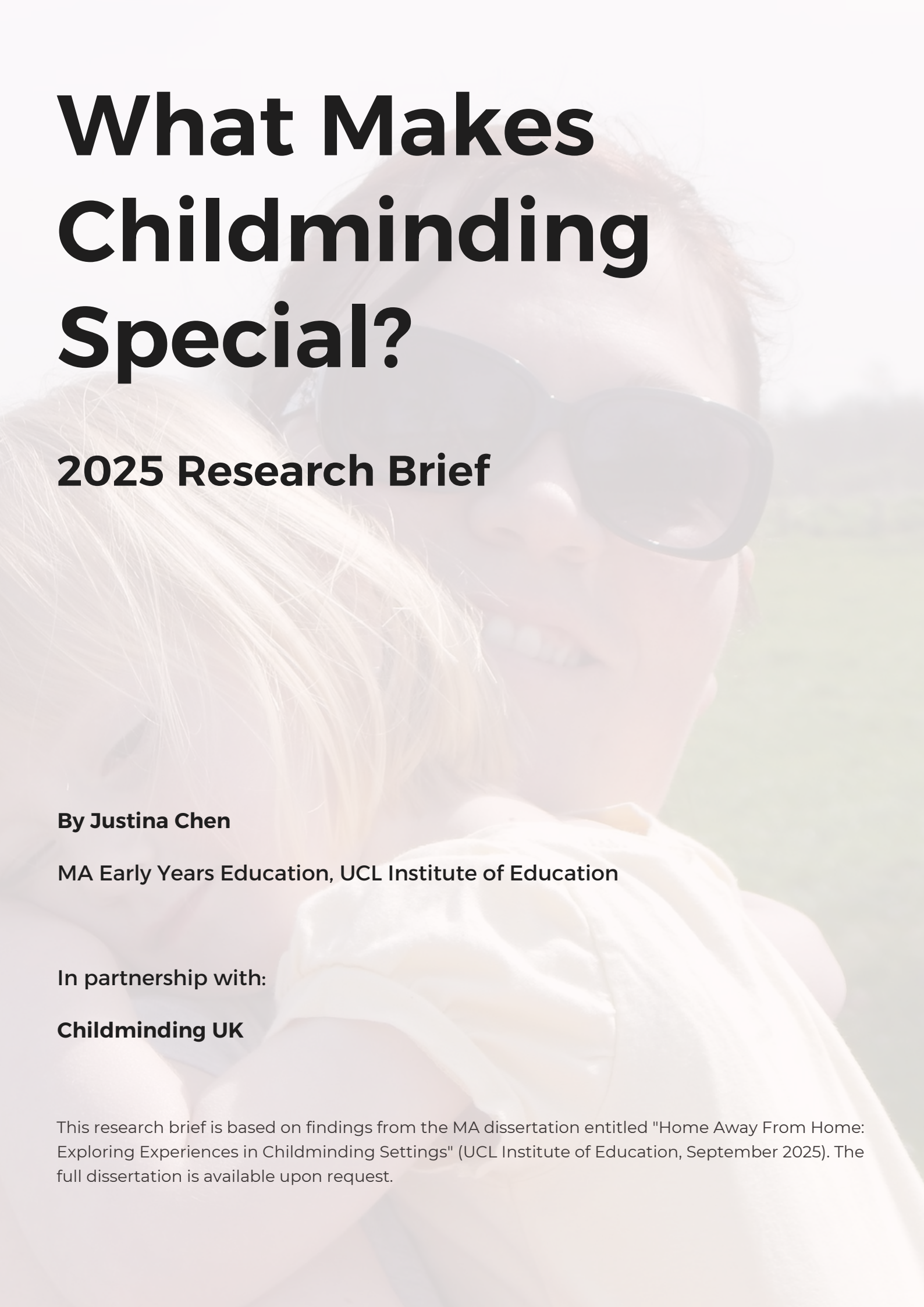




What Makes Childminding Special?

2025 Research Brief

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In partnership with:

Childminding UK

This research brief is based on findings from the MA dissertation entitled "Home Away From Home: Exploring Experiences in Childminding Settings" (UCL Institute of Education, September 2025). The full dissertation is available upon request.

Why This Research Matters to You

This research set out to really see what happens in childminding settings. To understand your unique role and share what makes your practice special.

I spent time in three childminding settings across England, watching, listening, and learning from childminders like you. This brief shares what I discovered about the incredible work you do every day.



What the Research Found

Your Work is Unique - And That's Your Strength

The research identified **three core features** that make childminding different from other forms of childcare. These are what set you apart from other forms of early childhood education and care.

1. You Bring Your Whole Self to Your Work

Your personal values and beliefs deeply shape your practice

2. Your Relationships Are Deep and Real

The close, affective relationships you build with children and families

3. Your Teaching is Woven Into Real Life

Learning is integrated into daily routines and community connections

1. You Bring Your Whole Self to Your Work

What the Research Showed

Your personal values and beliefs deeply shape your practice, and that's a good thing. Unlike in large settings where there is greater rigidity around institutional policies, you have the freedom to create provision that truly reflects what you believe matters for children.

Real Examples from the Study

"A passion for communication"

One childminder made communication her foundation. She used Makaton with all children, bought Portuguese books for a bilingual child, and even used Duolingo together. Parents chose her setting specifically because this aligned with their family values.

"Physical movement supports absolutely everything"

Another childminder prioritised outdoor time and risky play because of her belief in children's physical development. Children had freedom to bike down slopes, climb, and explore with her nearby, supporting their confidence.

"No prejudice"

A third childminder prioritised interaction with various community members through regular visits to a local care home and celebration of different cultural events. This was based on a clear philosophy of fostering empathy and inclusion from a young age that would allow children to "understand about diversity and differing needs"

What This Means for You

- Your values aren't 'just personal' - they're professional strengths
- Parents are looking for someone who shares their values
- Being intentional about your approach is what creates quality

Reflection Questions

- What are the core values that drive your practice?
- How do these show up in your daily work with children?
- Can you articulate these to parents?

2. Your Relationships Are Deep and Real

What the Research Showed

The close, affective relationships you build with both children and families are central to quality childminding. Your ability to truly know each child, to partner closely with parents, and to create that "home from home" feeling is something larger settings simply cannot replicate.

Real Examples from the Study

"Like dropping her off to an aunt"

Parents consistently described childminders using family terms - "like a great aunt figure," "Auntie's house." This wasn't seen as unprofessional, but as exactly what they wanted for their young children.

"We know those little quirky things"

Childminders noticed subtle cues - a non-verbal infant pulling at her hat, a child needing extra one-on-one time. You attributed this to being "in closer proximity" with the same children every day.

Partnership through milestones

One childminder supported a family through a child giving up their pacifier, providing consistent approach at setting and home and celebrating with the parent at 9 pm when the child succeeded. The parent credited her with making it possible.

What This Means for You

- Your close relationships enable responsive, personalised care
- This relational work is professional skill
- Parents value this partnership as much as educational outcomes

Navigating Boundaries

The research also highlighted that these close relationships can blur personal/professional boundaries:

- Late pick-ups or payment issues can feel more difficult when you're "lovely and welcoming"
- You might struggle with difficult conversations because relationships feel personal

 **Remember:** You can be warm AND have clear professional boundaries. The two aren't opposites.

3. Your Teaching is Woven Into Real Life

What the Research Showed

Your pedagogy is distinct. Rather than following pre-planned activities like nurseries, you weave learning into daily routines, respond to children's interests in the moment, and connect children to the wider community. This "authentic pedagogy" is incredibly valuable.

Real Examples from the Study



Spontaneous learning

When a child had an ulcer, what could have been just a care moment became a spontaneous oral hygiene lesson - other children asked for toothbrushes and everyone learned while brushing together.



Following interests

When children noticed the beautiful moon, this sparked a week-long space theme through moon dough exploration, rocket play, countdown songs, all emerging from that one observation.



Community as classroom

All three settings regularly went out to places such as libraries, museums, care homes, local restaurants for cultural celebrations, community gardens, fire stations. One childminder said, "They'll always remember being 3 and being able to sit in a fire engine."

What This Means for You

- Your flexible, responsive approach is pedagogically sound
- Community engagement is a unique strength of childminding
- "In the moment" teaching is intentional, not accidental

Supporting Your Practice

To strengthen this aspect of your practice:

- Reflect on your intentionality - why you make the choices you do
- Document authentic learning moments for parents and inspections
- Share your community connections - they're a powerful teaching tool

What Parents Are Really Looking For

The research showed parents chose childminding for:

01

Small groups and individual attention

"more personal care," "tailored to children's needs"

02

Shared values

wanting someone who sees the world the same way

03

Trust and partnership

a relationship, not a transaction

04

Home-like environment

"calm," "warm," "cosy," not institutional

05

Flexibility

accommodating their family's needs

- ❑ **Notably:** Despite your skills and qualifications, formal qualifications were rarely mentioned as priorities for families. Parents trusted you based on experience, relationships, and seeing their values reflected.

The Challenges You Face Are Real

The study acknowledged several tensions childminders experience:

Regulatory Pressure

Some of you feel the EYFS imposes expectations better suited to centres, not recognising your distinct approach. You may feel pressure to operate "like a nursery."

Financial Precarity

Despite your qualifications and the quality you provide, you remain amongst the lowest-paid in early years. Research from 2018 found that childminders' average personal hourly earnings (what you actually pay yourself after covering all business expenses) was just £7.46/hour. This doesn't reflect your professional expertise.

Blurred Boundaries

Working from home with your own children present means personal and professional life overlap. This can be both a strength (authenticity, family feeling) and a challenge (difficulty separating, burnout).

Invisibility

"It isn't seen as a real profession. You're a mum anyway." This persistent misconception undervalues your knowledge, pedagogical expertise and professional skill.

What This Research Means for YOU

Your Professional Identity

This research provides evidence that childminding is:

- A distinct form of ECEC - not inferior to nurseries, but different
- Highly professional - requiring intentionality, expertise, reflection
- Valuable - offering something centres cannot replicate

When Talking to Parents

You can confidently explain:

- Why your values matter - they create the foundation for your practice
- Why relationships are central - they enable responsive, personalised care
- Why your approach differs from nurseries - your pedagogy is authentically integrated into life, not delivered in planned sessions
- Why community engagement matters-it builds cultural capital and understanding

When Talking to Inspectors

You can articulate:

- Your intentionality - explaining the thinking behind your choices
- Your unique strengths - small groups, relationships, authentic learning
- How your practice reflects quality - even when it looks different from centres

For Your Own Practice

The research suggests value in:

- Articulating your core values - what drives your practice?
- Documenting authentic learning - helping others see your pedagogy
- Connecting with other childminders - sharing approaches and challenges
- Advocating for yourself - this work is professional and should be recognised as such

Moving Forward Together

What Childminders Need

Based on this research, the sector needs:



Quality frameworks

that recognise childminding's distinct approach



Better pay

that reflects professional expertise



Professional development

focused on childminding's unique pedagogy



Greater visibility

and recognition of your contribution

What You Can Do

While policy change takes time, you can:

- Name your approach - be explicit about your values and pedagogy
- Document your practice - capture those authentic learning moments
- Share with others - contribute to professional understanding
- Advocate for the sector - your voice matters
- Connect with networks - Childminding UK and local groups

Final Thoughts

This research set out to really see childminding, to understand what you do and why it matters. What it found was a distinct, professional, valuable form of early years provision that offers something unique:



Deeply personalised
through your values-driven
approach



**Profoundly
relational**
through the bonds you
build



Pedagogically sound
through real-world,
community-integrated
learning

Your work extends far beyond "just care." You are skilled early years professionals who:

- Understand child development
- Build meaningful partnerships with families
- Create rich learning environments
- Support children's holistic development
- Connect children to their communities

You deserve recognition. Your work matters. And this research provides evidence of your unique and valuable contribution.

"This idea that we fill a child's bucket, to be so rich that they feel that they can do anything is so important." - Childminder Participant

Want to Learn More?

The full dissertation provides:

- Detailed descriptions of practice in three settings
- Discussion of theoretical frameworks supporting childminding
- Links to research on quality in ECEC
- Implications for policy and practice

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Childminding UK

Facilitated by:

UCL Community Research Initiative for Students (CRIS)

Thank You

To the three childminder's who opened their settings and shared their practice - this research exists because of you. Your passion, expertise, and dedication to children and families inspired every word.

To Childminding UK - thank you for your partnership and commitment to supporting childminders across England.

Further Reading

If you'd like to explore the research behind these findings, here are some key studies about childminding:

On childminding practice:

- Aaronricks, K. (2023). A childminder approach: Recognising a distinctive home-based pedagogy. *Norland Educare Research Journal*, 1(1).
- Fauth, R., et al. (2011). *Childminding practice in England: Final report*. National Children's Bureau.

On quality in childminding:

- O'Regan, M., Halpenny, A. M., & Hayes, N. (2020). Childminders' Close Relationship Model of praxis. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(5), 6753689.
- Porter, T., et al. (2010). *A Review of the Literature on Home-Based Child Care*. Mathematica Policy Research.

On childminder identity and professionalism:

- Brooker, L. (2014). Childminders, parents and policy: Testing the triangle of care. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 14(1), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X14548779>
- Mooney, A. (2003). What it Means to be a Childminder: Work or Love? In *Family Day Care: International Perspectives*.

On care and relationships:

- Page, J. (2018). Characterising the principles of Professional Love in early childhood care and education. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 26(2), 125-141.