**Early Years**

**Building Resilience in your Childminding Business**



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Now more than ever it is important to take stock of where your business is and where you would like it to be in the future. The pandemic of 2020/2021 caused a great many problems for the small business sector. But is has also created opportunities. This is the time to reflect, readjust and reinvent your business model. It is so easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day running and forget about your goals and aspirations. You need to work on the business as much as in the business. These steps will act as a prompt to help you to review your goals.

1. **Don't forget your business plan** - a regular review of your business plan will help you to measure your progress and make sure you are still on track for success. Reviewing where you are against your objectives will help you to make those changes necessary to ensure the continuing success of your business in the future. A business plan is just that – a plan for your business. It allows you to consider where you are now; where you want to be and how you are going to get there. Your business plan should also involve all who work with you to get their input into your future direction and plans.

***Download your business plan template from our Business Toolkit resource page***

1. **Be prepared to be flexible and adaptable to your market** - is your childminding service still as attractive and relevant as before? What could you do to enhance your offer? What are your competitors offering that seems to attract more business? Know your competitors – well? Conduct fresh market analysis. It doesn't have to cost a lot of money – a simple conversation with your customers can give you a huge amount of valuable information. It might also be time to review your prices/fees. Do you review every year? If not, why not?

***Download your competitor analysis template from our Business Toolkit resource page***

1. **Cash is king** – a solid understanding of how your finances work will help you to create and maintain a healthy business (and avoid the pitfalls of unexpected costs catching you unawares). Examine your budget projections for the year ahead (and monitor the actual spend at least monthly). Are there any potential problems that could threaten your business? You will need measures in place to cope with any likely cashflow problems. If you haven't done any budget projections – why? Work out what your breakeven is so that you know how many children you need to cover your costs and make a profit.

*Download your budget forecast and breakeven templates from our Business Toolkit resource page*

1. **Talk to your existing customers** – do your current customers know about everything that you do already? It is likely (as in a lot of businesses) that you are not maximizing the sales that you make to existing customers: it's much cheaper and easier than selling to new ones. Could you extend the service your offer range or offer something new or different? E.g. holiday care, school pick up etc. Your customers come to you because they recognise the value and quality of the services that you provide, so the hard work is already done. Ask them what you might do to meet their needs in addition to what you already offer. Add value to the strong relationship that you have with your customers.
2. **Get more customers** – one of the downfalls of many businesses is that they rely so heavily on their existing customer base that they forget to promote to new customers. Each year you know that you are bound to lose some children and although in the past these may have been replaced don't take this as a given! Think about where your potential customers are, how you are going to reach them and more importantly what messages will you give them about your business that will make them want to buy from you. Use those marketing strategies that you know work well (and you know this because you ask your customers what attracted them to you – right?). Retaining customer loyalty is a massive challenge for all businesses and you must set yourself a target for how many new customers you recruit to your business every year
3. **Think about new ways of doing business** – just because you have always done something in a particular way doesn't mean that you have to carry on doing it that way. Of course, if it works then clearly it works, but our customer requirements and working patterns are changing, so it is important that you keep up to speed with their needs and the needs of your business.
4. **Increase your on-line presence** – most customers now expect businesses to have a website so that they can find out more about your business and get in touch with you. Make sure your website represents your business effectively and looks professional. Social media marketing has become the best way to promote many businesses. Twitter, Linkedin and Facebook will help you to attract and retain customers.
5. **Pause for thought** – even the most enthusiastic business owner can become disheartened and lose focus. Take a step back and take time to really take a critical look at your business. Talk to people who know and use you – what are their impressions and thoughts about you and your business. Talk to new people, go to (virtual) networking events and gather ideas and new ways of working. Share knowledge and expertise through on-line forums – you do have to give to get back.
6. **Talk to your community**– in the same way that you can benefit from conversations with parents, you can also learn a lot from the other organisations and businesses in your local community. Start to foster relationships with people who can bring new perspective to your business and help you. It can also reinvigorate the way you think and feel about your business. Remember that this works both ways and that helping other businesses may bring its own benefits and rewards.
7. **What about external expertise and investment** – growing your business and taking it to another level is a hard step and can pose a huge challenge to a business owner. You will need experience, knowledge and possibly money to do it, so it is important to make sure you get it right. You might consider a mentor to help you through the process and develop your ideas and plans to the next level. If investment is needed (and it will depend very much on the nature of your particular business) you might consider approaching your bank or other lender to consider a loan.

Here is a useful guide to the grants and loans that are available for small businesses in 2022

<https://www.simplybusiness.co.uk/knowledge/articles/2022/06/small-business-grants/>