

# A Parent's Guide To Childcare In Ireland



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
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## ELC and SAC



# EARLY LEARNING AND CARE AND SCHOOL AGE CHILDCARE IN IRELAND



Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) is the term given to the range of services offered for children outside the family home.

It includes full day care for working parents, pre-school for the 2 and a half years olds to the start of formal schooling and after school care for older children after their school day has finished or in the school holidays.

Typically, crèches and pre-schools and school age care are privately run in local communities. The services are registered and inspected by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and all staff must be qualified and vetted for this work.







## ECCE and NCS

### **Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE)**

The preschool programme is called ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education Programme). All children living in the Republic of Ireland are entitled to free early childhood care and education in the period before they start primary school.

The programme is provided for three hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks per year and the programme year runs from September to June each year.

The programme is available to all children who have turned 2 years and 8 months of age to the start of primary school. To find a pre-school service in your area you can contact the Childcare Committee in the county you are living in.

<https://myccc.ie/>

### **The National Childcare Scheme**

Parents that need longer periods of care and school age childcare can get financial support through the National Childcare Scheme (NCS). You can again talk to your local Childcare Committee to get details of this scheme.

# Play



Early learning and care services in Ireland focus on learning through play. The understanding behind this is that young children learn about the world about them through play and that play helps children to develop competence, confidence and feel good about themselves.

Young children have particular needs for physical and emotional nurturing and care, and sensitive guidance, as well as time and space for social play, exploring and learning. This applies both at home and in Early Learning and Care services.

Through pretend play, children also develop their skills in using language and in telling and understanding stories. For example, children act out scenes in the home corner or a child makes her furry toy 'talk', telling a story. Oral language skills in both English and the child's home language will be supported through play.

When children play with materials like blocks, sand and water, they develop skills in logic. They experiment with cause and effect, counting and sorting things and solving problems.

As children share materials and play together in dramatic play, they learn to cooperate, listen to others, stand up for their own ideas, handle frustration, develop friendships and begin to understand how others might be feeling in different situations.





There are two quality frameworks that guide practice in Irish early learning and care services, Síolta and Aistear:

## **Síolta:**

Síolta, meaning 'seeds' in Irish, is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education developed by the Government. Its purpose is to increase quality in the childcare sector in Ireland.

Within the framework there are 16 standards which cover areas such as Identity and Belonging, Parents and Families and Communication.

## **Aistear:**

Aistear, meaning 'journey' in Irish, is the National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years. Its aim is to help adults, both parents and early years educators, plan for and provide stimulating, enjoyable and challenging learning experiences for children.

There are four interconnected themes in Aistear:

- Well-being: Children will be happy, healthy and confident.
- Identity and Belonging: They will value themselves and feel respected as part of their family and community.
- Communication: Children will develop their confidence in sharing their experiences, thoughts and ideas with others
- Exploring and Thinking: They will learn more about the world through exploring, playing, observing, questioning, with others and for themselves.

## AIM – the Access and Inclusion Model



In order to support children with a disability to attend preschool with all other children, a programme of supports called the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) has been developed to provide expert advice, mentoring and support to early years services from specialists in early years care and education for children with disabilities.

AIM is designed to help meet the needs of each individual child in their preschool setting. It offers tailored, practical supports based on need and does not require a formal diagnosis of disability.

When parents have identified a preschool for their child, the service provider will consult with them to consider what supports may be needed. Where a child needs additional support, the service provider can apply, in partnership with the child's parents, for supports under AIM. Applications can only be made with parents' full consent. Both parents and providers are informed of the decision about supports.



# Partnership



Your involvement in your child's early care and education, in partnership with early years educators, is vital in helping your child to learn necessary life skills and feel happy and secure.

The opportunities that children are given to experience life through meaningful activities and play will carry them forward into adulthood and assist them in becoming happy, productive members of society.

When you put your child into the care of someone outside of their own home, the relationship of trust and respect that you build between you is extremely important. This is a partnership that develops over time.

Partnership involves informally sharing information between you and your childcare provider. Any issues or concerns can be expressed in an open way with the needs of your child at the centre.

Partnership requires the willingness to listen to others and to show respect for what both parties are trying to achieve. The best results for children occur when educators and families work together.

Parents and other family members are the most knowledgeable about their own background, culture and language. You can help early years educators to get to know your child's personality, temperament and their particular abilities and needs, for example, their fears, how they are best comforted, their favourite toys, food or songs.

Communication with you should not just be about any problems or issues that may be arising for your child, but should include what your child is interested in and learning. It is, of course, essential that any problems for children are dealt with in partnership with their parents.





## TRANSITIONS

The way the transition from home to the childcare setting and subsequent transitions such as preparing for school are supported is very important.

When your child is settling into a new place with new people to get to know and a new environment, the key person is vital to how this is managed effectively.

Children who do not feel that they have someone specific to go to may not settle in well or may withdraw because they don't know how to cope in the setting.

Children who are helped by sensitive adults to manage transitions will learn how to cope with change and to view it as natural, rather than traumatic or something that they should be afraid of. They are also better able to learn when adults, both parents and staff, help them to become familiar with everything.

Children need support in managing changes throughout the day, whether that is settling in each morning or changing from one activity to another. A small child may find it difficult to separate from their parent in the morning. Parents and staff can work together to understand and respond to the child's need for reassurance and help to ease the child into the environment.