

Principles of Síolta

THE VALUE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right.

The time from birth until six years of age is referred to as early childhood, and is a very unique time in a child's life. During this period, your child needs to have positive early experiences. The resources and supports that create these valuable experiences should be available to every child and should not depend on money or on any other factors.

CHILDREN FIRST

The child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences.

Right from birth, your child plays an active part in her/his own development, through their everyday contact with the world around them. This is prompted by a desire for independence, their own personal interests and things that they have already experienced. It is important that the quality of early years experiences is supported by recognising the child's role. In order to reach their full potential, children must be given a voice in issues which affect them.

PARENTS

Parents are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his well-being, learning and development.

In recognition of your role as the primary educator of your child, it is vital that the relationship between early care and education providers and parents is open, honest and respectful. This kind of partnership helps to maintain harmony between the variety of environments that a child experiences in the early years (for example, childminder, crèche, junior infant class in school). The development of relationships between the early childhood setting, parents, the extended family and the wider community also enriches early childhood experiences by reflecting the environment in which your child lives and grows.

relationships

Responsive, sensitive and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the well-being, learning and development of the young child.

From birth, your child's well-being, development and learning is influenced greatly by the two-way relationships with her/his immediate and extended environment. Positive relationships, which are secure, responsive and respectful are the cornerstone of their well-being. It is therefore important that they are consistent and continuous.

EQUALITY

Equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood education and care.

In order for every child to reach their full potential in terms of development, equality must be at the centre of quality early childhood care and education. This means that the individual needs and abilities of each child are recognised and supported in environments that understand, respect and promote equality.

DIVERSITY

Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural and linguistic identity validated.

The word 'diversity' is generally used to describe differences in people in terms of their gender, age, skin colour, language, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, religion or race. It can also be used to describe background differences such as family structure or economic circumstances. Quality early childhood environments should demonstrate respect for the diversity that is represented in modern Ireland. As well as promoting positive identities and a strong sense of belonging amongst young children, the settings should also provide rich experiences which support your child's ability to value social and cultural diversity.

ENRICHING ENVIRONMENTS

The physical environment of the young child has a direct impact on her/his well-being, learning and development.

During early childhood, your child's experiences are enhanced by a broad range of environments which include the indoor and outdoor, built and natural, home and out-of-home. These should be high quality and should enrich your child's development and learning, by stimulating their curiosity, fostering their independence and promoting a sense of belonging. From these experiences children should also develop respect for the environment.

welfare

The safety, welfare and well-being of all children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments.

Your child's well-being is a characteristic of a quality environment. This means protecting each child from harmful experiences and safeguarding their welfare. It is important that this focus on safety does not prevent your child from having a rich variety of experiences which are in line with her/his age and stage of development.

ROLE OF THE ADULT

The role of the adult in providing early childhood experiences is fundamental.

Quality early childhood practice is built upon the unique role of the adult. The abilities, qualifications, attitudes and experiences of adults are very important in supporting quality experiences for your child. It is equally important that this role is properly resourced, fully supported and valued.

teamwork

The provision of quality early childhood experiences requires cooperation, communication and mutual respect.

There is an old saying that it takes a village to raise a child. This idea of teamwork is central to quality in early childhood care and education. In order to ensure this quality, shared knowledge and understanding needs to be communicated clearly among the team within the setting, among other professionals involved with the child and with the parents. This kind of communication should also ensure respectful working relationships among all adults involved in supporting the well-being, learning and development of your child.

PEDAGOGY

Pedagogy in early childhood is expressed by curricula or programmes of activities which take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education.

Pedagogy refers to the wide range of strategies, techniques and approaches that support your child's development throughout their care and education. It takes into consideration the variety of relationships and experiences that shape your child's development and recognises the connection between them. It also supports the active role of each child within her/his own development, and so looks at the learning potential of the 'whole child'.

Play

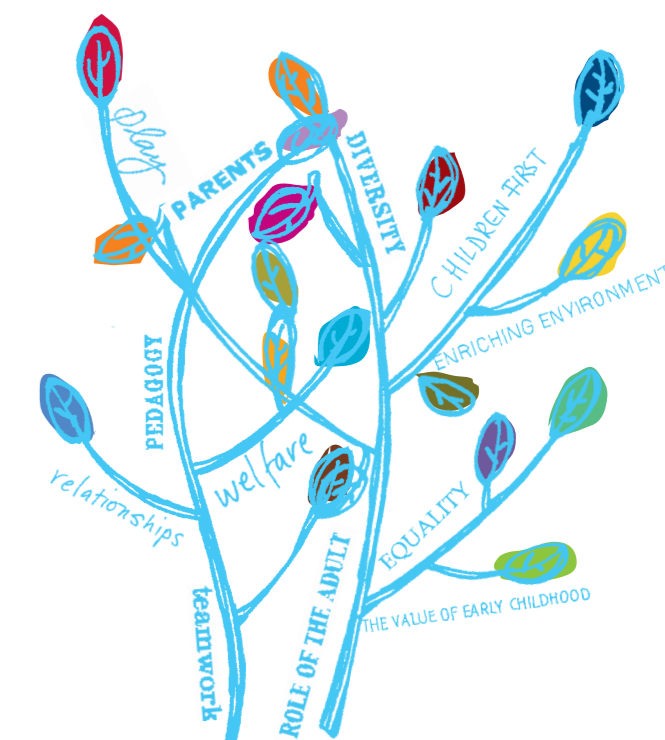
Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child.

Children interact, explore and make sense of the world around them through play. Your child's interactions with, for example, other children, adults, materials, events and ideas, are central to her/his well-being, development and learning. As well as being a source of joy and achievement for your child, play should also be a primary focus in quality early childhood settings.

síolta

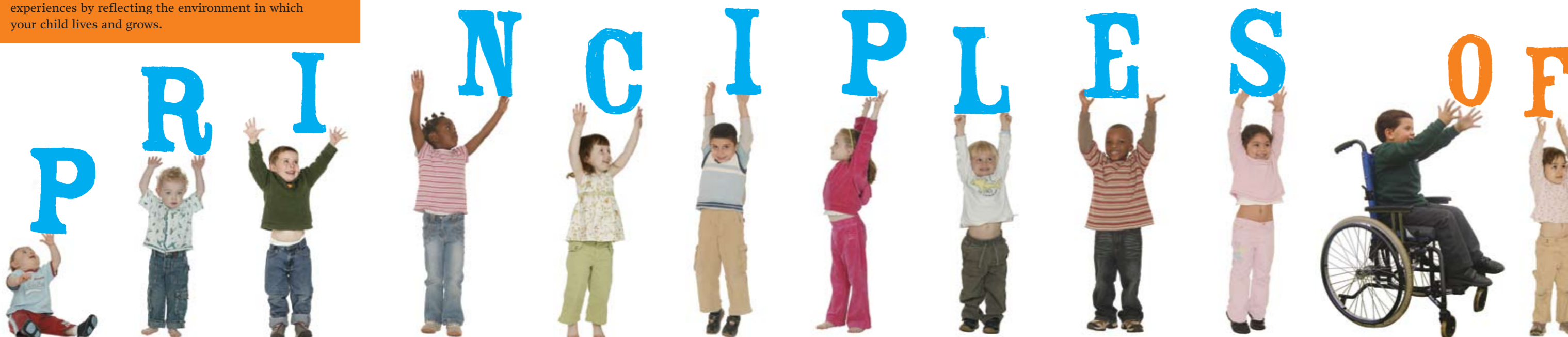
The National Quality Framework
for Early Childhood Education

cecede
Centre for Early Childhood
Development & Education



SÍOLTA

A Guide for Parents - DRAFT



About the CECDE

In 2001 the Minister for Education and Science asked the Dublin Institute of Technology and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra to jointly set up, and manage, the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE).

The overall aim of the CECDE is to develop and co-ordinate early childhood education in Ireland. We do this by:

- carrying out research on the best ways of working with children aged birth to six;
- advising the Minister for Education and Science on developments in this area;
- and developing and putting into practice *Siolta*, the *National Quality Framework*.

Our work is about children from birth to 6 years of age in nurseries, crèches, playgroups, child minders, preschools, the infant classes of primary schools, and other settings.

About *Siolta*

One of the main objectives of the CECDE was to develop a set of national standards for early childhood education and this has since become known as *Siolta*, the *National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*.

Siolta is the Irish word for seeds and we chose it for what it says about the potential of childhood and of this Framework to grow and succeed.

This Framework is a quality assurance programme. It is the result of three years of consultation and research in partnership with a wide variety of people interested in promoting the welfare and well-being of young children in Ireland. It is intended to provide support and guidance for all those working with, and on behalf of, children. It aims to improve the quality of their early childhood experiences.

Siolta and You

We hope that, as a parent, you find *Siolta* useful in deciding which early childhood setting will ensure the best experiences for your child. For example, *Siolta* has 16 Standards which – put together – tell you how quality is achieved in practice. So this document could support you in making informed choices for your child.

How can you use *Siolta*?

Ask questions

If an early childhood setting can show that it is very aware of the main principles of *Siolta* then it is more likely that it will be able to provide quality experiences for your child.

Some examples of general questions you can ask are:

- Does your child's setting (full and part-time daycare, sessional services, childminding, infant classes) have the *Siolta* materials available?
- Can they discuss how they meet the standards for quality?

You can also use the Framework to ask more specific questions about what happens within the setting in everyday practice. For example, the Standard on Parents and Families gives clear statements about what is good practice in this area. If you ask questions based on these statements it may give you more insight as to the level of quality in the setting, e.g. what is your policy on communicating with parents?

If you have a child who's already in an early childhood setting, or if you are considering a setting, use the following statements from *Siolta* to think about the level of quality this setting provides:

- The environment promotes the safety, both indoors and outdoors, of all children and adults.
- Staff and parents have both formal and informal opportunities for communications and information sharing about the child.
- The setting actively invites contributions to decision-making processes and strategies for the development and delivery of the service from a wide range of interested stakeholders.
- Interactions between the adults within, and associated with the setting, act as a model of respect, support and partnership for the child.

These statements, and more, can be found in each *Siolta* manual.



The *Siolta* materials include:

A poster which lists the 12 Principles of *Siolta*, broad statements on which the Framework is based. These Principles are listed and explained overleaf. There are two versions of the poster – one has an English cover with Irish text on the back, and the other has an Irish cover with English text on the back. The idea is that these can be hung up together in whichever of the two languages you prefer.

A leaflet which lists the Principles and Explanatory Notes in both English and Irish. The whole Framework is based on these so it was felt that it was important to have them separate.

The Handbook contains all the background information on *Siolta* – how we developed it, its characteristics, a useful glossary and other material.

4 Manuals – one for each of the four categories of early childhood settings that *Siolta* is aimed at. These are Full and Part-time Daycare, Childminding, Infant Classes in Primary Schools and Sessional Services (services that offer up to 3.5 hours in each session, e.g. playgroups). Each one contains the same introduction and resources section.

Content of the Manuals:

Each Manual contains the 12 Principles on which *Siolta* is based; 16 Standards which, along with the Components, translate the Principles into more practice-based guidelines. There are then Signposts for Reflection which are made up of questions followed by bullet-points called Think-Abouts. These are discussion points to help the practitioner (teacher/childminder/childcare worker and so forth) reflect on their work. They have been divided up into three age categories where appropriate – birth to 18 months, 12 – 36 months and 2½ to 6 years. The Think-Abouts are also edited to be appropriate for each of the four settings – so for example, the Childminding Manual won't refer to classroom situations and so on.

Sample Standard, Components, Signpost and Think-Abouts:

Standard 3 - Parents and Families – states that:

Valuing and involving parents and families requires that a proactive partnership approach evidenced by a range of clearly stated, accessible and implemented processes, policies and procedures.

A total of four Components break down what this statement means in practice. For example, Component 3.1 is 'Staff and parents have both formal and informal opportunities for communication and information sharing about the child.'

6 Signposts for Reflections further clarify what is involved in practice. For example, Signpost for Reflection 3.1.1 asks 'What kind of arrangements are in place to facilitate regular formal meetings between yourself and parents?'

Related Think-Abouts prompt discussion about appropriate activities that can make the Standard a reality in practice, and include for example,

- the types of meetings organised for parents
- Involving both parents (where appropriate)
- Frequency of meetings
- Responding to requests from parents for meetings
- Space for/location of meetings

There is a cd rom in each Handbook and this contains electronic versions of the Handbook, all 4 Manuals and the Resources Section.

The *Siolta* website can be found at www.siolta.ie and as well as containing all the material, there is also a feedback section here where you can send in your thoughts if you so wish.



Where can I find *Siolta*?

The various elements of *Siolta* – poster, leaflet, Handbook (including the CD ROM) and 4 Manuals aimed at Full and Part-time Daycare, Sessional Services, Infant Classes and Childminding, are all available from the CECDE directly.

These are free but there is a postage charge where necessary.

We can be contacted at:

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St. Patrick's College,
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9

Tel: 01 8842110
Fax: 01 8842111
Email: early.childhood@spd.dcu.ie
Website: www.cecde.ie

They can also be found on the *Siolta* website at www.siolta.ie.

Siolta is a quality assurance programme that relies on a number of people to enhance the quality of early childhood experiences for children aged from birth to six years. As a parent, you have a key role in this process, as nobody knows your child, their abilities and their needs, better than you do.

We hope that this Parents' Guide provides you with the information that you need when it comes to making informed decisions about the kind of care and education settings that you choose for your child. It may, for example, be useful when you try to decide whether the setting is of high quality, as it provides you with principles that should guide such quality. Likewise, it may provide you with enough information to feel confident asking questions about particular aspects of your child's care and education. The important thing is that it supports and informs you in whatever decisions you make around your child's early experiences.

www.siolta.ie

www.cecde.ie

