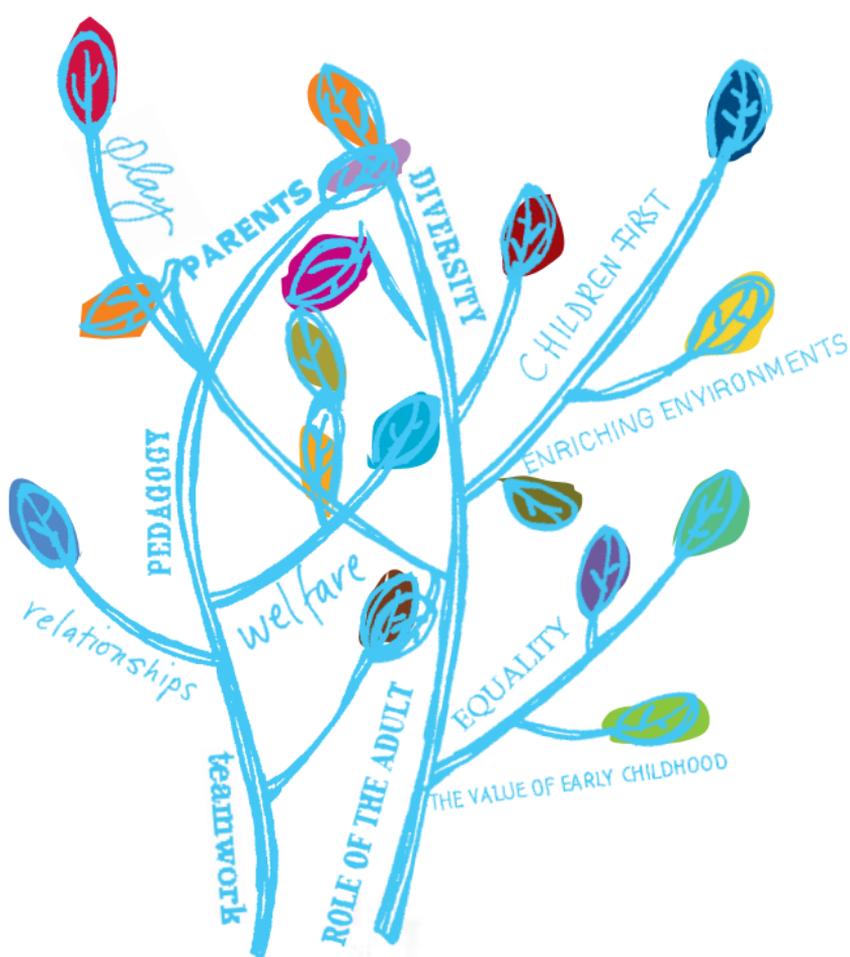


# síolta

The National Quality Framework  
for Early Childhood Education



# SÍOLTA

A Guide for Parents





## 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 years;
- advising the Minister for Education and Science on developments in this area;
- developing and putting into practice *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework.

Our work is about children in a variety of what are referred to as 'settings': nurseries, crèches, playgroups, childminders, preschools, and the infant classes of primary schools.



## About *Síolta*

The National Quality Framework, known as *Síolta*, is a set of national standards for early childhood education. *Síolta* 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 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.



*Síolta* 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.



## What does Síolta look like?

The *Síolta* materials include:

A poster which lists the 12 Principles of *Síolta*, broad statements on which the Framework is based. These Principles are listed and explained overleaf.

A leaflet which lists the Principles in both English and Irish.

The Handbook contains all the background information on *Síolta* – 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 *Síolta* 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).

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

The *Síolta* website can be found at [www.siolta.ie](http://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.

## *Síolta* and You

If an early childhood setting can show that it is very aware of the main Principles of *Síolta*, 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 might be:

- Does your child's setting have the *Síolta* 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?

Other questions you may wish to ask could include the following:

- Does the environment promote the safety of all children and adults?
- Do staff and parents have opportunities for communication about the child?
- Does the setting make every effort to ensure that children's need for rest, quiet time and privacy is respected, as appropriate?
- Do interactions between adults act as a model of respect, support and partnership for the child?
- Is confidentiality a feature of the way staff record, store and share information in the best interests of the child?
- Does the child spend a significant amount of time in the setting at play/exploration?
- Does each learning area and each activity in the setting have plenty of equipment and materials for the child?
- Does the setting promote a strong sense of identity and belonging among both children and adults?

These questions are based on statements which can be found in each *Síolta* manual.



## Where can I find *Síolta*?

The various *Síolta* materials are available from the CECDE directly. These are free but there is a postage charge where necessary.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact us at:



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Websites: [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie), [www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie).

[www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie)

[www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie)



# 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 (e.g., 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 her/his curiosity, fostering her/his independence and promoting a sense of belonging. From these experiences children should also develop respect for the environment.

### welfare

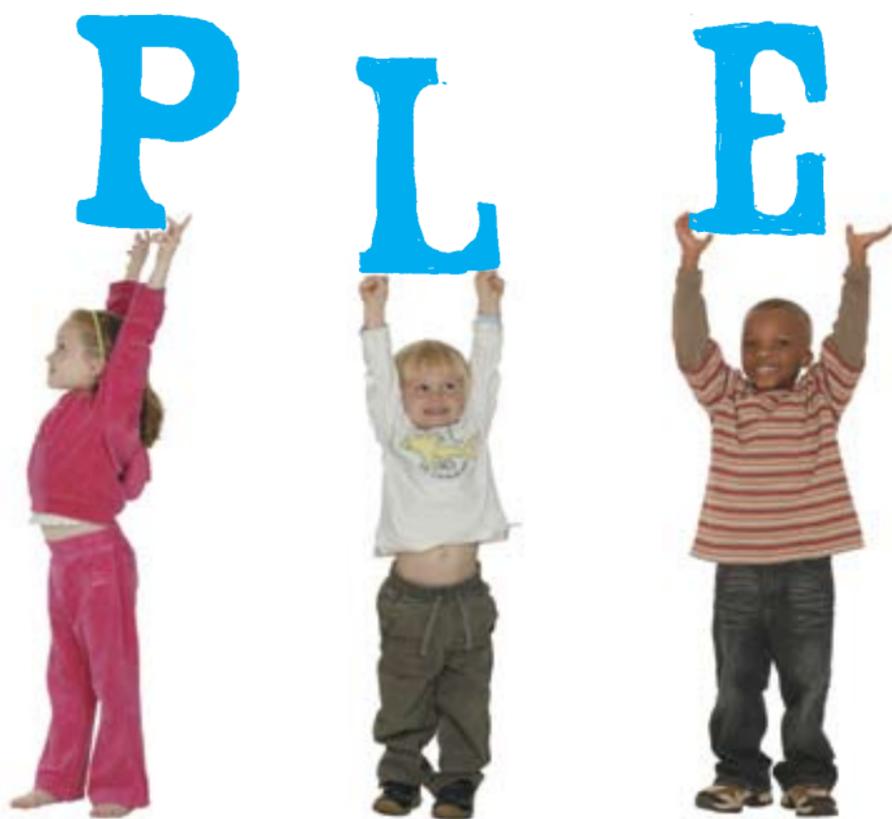
**The safety, welfare and well-being of all children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments.**

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.

