What?

Why?

How?

Guide to Interactions

Regulation 5 and Interactions

Background

Regulation 5

Interactions are one of the central areas of assessment and are fundamental to compliance under regulation 5 of the preschool regulations. Regulation 5 is concerned with the health, welfare and development of the child; this is an essential component of our work with children and is focused on children's learning and development.

Regulation 5 states that *"A person carrying on a preschool service shall ensure that each child's learning, development and wellbeing is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interactions, materials and equipment having regard for the age and stage of development of the child's cultural context."*

The HSE have developed an Assessment Guide to Regulation 5 which can be downloaded from the HSE website clearly outlines the areas/items that will be assessed under each of four assessment sections. This guide can be downloaded from www.hse.ie The Regulation outlines what providers should do: *"In planning activities to support each child's development, which are reflective of the philosophy and ethos of the service, as provided for in the Explanatory Guide to Regulation 14 (1) (f) and 25(a) at (iv), each child's individual needs, interests and abilities should be considered. The provider should be pro-active in ensuring that appropriate action is taken to address each child's needs in co-operation with his/her parents and following consultation, where appropriate, with other relevant services. Each child's learning, development and well-being needs should be met within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interactions and materials. In meeting these needs, service providers should recognise how children affect and, in turn, are affected by the relationships, environment and activities around them. This approach is outlined in the National Children's Strategy and is called the 'Whole Child' Perspective."*

Inspection Process

With above in mind the Preschool inspector is required to use their professional judgement and based on their skills and knowledge, as well as on observed evidence evaluate if a person carrying on a preschool or early years' service is compliant or non-compliant under regulation 5. When assessing compliance with Regulation 5, the assessment is divided into four sections as follows:

Regulation 5: Assessment Sections	
Section	**Details**
1	The extent to which personal care provided meets the basic needs of the infants and children.
2	The extent to which relationships around the children are supported.
3	The extent to which the physical and material environment supports the development of children.
4	The extent to which the programme of activities and its implementation support children's development.

An integral part of any early year's service must include positive interaction strategies where the children's developments are supported and good communication strategies between adults and children, children and children and adults and adults are encouraged. These interactions and relationships are specifically measured in section 2 (as highlighted above) of the assessment, *"Extent to which Relationships around Children are Supported"*. Compliance within this regulation is further divided into 5 sections which relate to interactions as detailed below:

Section 2a looks at how provision is made to ensure children can *"form and sustain secure relationships with adults, siblings, peers and other children"* (Adult to Child interactions). This section also requires that a person carrying on a preschool service provides appropriate supports for children to enable them to "Interact positively with other children" (Child to Child interactions).

Section 2b requires that "*Adults demonstrate sensitivity, warmth and positive regard for children and their families"* (Adult to Adult interactions). This section requires that a person carrying on a preschool shall take into consideration the use of language, regard for infants, children and their families, methods of communication and response to children's requests.

Section 2c considers the level of team work evident in the centre (Adult to Adult interactions).

Section 2d the staff of the facility operates in partnership with parents and are responsive and sensitive in the provision of information and support of parents in their key role in the learning and development of the child (e.g. transitions are made as smooth as possible, exchange of information on play, feeding, sleeping, settling, preferences, nappy changing and developmental milestones, written records, communication of information, special events).

Section 2e the setting is integrated with the local, regional and national community (for example, local involvement, professional supports and organisations).

What are positive Adult Child Interactions?

In order to understand what positive interactions are we need to recognise the components of positive interactions. As early years professionals we value children and always endeavour to demonstrate our regard for them. We do this through a number of different approaches, including interaction strategies:

Components of Positive Interactions	
Interaction Strategy	**Examples**
Assisting children to identify and express their feelings	• Identifying and validating childrens feelings • Asking open-ended questions i.e. questions which have an open ended response eg. how, what, why, when and where
Modeling social skills	• Creating a balance between child-initiated and adult-initiated conversations and activities. • Talking to children about their mistakes and showing them that mistakes and accidents are okay • Promoting positive behavior and make it not acceptable for children to hurt each other through words or actions. • Encouraging respect for each other. • Urging children to interact with each other.
Encouraging problem solving	• Identifying what they are doing and talking to them about it. • Encourage children to persevere with difficult tasks. • Make it safe for children to explore new situations to extend their thinking and problem solving skills. • Helping children to understand more about the world around them.
Helping children to become more independent	• Taking their opinions on board. • Offering choices, and respecting their choices.
Acknowledging children in a positive way	• Recognizing children as individuals. • Talking <u>with</u> children - not at them. • Conversing with children at their physical level. • Using the child's name • Using a warm tone of voice when addressing the child. • Ensuring that each child is positively attended to each day • Asking them to complete tasks rather than ordering them. • Not interrupting, and causing them to say "please" and "thank you", etc.
Enjoying and appreciating the children	• Smiling and laughing sharing in their discoveries and milestones. • Being involved in the children's play and join in with their games. • Building on children's interests

Why do we need to establish positive interactions with children?

Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework outlines why good interactions need to be established, *"Good adult/child interactions are respectful, playful, enjoyable, enabling, and rewarding"*. Through these the adult *"respects all children as individuals with rights, builds on children's abilities, Interests, experiences, cultures, and backgrounds, provides for their needs and facilitates them to initiate activities, to make choices, and to become increasingly independent and responsible"*. The adult *"takes account of additional needs or supports children may require in order to participate as fully as possible, gives children feedback on what they are doing, names and affirms their efforts, celebrates their progress and achievements, and helps them to learn from mistakes, setbacks and challenges"*. Finally the adult *"establishes and maintains good relationships with children's families"* (See Aistear the guidelines to good practice Building partnerships between parents and practitioners).

Aistear guidelines for good practice, highlights that *"Many interactions just happen while others come about through careful planning and decision-making. The above factors, the relevant aim(s) and learning goal(s) in Aistear, and the activities being undertaken all influence the adult's decisions about when and how to interact with children. His/her expertise, experience and view of his/her role in fostering children's learning and development also influence the types of interactions the adult has with children. In addition, some children require significant support for extended periods of time, while others require less and over shorter timeframes."*

Consistent adult support through positive interactions provides a good basis for an emotionally supportive learning environment for children. In this environment children's physical, social and emotional needs are met. Adults create a warm caring environment for the children in their care and participate in parallel play with children, acknowledging children's accomplishments and recognising their skills. Adults encourage children to interact with each other and to help one another to resolve difficulties and challenges by referring one child to another. A carefully planned learning environment will provide opportunities for adults to encourage children to explore and use materials at their own developmental level and pace.

Consistent and predictable daily routines provide stability and assurance for children and this in turn reduces conflict situations. However even the most carefully planned and supportive classrooms have situations of conflict in spite of our best efforts to avoid disputes amongst children. Adult support and positive interaction strategies can help reduce the number of conflicts as well as the severity and intensity of clashes between children. It is therefore extremely

important that childcare services adapt a positive behaviour management strategy in order to create a positive, vibrant, healthy and social environment where children are included in the conflict resolution.

How do we establish positive interactions with children?

Aistear, The Early Childhood curriculum Framework guidelines to good practice proposes that positive and respectful interactions between all the adults in a child's life influence how children interact with each other. **Building relationships** with children is one of the strategies outlined in Aistear, the methods sampled in the framework include:

<u>Building Relationships</u>

Accepting and valuing children, their families and communities by welcoming all children, their families and communities, finding out about each child's interests, background, values, and traditions (we can do this through consulting with parents and our observations of children). By providing appropriate props, toys, books, and displays the childcare service will help to make children feel included and represented in the environment and in turn this will help children to learn about their communities, backgrounds and culture.

Engaging, discussing and communicating with children - childcare providers can join with the children in their play activities and discussions, share jokes and funny stories, and have playful interactions with children as well as those that are serious. This strategy also helps children develop speaking and listening skills and the adult can take the opportunity to extend children's verbal responses where and when this is appropriate by listening attentively and trying not to interrupt.

Guiding children's behaviour - the provider will maintain a positive and safe learning environment through regular review of the learning environment and safety policies. The provider will also need to ensure that the positive behaviour management policy is enforced.

The Learning environment – the provider should work with children to draw up rules for the room and the playground or yard, working with children in a cooperative manner in the decisions of rule making this gives the children ownership and they buy into the rules if they have agreed them themselves.

Coping mechanisms - do not take it for granted that children have a natural inbuilt resilience some children can be sensitive and easily upset, providers need to support children in building resilience and in coping when things go wrong and when they are upset. Inevitably conflict situations will occur in the classroom take these opportunities of conflicts and awkward moments to discuss feelings with the children in the group. At the times of conflict resolution the role of the childcare provider or room leader, is to work with children to solve problems and conflicts taking into account the age, disposition and stage of development of each child. The adult will need to mediate when necessary in a firm and fair way to support children when they are feeling hurt.

Naming and affirming actions and behaviours – another key aspect of positive interactions are to use children's names, names of objects, feelings and actions describe what children are doing. It is also important for childcare providers to regularly encourage children's efforts irrespective of whether they are doing the activity the way you had expected it to be completed. Children will gain more confidence when they are encouraged and this in turn will lead to motivation to try out new and more challenging activities so it is important to provide positive feedback (verbal and non-verbal).

Facilitating

Negotiating learning and clarifying learning goals- this process includes using a horizontal approach to early education this means actively encouraging children to do things for themselves and also helping children to direct their own learning and develop their skills and interests. This approach to learning involves children in decisions about their learning and gives them choices of their activities and the outcomes of the projects they choose. Making these choices and decisions about their learning direction helps children to be clear about learning goals and encourages them to judge how well they have done something.

Supporting participation and learning - In partnership with the children the role of the adult is to acknowledge and nurture children's ability to do things themselves through sharing control and empowering them. In cooperation with the child, adults help children work out how and why they can complete a specific task by assisting children's initiatives, perseverance and decision-making skills. Referring one child to another for support helps towards a supportive learning environment and encourages children to help and teach each other

(peer mentoring). The responsibility of the adult is to ensure that children are supported in this peer mentoring; this may often require the adult to provide temporary assistance and support to children, to move from one level of competence to another this is known as *"scaffolding"*. In order to do this in a supportive and inclusive environment it is not the job of the adult to direct but rather to offer ideas, advice, suggestions, and recommendations when asked or when appropriate.

Organising

Grouping Children- Having a consistent and predictable Daily Routine is of immense importance in providing a quality early years' service to children. Along with the daily routine it is also essential to introduce a ***"Key Worker"*** system. This will allow for children of the same group to participate in activities within the routine alongside a consistent group of children. Providers need to think about ***"grouping children"***. In this process the adult decides why, when and how to bring children together in groups and allocates time for children to negotiate group roles. In a key worker system the adult provides individual, pair and small group experiences within their own particular group and decides on which groups to work with at a given time.

Planning for and reflecting on children's learning - The role of the adult in this instance is to encourage children to plan activities keeping in mind the horizontal approach to learning. With the children the adult plans, reviews, thinks, and talks about children's experiences with them. With the view to progression using children's interests as a vehicle for learning the adult decides on the next steps in learning and provides tasks, activities and materials based on children's needs and interests.

Scheduling and timetabling - Central to appropriate organisation is a daily routine which is dependent on appropriate scheduling and time tabling. This gives the adult specific times to organises learning experiences and monitor the ensuing interactions between children, between adults and children, and between children and the environment. Part of the daily routine will include completing one activity or scheduled part of the daily routine or moving from one activity to another. Successful organisation depends on the adult initiating appropriate plans, routines and transitions, involving children where possible.

Structuring the learning environment - As with all aspects of quality early childhood education and care the learning environment is of central importance and structuring the learning environment in a well thought out and rational manner will be a major advantage. The adult should think about and decide which equipment and materials will be available in the environment. It is very important that the adult plans regularly and reviews the learning environment regularly, based on children's experiences and Aistear's aims and learning goals. It is also necessary to provide sufficient resources, time and space for all children to benefit from the experiences on offer.

Directing

Assisting Children's Thinking - This is an essential feature of positive interactions and developing authentic relationships with children and adults. In order to achieve this, the adult needs to establish an atmosphere which encourages talk and discussion. In this atmosphere of open communication and supportive approaches adults listen carefully to understand what children are thinking and feeling. Encouraging children to talk by asking open ended questions, the adult builds on children's contributions, ideas and interests to extend conversations. Asking children to identify what they are doing and talking to them about it helps children to use their full range of thinking skills. In order to assist children to identify and express their feelings and by talking to children about their mistakes the adult poses appropriate, challenging questions. As children's confidence grows they become more aware of their own progress and development, the adult encourages this and helps children to recognise their own progress and achievements and to build on these.

Leading, labelling, describing, and explaining learning - In this horizontal approach to learning some of the activities are child initiated and some are adult. The adult plans learning experiences and explains to children what they will be doing and learning, and outlines how things work and what the *'rules'* are. In the supportive learning environment the adult reasons and clarifies actions and why things are being done the way they are. In the process of developing authenticity to the relationship between adults and children the adult tells, interprets, hypothesises, and thinks aloud.

Modelling - Positive behaviours and interactions between children and adults will include teaching by example and showing children how to do things. Through this modelling of positive interactions and attitudes the adult needs to

demonstrate value and respect for others and is mindful of the language, behaviours, values, and attitudes portrayed as children imitate what they see and hear.

What are the effects of positive interactions with children?

In order to create a secure, safe and happy learning environment for children it is essential that interactions between Adult-Adult; Child-Child and Adult-Child are sensitive, respectful, courteous and patient. It is in this supportive and respectful environment that children feel secure and safe, are more self-assured and find it easier to develop relationships with other children as well as adults. When adults communicate effectively with each other they demonstrate respect and become positive role models for the children. Adults who demonstrate that they respect and value a common belief and attitude towards others, guide children into developing positive attitudes towards other people with different abilities and backgrounds.

Children's emotional well-being and their confidence to explore and experiment in a safe environment are hinged to the attachments they develop with adults. *"Secure trusting relationships with carers provide children with the foundation for their successful exploration of the social and learning environment"* (Harrison 2003). In a reassuring and encouraging environment where children's opinions and ideas are valued children become more self-confident and self-assured becoming *"confident and competent learners"*.

Aistear & Interactions

Aistear is the Curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. It provides information for adults to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others. *Aistear* describes the types of learning (dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding) that are important for children in their early years, and offers ideas and suggestions as to how this learning might be nurtured. The Framework also provides guidelines on supporting children's learning through partnerships with parents, interactions, play, and assessment.

In supporting children's early learning and development *Aistear:*

■ identifies what and how children should learn, and describes the types of experiences that can support this
■ makes connections in children's learning throughout the early childhood years and as they move from one setting to another
■ supports parents as their children's primary educators during early childhood, and promotes effective partnerships between parents and practitioners
■ complements and extends existing curriculums and materials
■ informs practice across a range of settings, disciplines and professions, and encourages interdisciplinary curriculum

Aistear presents children's learning and development using four themes as follows:

1. Well-being
2. Identity and Belonging
3. Communicating
4. Exploring and Thinking.

These themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning goals. Some of these goals may be more suited to children as they get older.

Each theme offers some ideas and suggestions for the types of learning experiences that adults might provide for children in working towards *Aistear's* aims and goals. These ideas and suggestions are known as sample learning opportunities and are presented in three overlapping age groups: babies (birth to 18 months), toddlers (12 months to 3 years) and young children (2½ to 6 years).

Aistear provides lots of information on Interactions and presents four strategies of interaction. Two of these strategies are child led learning with the *"adult in an enabling role. In this role, the adult organises the environment, observes the children's experiences, models behaviours and learning, establishes shared understanding and meaning, and reflects on what is happening."* In the other two strategies the adult *"directs learning by taking a more pro-active role, giving*

feedback, leading an activity, or joining in as appropriate." It is important that children have opportunities to *"lead learning through self-initiated and self-directed learning, and to be involved in decisions about what they do. At other times, the adult leads through planned and guided activities and increases or lessens the amount and type of support as children grow in confidence and competence."*

Aistear has recognised parents as the most important people in their children's lives and stresses the importance of partnerships between parents, families and practitioners. The Aistear Toolkit (which can be found on www.ncca.ie) has included a series of tip sheets for parents which give tips on helping parents play with their children. This is important for supporting parents in their child's early education as it will allow them give valuable information to the practitioner about their child's learning and development in the home.

Síolta and Interactions

Síolta is a voluntary quality assurance programme that has been developed by the CECDE, in consultation with the wider early childhood care and education sector in Ireland. It is applicable to all settings in which children aged from birth to six years of age are present. Síolta has been developed in relation to the three strands of defining, assessing and supporting quality.

The main focus of the initial stages of the development process concentrates on the definition of Quality, which is identifying and agreeing the 12 Core Principles, the 16 Standards and their Components of Quality. While the Principles, Standards and Components are applicable to all settings in which children aged birth to six years of age are present, the Signposts for Reflection are mediated in two different ways to ensure they are appropriate to the needs of all children. First of all, they are differentiated for four distinct settings, which are:

1. Full and Part-time Daycare
2. Sessional Services
3. Infant Classes of Primary Schools
4. Childminding.

Specifically the interactions are linked to the following Standards and Components of Síolta:

Link between Interactions and Síolta		
Standard	**Details**	**Components**
1	Rights of the Child	1.2
2	Environments	2.1, 2.5, 2.6
3	Parents and Family	3.3
4	Consultation	4.1
5	Interactions	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6
6	Play	6.6
7	Curriculum	7.4
9	Health and Welfare	9.6
10	Organisation	10.5
11	Professional Practice	11.5
14	Identity and Belonging	14.2,14.3

Where appropriate, they are mediated for the three specific age ranges; from birth to eighteen months, one to three years and two-and-a-half to six years.

Síolta is designed as a manual which allows early childhood care and education providers to evaluate the quality of their service. Accordingly, the Síolta Framework recognizes elements of practice that are successful within the setting, as well as identifying aspects in need of attention and improvement. In this way, it acts as a tool to promote continuous quality improvement and planning. *(Source: Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education 2009.)*