

## What is *Aistear*?

*Aistear* is a **curriculum framework** for children from **birth to six years** in Ireland. It describes the types of learning that are important for children in their early years.



## How can *Aistear* help me as childminder?

There are lots of great examples, exciting ideas, and practical suggestions in *Aistear* to help you as you work with the children in your childminding setting.

You can use *Aistear* to build on and extend the work you are already doing with the children. The Framework will help you see the many exciting opportunities for supporting children's learning and development that happen in everyday activities such as going to the shop/post office, hanging out the washing, cooking, or working in the garden. By talking to the children, pointing things out, and inviting them to help you can turn these activities into valuable learning experiences. *Aistear* also stresses the importance of play for early learning and development. It outlines different types of play and includes a long list of low-cost and free play resources. The Framework also has lots of practical ideas for working with parents, and *Aistear*'s themes can help you to plan activities to help the children in your setting to learn and develop in a way that is fun and challenging for them.



## Where can I find *Aistear*?

*Aistear* is available in English and in Irish at [www.ncca.ie/earlylearning](http://www.ncca.ie/earlylearning).

## What else is in Aistear?

Aistear has four elements:

- Principles and themes
- Guidelines for good practice
- User guide
- Key messages from the research papers.

The *Principles and themes* and the *Guidelines for good practice* are the most important of these.

## Aistear's themes

Aistear uses four **themes** to outline what children learn during their early childhood.

The themes are

- *Well-being*
- *Identity and Belonging*
- *Communicating*
- *Exploring and Thinking.*

Each theme has Sample Learning Opportunities (SLOs). These are ideas for activities for babies, toddlers and young children. Why not try out some of these with the children you work with?

## Guidelines for good practice

Aistear also has **guidelines** that look at

- partnerships between parents and practitioners
- interactions
- play
- assessment.

The guidelines include 11 stories from childminding settings. One of these is set out below.



**Learning experience 60: Number chats****Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 3 and Learning goal 2****Age group: Babies, toddlers and young children****Setting: Childminding**

Bernie, a childminder, looks after Jack (16 months), Sorcha (3 years) and Rhiannon (5 years) in her home. Bernie plans lots of activities for the week to build on some of what Sorcha has been doing in playgroup, and Rhiannon in school.

On Monday they all go for a walk to the shops. On the way they count the red cars parked along the street; Rhiannon and Sorcha look for 1, 2 and 3 on car number plates (Rhiannon does this for 4, 5 and 6 too). Rhiannon spots numbers on houses and shop doors. They identify these and Bernie explains their purpose. They reach the post box. Sorcha and Rhiannon each take a letter for posting and Rhiannon notices a 5 on the stamp. They ask Bernie what the number is and she explains about the cost of the stamp. Bernie makes sure Jack is included by drawing his attention to things. From time to time she kneels beside Jack in his pushchair and points to and describes things around him.

On Wednesday Bernie bakes with the children. Jack sits at the table in his highchair and the girls sit on chairs in their aprons. They are making top hats. Bernie gives Jack a dish of softened fruit and a spoon for him to mix and eat while she and the girls count out bun cases, making sure there is one for each person and their mam, dad and siblings. *How do we make these buns, Bernie?*, enquires Rhiannon. Bernie explains. She adds the melted chocolate and the girls put a marshmallow in each case followed by a small strawberry, which they picked in Bernie's garden that morning.

On other days they look for numbers in the kitchen, for example on the washing machine dials, on food packets, and in story books. *What that for?*, asks Sorcha as she and Rhiannon help Bernie load clothes in the washing machine and set the correct cycle. Bernie describes these experiences to Jack and involves him in the conversations. The children also help Bernie in her day-to-day activities in caring for the house and Bernie talks to them about how and what they are learning through these hands-on experiences.



**Reflection: Do I encourage children to ask me questions as part of their conversations with me?**

If you enjoyed reading about Bernie why not look at the other childminding stories by clicking on the *Aistear* logo and on 'Search Learning Experiences' at [www.ncca.ie/earlylearning](http://www.ncca.ie/earlylearning).

## Who else is *Aistear* for?

*Aistear* can also be used in

- full- and part-time daycare settings
- sessional services
- infant classes in primary schools
- children's own homes.



## What's the *Aistear* Toolkit?

The *Aistear* Toolkit which you will find at [www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit](http://www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit) has lots of resources to help you learn more about *Aistear* and to see how it might help you in your childminding work.

## Where can I find out more about *Aistear*?

Contact your local County/City Childcare Committee (CCC) for more information.