

Information for practitioners in full and part-time daycare settings

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. As a curriculum framework, *Aistear* can work as a **guide** in planning practical learning programmes for children in full- and part-time daycare settings.



How can *Aistear* help me as a practitioner in a daycare setting?

There are lots of great examples, exciting ideas, and practical suggestions in *Aistear* to help you work with the children in your setting. Many of these have come from practitioners working in other daycare settings around the country.

If you are taking part in the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (Pre-school Year Initiative) then you will be starting to use *Síolta*. *Aistear* can help you in a practical way to work towards many of the *Síolta* standards. For example, the themes, aims and learning goals in *Aistear* can help you plan a curriculum to help the children in your setting to learn and develop in a way that is fun and challenging for them. If you already have a curriculum you can use *Aistear* alongside it to build on, and perhaps extend, the work you are doing with the children. *Aistear* also includes lots of practical ideas and examples for using play to support children's learning and development, as well as a long list of low-cost and free resources for play. Or, you might be interested in getting some new ideas for working with parents.

Where can I find *Aistear*?

Aistear is available in English and in Irish at www.ncca.ie/earlylearning. A limited number of CD and print copies were made. One CD copy and one print copy were set aside for each setting taking part in the Pre-school Year Initiative. The CDs were sent directly to settings in late 2009/early 2010. The print copies were sent to the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) in Spring 2010.

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.

Principles and themes

Aistear has 12 **principles**. You'll recognise many of these as they are similar to the principles of *Síolta*, *The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (2006). Based on these principles Aistear uses four **themes** to outline what children learn during their early childhood.

The **themes** are

- Well-being (pages 16–23)
- Identity and Belonging (pages 25–32)
- Communicating (pages 34–41)
- Exploring and Thinking (pages 43–52).

The themes are interconnected and link to developmental domains such as PILES. They also relate directly to the subjects in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

Guidelines for good practice

Aistear also has **guidelines** that look at

- building partnerships between parents and practitioners (pages 6–25)
- learning and developing through interactions (pages 26–51)
- learning and developing through play (pages 52–70)
- supporting learning and development through assessment (pages 71–102).

The guidelines include 15 examples of good practice in daycare settings. These are called **learning experiences** and they highlight your important and complex role as a practitioner in helping young children to learn and develop. You can search these at www.ncca.ie/earlylearning according to:



- setting type (full- and part-time daycare, sessional, infant class in primary school, childminding, the child's own home)
- an age group of children (baby, toddler, young child)
- an Aistear theme (*Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking*).

See *Learning experience 20: I did it, I stood up!* which shows how Monica (baby Daniel's Key Worker) is encouraging Daniel to persevere with the important task in hand of learning to stand.

Learning experience 20: I did it, I stood up!

Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 4

Age group: Babies

Setting: Home, and full and part-time daycare (crèche)

Baby Daniel (10 months) is learning to pull himself up to a standing position. Monica, his Key Worker, is watching closely nearby. Daniel has tried several times to pull himself up by holding on to a roll-along toy but as soon as he grabs it the toy tends to move and Daniel slides back down on the floor. He is starting to get frustrated. Monica describes what Daniel is doing, *You are trying to stand up on your own, aren't you?* She encourages him to persevere by smiling at him and telling him how well he is doing. *I think we could stop these wheels moving*, she suggests as Daniel falls again. She encourages him to try once more by showing him that the toy will not roll because it is now locked. Daniel grabs onto the toy again and slowly pulls himself up. He screeches with delight at Monica once he stands upright. Monica affirms his achievement by clapping her hands, describing what he has done and calling to her colleague to come and see. Her close proximity and keen interest act both as physical and emotional supports. She takes a photograph later in the day of him standing which she shows to him and uses to again describe his great achievement. She also shows it to his dad when he is collecting him that evening. She then puts it on display in the hallway with the date and a short description of the endeavour! Daniel's mam stops to look at it in the morning when she drops him off, and talks to him about what he did. They exchange smiles.



Reflection: How can I encourage children to persevere with difficult tasks?

Who else is Aistear for?

Aistear can also be used in

- sessional services
- infant classes in primary schools
- childminding settings.

Aistear has ideas and suggestions for parents to help them support their children's early learning and development at home.

What's the Aistear toolkit?

The Aistear Toolkit has lots of resources to help you to learn more about the Framework and to see how it might help you in your work with the children in your setting. For example, you might like to watch the eight-minute presentation which gives a short overview of Aistear, or listen to the podcasts on play, or perhaps download the tip sheets for parents on the importance of play for children's learning and development. Over time, the Toolkit will include examples of Aistear-in-action, such as video clips, photographs, conversations between practitioners and children, and samples of children's 'work'. You will find the Toolkit at www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit.



Where can I find out more about Aistear?

Many of the City and County Childcare Committees are providing information sessions on Aistear. Some of the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations are also planning events on Aistear. If your setting is supported by a *Síolta* Co-ordinator you can also get information on Aistear from her/him. In addition, Aistear and *Síolta* are being built into programmes at the further and higher education levels.