

# Dublin City

Childcare Committee Company Limited by Guarantee

*Coiste Cúraim Leanaí Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath Cuideachta faoi Theorainn Ráthaíochta*

## A Guide to Starting a Parent and Toddler group



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



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of Children  
and Youth Affairs



government supporting communities

This booklet is intended to support Parent & Toddler Groups. It should be used as a guide only and does not take the place of legal or other advice. The information is correct as of the publication date. It remains the responsibility of the Parent & Toddler group to ensure they comply with all relevant requirements.

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## What is a Parent & Toddler group?

A Parent & Toddler group is an informal group which meets in the local community. Parent & Toddler groups offer opportunities for play, learning and social interactions for babies up to preschool aged children. Parent & Toddler groups, can include Parent & Baby groups, Mother & Baby Groups and Father & Baby groups and are often run by local parents in the local community. They provide a welcoming space for parents, carers, guardians, grandparents and childminders to make friends and get support from others in the local area.

Parent & Toddler groups can provide quality play for each child by ensuring children have opportunities to engage in accessible, developmentally appropriate and well-resourced spaces for exploration and creativity in the company of other children, with participating and supportive adults.

## Importance of Play

Play is a child's way of making sense of the world around them. It gives opportunities to experiment and explore their environment in a safe and secure way. Children's early learning and development takes place through play and hands-on experiences. These experiences help children to manage their feelings, develop as thinkers and language users, develop socially, be creative and imaginative and become effective communicators and learners. Parent & Toddler groups provide opportunities for children to play and interact with others. It is important that Parent & Toddler groups provide play spaces and activities that support and encourage children to learn and develop (see page 8 for some ideas).

### ***Skills developed through play include:***

- Creativity and Imagination.
- Skills of observation, exploration and concentration.
- Experimentation, discovery and problem solving.
- Decision making.
- Independence.
- Vocabulary and conversation skills.
- Social skills – waiting, turn taking and sharing.
- Hand – eye co-ordination, hand and body control.
- Understanding emotions and developing empathy.
- Developing own ideas.

# Improving children’s experience of early years care and education

Ireland’s National Quality and Curriculum frameworks establish principles of practice that all services for children aged 0 – 6 years can adopt to improve and support young children’s experiences of early years care and education.

## ***Síolta:***

Síolta is The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and was developed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. Síolta is comprised of three distinct but interrelated elements: **Principles**, **Standards** and **Components** of Quality. The 12 Principles provide the overall vision of the Framework, while the 16 Standards and 75 Components allow for the practical application of this vision in any environment which provides services to children aged 0 – 6 years. More information can be found at [www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie)

## ***Aistear***

Aistear is the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for all children from birth to six years and was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. It provides information and guidance for adults, both parents and those working with young children, on planning and providing enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others. Aistear also describes the types of learning (dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding) that are important for children in their early years. The curriculum framework is underpinned by a set of principles and applied through the four themes, Well-Being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking. There is more information on Aistear within this booklet, but for further reading visit <https://www.ncca.ie/en/early-childhood>

## Aims of a Parent & Toddler group

- Opportunities for social interaction for babies, toddlers and preschool children.
- Develop children's social skills and confidence.
- Meet other parents, carers and guardians in the local area.
- Share expertise and ideas with other parents, carers and guardians.
- Share your own experiences.
- Provide a social outlet for parents, carers and guardians.
- Provide children with opportunities which may not be available at home, such as group play, messy play, creative play, songs and stories.

## Setting up a Parent & Toddler group

Venues for parent and toddler groups can include community halls, schools, health centres, sports centres, church halls, libraries etc. Groups usually meet one morning a week for approximately two hours. There is usually a small fee per family to help cover costs of rent, insurance, equipment and refreshments.

- Get support, advice and guidance from organisations such as Dublin City Childcare Committee, Local Family Resource Centre and other Parent & Toddler groups.
- Form a Parent & Toddler Committee and elect officers (chairperson, secretary & treasurer).
- Open a dedicated bank account.
- Decide on a suitable venue.
- Once a venue has been chosen, ensure to block book the venue.
- Get the local fire officer to check the building and ensure fire exits are kept clear.
- Develop policies and procedures for your group.
- Decide on a suitable day and time to hold the group. Think about; start and end times of local schools etc.
- Advertise your group in local shops, doctor surgeries, libraries, banks and social media platforms.

- Draft an activity plan.
- Decide on membership fees/donations /fee per family/fee per child.
- Consider if the fee/donation will cover refreshments for parents and children.
- Apply for funding (if available)



**Think About:** *Is the venue child friendly – safe spaces for children of all ages from babies to preschoolers, is it easily accessible- including bathrooms/kitchen areas/changing areas, can the space facilitate messy play activities, is there space for buggies, is there safe storage space for equipment, are there additional costs involved- heating/electricity?*

## Funding

- Statutory funding & grants
- Parent & Toddler Group Initiative Grants - Parent & Toddler group can apply through Dublin City Childcare Committee.
- Fees/donations from parents/carers who attend the group.
- Fundraising
- Local business, may donate or support the group.

## Insurance

Parent & Toddler group must have a valid insurance policy that provides adequate cover for the operation of the group. The insurance must be renewed annually. Insurance must cover weekly meetings as well as one off events or outings which the group may go on.

Ensure equipment is covered in the event that the building the group is using becomes damaged, your equipment may not be covered under the owners insurance.

Please make sure to read and adhere to the terms and conditions of your insurance policy e.g. if your policy has a limit on the number of members in your group, it is important that you do not operate above this number.

# Choosing equipment & materials



**Think About:** *the age, stage and development of the children who will be attending the group.*

- Have suitable chairs and tables for both children and adults.
- Large, soft floor mats for younger babies.
- If space allows, ride on bikes, scooters, balance bikes and slides e.g. for a large sports hall.
- Use Storage boxes –easy to tidy up and store equipment.
- Arts & Crafts materials – collect recyclable materials such as egg cartons, cardboard boxes, small pieces of material, ribbons, crayons, pencils, markers, paintbrushes, paints.
- Open ended materials such as blocks, sand, water play, playdough, arts and crafts materials, dress up – hats, bags etc.
- A variety of Jigsaws, puzzles and books which can be rotated.
- Ensure all toys are in proper working order. Discard any broken toys.
- Ensure toys and equipment are safe and contain no loose, sharp or small parts.



**Think About:** *Is the toy safe? Is it open ended? Can it be used in a variety of ways? Is it durable? Is it age and stage appropriate? Do the toys and materials promote inclusion and diversity for all children and families?*

## Achieving the balance

Parent & Toddler groups are a great way to encourage parent and carers to interact with their children as well as socialise with other adults.

Putting adult chairs at the children's activities will encourage adults to sit with and join in with the children.

Try different layouts and see what works, avoid creating a barrier and separating 'children's areas' and 'adult's areas'.

Children should be supervised at all times, encourage parents, carers and guardians to get involved in the activities and have fun!

## To ensure smooth running of a parent & toddler group

- Establish a committee and set out roles and responsibilities for members.
- There should be at least one member of the group trained in first aid.
- Have a properly stocked First Aid Kit onsite at all times.
- Ground rules should be drawn up and shared with all members/new members.
- Rotate jobs and responsibilities e.g. setting up and tidying away equipment.
- Encourage all parents to be involved and contribute to the group.

## How can Dublin City Childcare Committee CLG work with your parent & toddler group?

- Provide advice and support on setting up a Parent & Toddler group.
- Provide information on Parent & Toddler grants.
- Organise workshops/training for parents.
- Raise awareness about quality childcare.
- Provide updates about childcare options and available programmes.
- Assist with applications for available funding & grants.
- Design and deliver quality assurance supports.
- Share monthly news & information bulletins.
- Assist with general queries.



**Think About:** Policies and procedures that may need to put in place and share these with all parents and carers. Behaviour policy, exclusion due to sickness policy, accidents and incidents policy, code of conduct, roles and responsibilities of members, policy on Outings, Policy on attendance/membership. Safeguarding statement.

# Appendix

Page 10	Aistear: National Curriculum Framework
Page 11	Sample Welcome Letter
Page 12	Activity Plans for Parent & Toddler Groups
Page 16	Useful websites
Page 17	Other Useful Resources



## Aistear Information for Parents



Aistear is the Irish Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years. The aim of the Aistear framework is to expose children to meaningful and appropriate learning experiences and opportunities. Aistear encourages children to grow and develop as competent and confident learners through relationships, communication, exploration and play. Aistear encourages dispositions such as confidence, curiosity, imagination, concentration, responsibility and independence.

### ***How can Aistear help me as a parent?***

There are lots of great examples, exciting ideas, and practical suggestions in Aistear to help you as a parent. For example, the Framework suggests lots of things you can do to help your child learn through everyday activities and routines, such as getting food ready for meals, going to the shops, and checking the post. Aistear demonstrates how important play is for your child's learning and development, and offers ideas for ways you and your child can play and learn together. For more information on Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework. Please see [www.ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/aistear](http://www.ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/aistear)

### **Learning opportunities are organised into four themes:**

- **Well-Being** – providing play and learning opportunities that enable your children to become confident, happy & healthy.
- **Identity & Belonging** – promotes your child's sense of who they are so that they feel valued and respected as a unique individual.
- **Communicating** - involves your child learning to communicate and share experiences, thoughts and ideas with others in a variety of ways.
- **Exploring & Thinking** – enables your child to make sense of what he/she sees, feels and experiences in the world by thinking, questioning, experimenting, discussing and through practical hands – on experiences.

## Sample Welcome letter

Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of Parent & Toddler group*).

We would like to welcome you to our Parent & Toddler group. We will do all we can to help you feel part of our group!

The group meets on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. We do/do not meet during school holidays.

We have a weekly fee of \_\_\_\_\_ (*insert fee and specify if this is per child/per family*). This money contributes towards the running costs of our group.

A light snack consisting of \_\_\_\_\_ (*fruit, crackers etc.*) is provided for children and adults. Refreshments of \_\_\_\_\_ (*tea, coffee, water*) is also provided.

To ensure the smooth running of our group each week, we ask all members of the group to help out in whatever way possible, e.g. with activities, storytelling, songs, setting up and tidying away activities etc. If you feel you can help out please let us know.

It is important that every member of the group feels relaxed, supported, safe and secure and enjoys being part of the Parent & Toddler group. For this reason we have developed a set of guidelines/policies for our group. A copy of these guidelines/policies can be obtained from \_\_\_\_\_ (Chairperson).

### **There are two main guidelines:**

- Each Parent/Guardian/Carer is responsible for their own child/children.
- Each Parent/Guardian/Carer is invited to participate in the running of the group which includes setting up, putting away equipment, organising activities etc..

The Committee members are:

Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

We look forward to you joining the group.

Yours Sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_ (name of Secretary)

# Activity Planning for Parent & Toddler groups.

Parent & Toddler groups often have a programme of activities, which vary from week to week. It is important that Parent & Toddler groups provide a range of flexible activities that cater for all children and families within the group.



**Think About:** *equipment and resources available, group member's talents or interests, space available, separate areas for different activities e.g. larger spaces for music & movement, cosy/soft area for storytelling.*



## Activity Ideas for Parent & Toddler groups.

### Storytelling

Storytelling is an enjoyable activity for babies, toddler and preschoolers. It is important to find a quiet, cosy area to enjoy storytelling with children and parents. Visiting the local library can be a great outing for Parent & Toddler groups.

#### **Benefits of Storytelling with young children**

- Improves language skills.
- Develops imagination and creativity.
- Builds listening and concentration skills.
- Gives children information about the world around them and fosters curiosity.

## **Music & Movement**

Music and movement is a really enjoyable activity for young children. Music and movement is a great large group activity and can also be enjoyed in smaller groups.

### **Some Ideas...**

- Music and movement with a parachute games.
- Musical statues.
- Dancing and moving to different types of music.
- Sing songs and Nursery rhymes.



## **Arts & Crafts**

Arts and crafts activities are enjoyable and fun for children of all ages. Allow the children to lead their own art activities and be amazed at what wonderful creations are made.

### **Some Ideas...**

- Mark making with crayons, markers, pencils, paints etc.
- Cutting, sticking & gluing with different textures and materials.
- Experiment painting with brushes, strings, cotton wool, leaves, bubble wrap, etc.
- Painting, cutting, sticking with recyclable materials such as cereal boxes, yogurt cartons, egg cartons, etc.

## Sensory Play

Sensory play is a great activity for developing fine and gross motor skill, hand eye coordination, and language skills. It is also a great opportunity for some messy play.

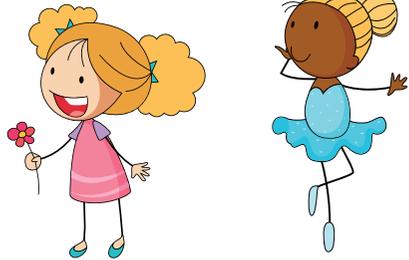
### Some Ideas...

- Playdough
- Sand
- Water
- Making sensory boxes, fill large plastic boxes with different materials such as dried rice, pasta, lentils and spoons, scoops, tubs, sieves, funnels etc.

## Playdough recipe

### Materials

- 1 cup plain flour
- ¼ cup salt
- 1 tablespoon cooking oil
- A few drops of food colouring
- ½ cup water



### Directions

1. Mix the flour and salt together in a large bowl.
2. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients and pour in the oil.
3. Add a few drops of food colouring to the ½ cup water and mix to combine.
4. Add the coloured liquid, a little at a time, to the flour and oil.
5. Knead until the mixture is smooth and has the consistency of scone dough. If the mixture is too dry, add more water. Likewise, if the mixture is too sticky, add more flour.

## Group Games

Groups games that involve easy to follow rules will help to develop co-operation skills, turn taking and sharing. These games can also help to develop gross motor skills- kicking, throwing, running, catching.

*Some ideas...*

- Catching Bubbles
- Parachute games
- Kicking/throwing/catching balls
- Bean bag pass



## Useful Websites

Dublin City Childcare Committee

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

Information on Childcare funding programmes

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

National Early Years Curriculum Framework

[www.ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/aistear](http://www.ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/aistear)

National Quality Framework for Early Years Services

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

Department of Children & Youth Affairs

[www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie)

Access & Inclusion Model

[www.aim.gov.ie](http://www.aim.gov.ie)

Department of Education

<https://www.education.ie/en/>

Tusla – Child & Family Agency

<http://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/pare/>

Barnardos

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

Children's Rights Alliance

<https://www.childrensrights.ie/>

Early Childhood Ireland

<https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/>

Childminding support

<http://www.childminding.ie/>

Guidance and support for parents

<http://www.parentline.ie/>

Family Support

<https://onefamily.ie/>