

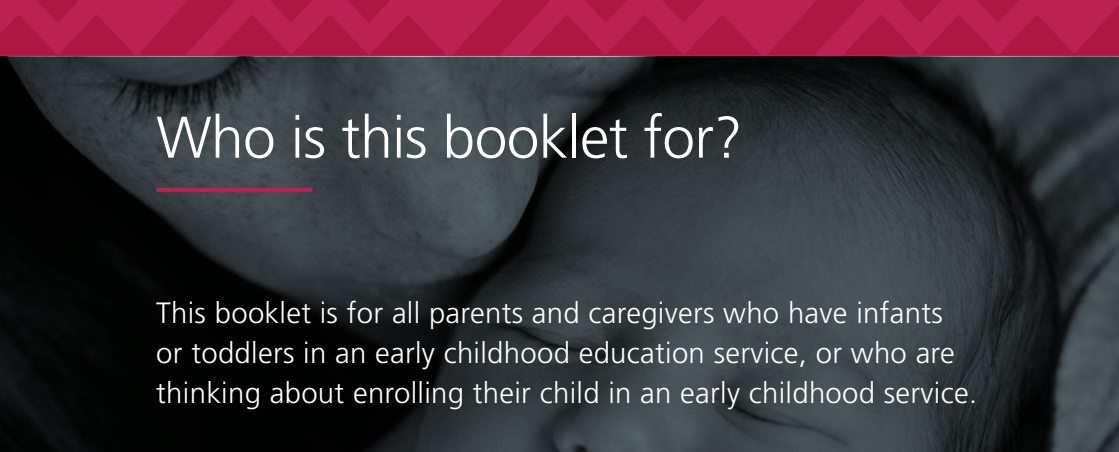


EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
TE TARI AROTAKE MATAURANGA

The Early Learning Years

Quality education for infants and toddlers





Who is this booklet for?

This booklet is for all parents and caregivers who have infants or toddlers in an early childhood education service, or who are thinking about enrolling their child in an early childhood service.

Choosing an early childhood service is a big decision. You will want to know that you have made the right choice for your child. You will want to know they will be happy, settled and learning.

This booklet gives you an idea of what you can expect from high quality early childhood education and the questions you can ask a service about the education and care of your child.

Use of the word 'educator'

There are many different roles people have in early childhood services. This booklet uses the word 'educator' to describe a leader, manager, teacher, parent or other adult who is responsible for the education and care of children at an early childhood service.

Who is ERO?

The Education Review Office (ERO) is the government department that evaluates and reports on the education and care of children in early childhood services and schools in New Zealand. ERO reviews most early childhood services and schools once every three years.

How do I choose an early childhood service?

In New Zealand, you can choose between teacher-led or parent-led early childhood education.

Teacher-led services include kindergartens, home-based education and care services, and centre-based education and care services. Playcentres and kōhanga reo (Māori immersion centres) are examples of parent-led services.

Different early childhood services have different approaches to children's learning.

The Ministry of Education's parent website has information about the different types of services. You can also ask for copies of their parent booklets about early childhood education.

When choosing an early childhood service for your child, you will find information in the latest ERO review reports for the services helpful. The reports tell you what is going well at the service and what, if anything, they need to do differently to improve.

All reports are on our website or you can ask the early childhood education service for copies.

You may also want to ask other parents in the community about their experiences with local early childhood services.



Find out more at www.ero.govt.nz and www.education.govt.nz

How do early childhood services support learning?

As you know, your young child has specific needs.

Early childhood services often cater for a wide age range (birth to six years) and have different programmes of learning for different age groups. Most services will have separate physical spaces for each age group.

The early childhood service will have a learning programme – this is called a curriculum. A service's learning programme is based on the New Zealand early childhood curriculum called *Te Whāriki*.

Te Whāriki includes key requirements to make sure infants and toddlers thrive and learn.

Infants (birth to 18 months)

- › one-to-one responsive interactions
- › an adult consistently responsible for, and available to, your infant
- › higher staffing ratios than for older children
- › sociable, loving and physically responsive adults who can tune in to an infant's needs



- > individual programmes adjusted to your infant's rhythms
- > predictable and calm environment
- > partnership between you, the teachers and other adults caring for your infant

Toddlers (from one to three years)

- > a secure environment and a programme that provides both challenges and predictable routines
- > opportunities for your toddler to explore and move
- > a flexible approach at a pace that allows your toddler to try things independently
- > adults who encourage your toddler's skills and language development
- > responsive and predictable adults who understand and accept your child's development swings.



Read more about *Te Whāriki* on the Ministry of Education's website:
www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood



Settling your child at an early childhood service

Starting your child at an early childhood service can be a difficult time. You will want to know that your child will be happy, safe and well looked after.

You may need to be flexible with your hours in the first few weeks and you may decide to stay with your child while they are settling into the service.

If you are worried and can't stay with your child, talk to the service about your concerns and agree on what will work best. Ask them for information and support as you and your child go through this important transition. Remember that well-managed separations are learning opportunities. See this as an exciting time for your child.

What if my child has special needs?

If your child has special needs – such as a physical or intellectual disability, or behavioural needs – they may require extra support to be able to participate fully in the service's programme.

Children with special needs have an equal right to high quality education, and your early childhood service needs to plan how they will include them in their programme. Ask your service how they might adapt their programme, routines and activities to cater for your child and ensure they are included.

The Ministry of Education provides a range of services and support for children with special needs, depending on how much support they need to help them learn. For example, your service may get resource teachers to create individual programmes for children with behaviour and learning difficulties or hearing and vision impairment.



Visit the Ministry's parent website for more information:

<http://parents.education.govt.nz/special-education-needs/>

What you can expect from an early childhood service

High quality early childhood education gives your child a positive and rewarding start to their learning pathway. Your infant or toddler will be in an environment in which they are happy, safe and secure, and their learning is encouraged.

A high quality early childhood service will take the time to get to know you and your child. You will feel welcome, included and part of your child's education and care.

For infants, you should expect:

- > a calm and relaxed atmosphere with unhurried, individual routines
- > one person who forms a secure and strong bond with your baby. Many early childhood services have a primary caregiver or key teacher for infants, who will be your main point of contact at the service. You can expect this person to have experience working with infants
- > safe but open spaces for young infants to watch others and be part of the group. Spaces will allow them to roll, crawl, pull themselves up, and lift their heads
- > opportunities to pull, push, touch and grasp
- > high adult-to-child ratios
- > small group sizes
- > educators with relevant qualifications
- > positive and responsive care relationships
- > educators who are welcoming and available to talk to you and your family
- > good systems for sharing information about your child, you and the service (eg. sleeping, eating, play, moods, interests).

For toddlers, you should expect:

- > a safe space in which your child can explore, interact and learn – including free access to an outdoor space
- > interesting resources that the toddlers can reach
- > play activities that give toddlers the opportunity to communicate, create and experiment including messy play
- > opportunities for your toddler to play with older children
- > to see the same educators regularly interacting with your children.



Questions to ask at an early childhood service

These questions will help you when choosing an early childhood service. They will also give you an idea of what to look for and ask when you drop off and pick up your child once they're going to a service.

Environment and educators

- › Will a particular person be responsible for my child?
- › How many children are in the group at any time?
- › Do you have different spaces and facilities for different ages?
- › How will you help my baby or toddler move from one space to another as they get older?

Learning

- › What sort of learning activities will my child be involved in?
- › How will you respond to my child's interests and strengths?
- › How will I know how well my child is doing? Do you assess my child's progress and if so, how?
- › How can I be involved in my child's learning?
- › What is special about this service? What do you think is important for children's learning?
- › How do you celebrate diversity – how do your educators support children who speak languages other than English?

Routines, sleeping and eating arrangements

- › How will I know about how well my child eats and sleeps, and what they do each day?
- › What are the arrangements for dropping off and collecting my child?
- › What are the arrangements for snacks and meals?
- › What are the nappy changing arrangements?
- › Do you help with toilet training?

- › What provision is there for when my child needs to sleep?
- › What should my child wear, and will he or she need spare clothes?
- › What will happen if my child is sick or has an accident?
- › What are the arrangements if there is an emergency?
- › Are educators trained to work with special diets, allergies and/or special feeding requirements?
- › How do you make sure that children are safe and settled?
- › How can I let you know about my child's routines at home?

Behaviour and concerns

- › How do you help my child when their behaviour is upsetting other children or they are upset by the behaviour of others?
- › What should I do if I am worried about my child's experiences at the service?
- › What is your complaints procedure?

Parent, whānau and family involvement

- › Is there a daily two-way communication system available between educators and families?
- › How can I be involved?
- › Is there an opportunity to meet with my child's educator at least monthly?
- › How are parents encouraged to volunteer to assist and share their culture and interests?
- › Can I visit and be at the service with my child at any time?



Continuing the learning - supporting your child's learning at home

As a parent you have a very important and ongoing role in your child's learning and development. There is a lot you can do at home to help your child develop as a confident, competent and curious learner.

For example you can:

- > give your child opportunities to play, explore and experiment
- > talk, read and listen to your child to help their language development
- > take your child for walks and outings to discover new places and broaden their knowledge of the world
- > spend time with your child, talking and playing
- > help your child see what they are learning to do each day
- > encourage your child to try new and challenging things
- > tell your child's early childhood service what your child is doing at home and what they are interested in.



Read more about supporting your child's learning at home on the Ministry of Education's parents website:

www.parents.education.govt.nz/early-learning/supporting-learning-at-home/



Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa
The Child – the Heart of the Matter



www.ero.govt.nz