

Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Parents

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To parents and caregivers

This document is to support you to make an informed decision about selecting an early childhood service that suits you and your child.

When your child begins attending an early childhood service the separation of you and your baby or young child leave you feeling anxious. It is important that you feel as comfortable as possible that he or she will be well cared for. You will also want to know that the early childhood education your child receives will be of a high quality.

New Zealand has many kinds of early childhood services. What you choose will depend on your own and your family's values and beliefs. In addition you should consider where you live, your child's age, whether or not you work full or part-time and what you expect from an early childhood service.

The Education Review Office (ERO) checks the quality of care and education in early childhood services and schools in New Zealand. It has published this document so that parents can:

- know what to look for in a high quality early childhood service;
- learn about the variety of early childhood services available; and
- make the best possible use of the ERO reports about early childhood services.

The document also suggests how you can help your child settle into an early childhood education service.

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1. Types of early childhood education services

There are many different types of early childhood services. When you are choosing a service for your child you will find:

- structural differences, such as sessional or all-day programmes;
- different ownership and organisational arrangements - services may be run by private individuals, government organisations, cooperatives, or trusts;
- different learning environments such as homebased or centre-based services;
- a range of different philosophies such as kindergarten, playcentre, Montessori or Rudolf Steiner programmes;
- rural and urban settings.

A key difference, that may affect your decision, is how much involvement services expect of parents and whānau.

The main types of early childhood education services are described below.¹

Teacher-led services

In teacher-led services paid staff have the main responsibility for children's education and care. Parents are often encouraged to support the educators through involvement in the learning programme.

Kindergartens

Kindergartens employ qualified and registered teachers. They have a variety of sessional structures, most have morning and afternoon sessions, but others provide extended sessions or all day education and care. Most kindergartens cater for children aged between two-and-a-half and five years.

Kindergartens are chartered and licensed. The regional kindergarten association employs the teachers, manages funding, property and the allocation of resources. Local (parent/whānau) committees support teachers in each kindergarten, and raise local funds and resources to support the kindergarten. Parents are also asked for financial donations.

Although the paid teachers have responsibility for the programme, parents/whānau are encouraged to participate in programmes, talk with staff, ask questions and offer information about their child. You could also be involved in the local kindergarten committee or regional association, if you wish.

¹ The descriptions of services used in this section are adapted from the Ministry of Education publication *Choices in Early Childhood Education*. For more information see : www.ece.govt.nz.

Homebased services

Homebased and family day-care services provide babies and young children with early childhood education either in the child's own home or in the home of an adult educator. This may be all-day or part-day education and care.

Homebased services provide learning opportunities for children in small groups within homelike surroundings. Some homebased care networks also operate playgroups, so that educators and children can have regular social and educational contact. Some children may attend other early childhood services as well as the homebased care service.

Homebased care services are managed by chartered homebased care network organisations. Parents are usually charged fees for their child's attendance.

Qualified and registered teachers are employed as coordinators to support the educators within each network. Communication between parents/whānau and educators is an important feature of these services. Educators are offered training opportunities to improve their understanding and knowledge of how children learn. The homebased network coordinator visits each home regularly to check on children's safety, wellbeing and learning.

Education and care centres

All centre-based services other than playcentres, kōhanga reo and kindergartens are known as education and care centres. They include:

- all-day and part-day services;
- sessional services that have sessions of a few hours per day or week;
- Pacific language centres;
- privately owned centres;
- community-owned centres; and
- ancillary centres attached to a business or an organisation (for example a gym crèche).

The person responsible for operating an education and care service must be a qualified and registered teacher. There should also be enough other educators with a range of qualifications and experience to ensure a safe learning environment for children.

Parents/whānau usually pay fees for their child to attend education and care services. Parents are sometimes involved in the management of the centre. The extent and manner of parent participation in the programme depends on the choice of service. In all types of education and care service parents should be encouraged to talk to educators, ask questions and offer information about their child.

Parent-led services

In parent-led services it is the parents of the children who are the main educators or teachers. Sometimes there may also be a paid teacher, supervisor or kaiako to support the parents in understanding children's learning and development.

Playcentres

Playcentres are parent cooperatives. The families/whānau of children attending are responsible for how the centres are managed and operated. Parents become members of their playcentre and most pay low fees to attend. Generally playcentres are chartered and licensed although some may operate as parent-led playgroups.

The regional playcentre association, which belongs to the New Zealand Playcentre Federation, supports local centres through provision of administration and parent education services.

In general, parents/whānau are responsible for running the sessions, and are expected to participate regularly with their child. Sometimes there is also a trained supervisor.

As well as providing early childhood programmes for children, playcentres provide educational programmes for parents/whānau to learn alongside their children. These programmes increase parents' understanding of how children learn and develop, and can lead to playcentre and early childhood qualifications.

Te Kōhanga Reo

Kōhanga reo are whānau cooperatives where the families are responsible for the overall management of the centres. The aim of the programme is to foster young children's and parent's knowledge of te reo Māori (language) and tikanga Māori (culture).

Kōhanga reo are chartered through the umbrella organisation, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust. The Trust is responsible for the quality and revitalisation of the Māori language. Through the Trust, kōhanga reo offer whānau training programmes and teacher training for kaiako (educators).

In kōhanga reo, the parents/whānau are closely involved in the total immersion learning and development programmes. Te reo Māori is the main language used. Parents join in the daily programme and participate in whānau-based learning. Whānau contribute to the kōhanga reo through koha and/or paying fees, depending on their circumstances.

Playgroups

Playgroups are licence-exempt services where parents attend with their children and provide the play programme. Playgroups cannot operate for longer than three hours a day, and at least half the children attending must have a parent or caregiver stay with them throughout that time. The Ministry of Education (the

Ministry) funds playgroups to assist with equipment and hall hire. The Ministry also gives information and training so that a suitable range of activities is provided for children. Sometimes these groups evolve into fully licensed and chartered early childhood services.

Ngā Puna Kōhungahunga

Parents and whānau run the sessions in these playgroups, which provide learning programmes in both te reo Māori and English. They aim to develop whānau and children's knowledge of te reo Māori and tikanga. As with other playgroups, the Ministry of Education helps with support and training. Parents may be asked for koha or a donation.

Pacific Islands Early Childhood groups

These playgroups are often church or community based, and parents help run the sessions. They aim to develop young children's knowledge of their own Pasefika language and culture from countries such as Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Fiji. The learning programmes may be in both Pasefika and English, or in the Pasefika language only. Parents may be asked for a donation to support these groups

2. Choosing a service for your child

Parents/whānau can choose from a wide variety of early childhood services, which have different philosophies and approaches to children's learning. Educators in early childhood services should be able to explain their philosophy of teaching and learning to you, to help you make your choice.

All early childhood services should provide a safe and secure learning environment. Children should be accepted for who they are and participate in programmes that have meaning and purpose for them. Parents/whānau should be treated with respect.

There are also practical aspects to be considered including:

- whether the service is easy for you to get to, especially in an emergency;
- whether the hours of operation suit your needs;
- costs and fee structure; and
- the extent that you wish to be involved in the learning programmes.

If possible, you should visit some services with your child, talk to the educators and see how comfortable you feel in different settings. Then choose the service that best suits your child and family.

Parents visiting a service

You should always feel welcome to visit early childhood services at any time, to talk with educators about programmes, and your child's preferences and wellbeing.

Parent/whānau involvement

There is no one 'right way' for parents to be involved in early childhood services. Parents should be able to choose how they are involved.

Some services, such as playcentres and kōhanga reo, are more reliant than others on parent/whānau participation in centre management and programmes. When choosing a centre, you should consider the service's requirements for involvement and your ability to participate.

In all services you should be encouraged to contribute information about your child, so that the educators in the centre know about your child within the context of their family. If educators know about the practices, routines and experiences that happen for your child at home, they can continue these within the early childhood setting. When a child's strengths and interests are known educators can make learning more relevant and meaningful for them. This sharing of information between home and the service is likely to enhance your child's wellbeing and learning.

3. What to look for in an early childhood education service

This section describes what children experience and do, what adults do and what the environment looks like, in a high quality early childhood education service.

ERO uses specially designed indicators to decide how good an early childhood education service is. These are set out in two publications: *Evaluation Indicators for Education Reviews in Early Childhood Services* and *Evaluation Indicators for Education Reviews in Kōhanga Reo*. This section is based on these two documents. You can also see the indicators on the ERO website at www.ero.govt.nz, under Review Process.

If you would like to read the most recent ERO review of an early childhood service you could ask the service for a copy, or phone the nearest ERO office. You can also read the report on the website: www.ero.govt.nz. ERO offices are listed in Appendix 2.

What children should experience and do

In a high quality service, children:

- show a strong sense of belonging and comfort in the centre;
- spend most of their time in child-initiated play-based activity;
- actively explore an environment designed for learning;
- express their happiness and take pleasure in the company of others;
- make decisions, ask for things and choose whether or not to participate;
- have sustained conversations with other children and adults;
- show growing independence, are aware of what they can do well, and what they can do with assistance;
- feel comfortable asking adults for help;
- experience being teachers as well as learners, and their expertise is valued and called on;
- show creativity, express themselves in art, music, dance and imaginative play;
- learn useful strategies for managing their behaviour;
- learn about their community and the wider world; and
- who are unsettled are settled in a positive way.

What adults should do

In a high quality service, adults:

- respond to children with warmth and affection;
- comfort and reassure children promptly and with care;
- respond to children's needs and preferences through flexible routines and timetables;

- are familiar with individual children's interests and strengths, and provide for them;
- respect children's choices of activity;
- suggest ways of extending activities to challenge children;
- help children to persist when faced with difficulties and to overcome setbacks;
- ask questions that encourage and extend children's thinking and learning;
- become more informed about topics of interest to children;
- are knowledgeable and skilful in their support for children's play and learning;
- actively respond to infants and toddlers varied communication; and
- respond to children's interest in reading and books through skilful shared reading.

Educators should be able to explain to parents how they identify children's interests and strengths; how they use this information to make learning exciting and meaningful; and how they involve parents/whānau in this process.

High quality environment

The quality of the learning environment has a significant impact on learning outcomes for children. The environment of a service, both inside and outside, should be attractive and stimulating, inviting curiosity and exploration. The environment, resources and equipment should meet the specific needs of the infants, toddlers and young children attending.

In a high quality service:

- thoughtful consideration is given to the way the learning environment is presented;
- adults minimise risks to children's safety while still providing a challenging environment;
- equipment and materials are selected to meet the emerging interests of children;
- resources are open-ended and can be used in many ways;
- resources are accessible to children at their level;
- adults ensure materials and resources are available for sustained periods of time;
- children have the freedom to choose equipment and resources, as they require them;
- children move easily inside and outside easily;
- children are surrounded by messages that are in writing, pictures and photographs; and
- the environment and resources are safe and hygienic.

Educators should be able to explain to parents/whānau how they ensure that they have a well-resourced and safe learning environment for children, and how families can contribute to this outcome.

4. Key questions to ask when you visit a service

Before you enrol your baby or child in an early childhood education service you will want to check that they will be happy and learning in a safe and caring environment. Here are suggestions for questions you may like to ask when you visit an early childhood service.

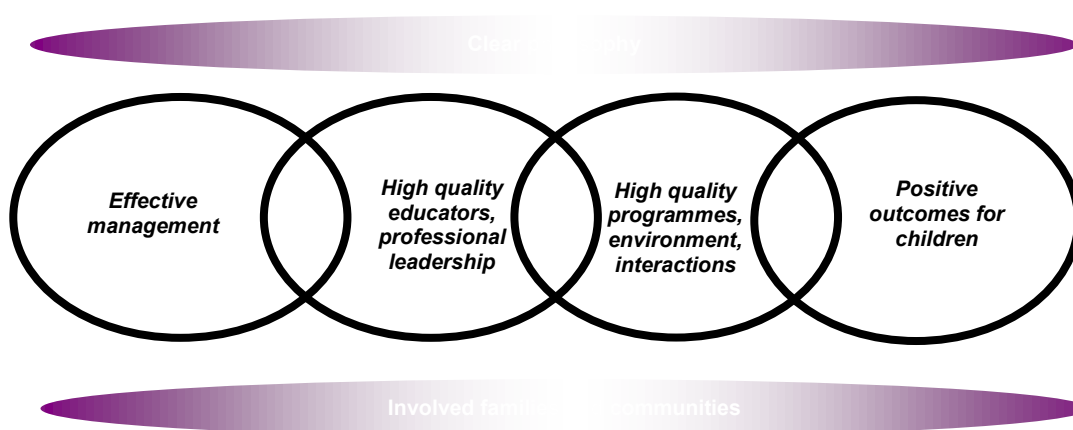
- Will you have a place for my child? Is there a waiting list?
- How many children are in the group at any time?
- How many teachers are there for this group of children?
- Will a particular teacher be responsible for my child?
- How does the service cater for infants and toddlers, and for older children? Are there appropriate facilities for different ages?
- What qualifications do your educators have? How many educators are qualified? Do you have qualified educators available for relieving?
- What is special about this service? What do you think is important for children's learning?
- How do you make sure that children are safe and settled?
- How do you respond to children's interests and strengths?
- How will I know what my child has learned?
- How can I be involved?
- What is your approach to managing difficult behaviour?
- What should I do if I am worried about my child's experiences at the service?
- What is your complaints procedure?
- What fees will I be expected to pay?
- Do you have the most recent ERO report on your service?
- Can you tell me about the centre routines, and what my child will do during the day?
 - When is the centre open?
 - What are the arrangements for delivering and collecting my child?
 - What are the arrangements for snacks and meals?
 - What are the toileting arrangements?
 - What provision is there for tired children?
 - 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?

You may also have questions about what you have seen at the service, or what comes up as educators answer your other questions.

5. ERO's Chain of Quality

The early childhood education Chain of Quality reflects ERO's evaluation findings over a period of many years. It is used as a tool to assist ERO and early childhood services to explore and identify children's outcomes and the most important processes likely to be contributing to these outcomes.

Figure 1: ERO's Early Childhood Education Chain of Quality



The *Chain of Quality* diagram shows links between key elements of early childhood services' operations and positive outcomes for children.

Positive learning outcomes for children in early childhood education include:

- children's knowledge (eg facts, concepts, ideas, vocabulary);
- children's skills (physical, intellectual, language, emotional, social);
- children's dispositions (eg curiosity, persistence, playfulness, resilience);
- children's attitudes (eg confidence, belonging, participation, enjoyment); and
- children's cultural dimensions (eg aspirations, language, practices, traditions).

Te Whāriki is the Ministry of Education's early childhood curriculum statement. This document sets out intended learning outcomes for children in early childhood settings, relating to Wellbeing (Mana Atua), Belonging (Mana Whenua), Contribution (Mana Tangata), Communication (Mana Reo) and Exploration (Mana Aotūroa).

6. Early Childhood Terminology

When talking to educators about their early childhood service you are likely to hear phrases and terms that are unfamiliar to you. The following section describes some of the commonly used language in relation to the different elements of the Chain of Quality.

Clear Philosophy

All early childhood services are required to develop a statement of their philosophy. Although there will be common elements, services may have different approaches to children's learning that will be reflected in their philosophy. Some services are guided by specific philosophical approaches, such as Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner.

You can ask to see the service's philosophy statement. Educators should be able to describe how this philosophy guides the teaching and learning, and other practices such as routines and daily events.

Involved Families and Communities

Early childhood education should be a partnership between the home and the service. It is important that the adults in the early childhood service know about your child within the context of his or her family/whānau. (See Page 5)

When you arrive at a service you should feel welcome and respected. Educators should show interest and listen to your opinions and knowledge about your child.

Positive Outcomes for Children

Words and phrases that you may hear educators use in relation to outcomes for children include:

Dispositions

- *Dispositions* are combinations of children's emerging knowledge, skills and attitudes to learning.
- Positive *dispositions* for learning include courage and curiosity, trust and playfulness, perseverance, confidence and responsibility.
- *Dispositions* for learning also include the way children approach learning, for example taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, challenge and uncertainty, and expressing a point of view.
- Children's *dispositions* are noticed, recognised and responded to by competent educators in early childhood settings.
- You will also notice these dispositions at home. Through sharing your observations and knowledge with the early childhood service a broader perspective of your child's interests and abilities will emerge.

Empowerment

- When children are *empowered* they are more likely to develop a sense of themselves as capable and confident learners.
- In the centre you could expect to see *empowering* practices such as: children having choice and making decisions; setting their own learning goals; being consulted about what they will do next; and also having a say about what will be recorded and collected about their learning.

Engagement

- Children are *engaged in learning* when they spend the majority of their time in child-initiated play that is interesting and satisfying for them.
- To encourage *engagement*, adults should work together knowledgeably with children in their play. Educators get involved alongside the child, and skilfully extend and stimulate children's thinking through questions, suggestions and sharing information.
- Children who are *engaged* in learning will theorise, investigate and explore at their own pace. Sometimes children (especially babies and toddlers) may want to simply observe, spending time watching the other activities around them. This will usually lead to further experimentation and new learning outcomes.
- If children are not engaging in activities that are of interest to them the service may not be providing enough choices or adequate stimulation. Disruptive children may be a sign that there are not enough challenges or activities to engage their interest.

Holistic

- All aspects of a child's learning and development are interrelated and interconnected.
- Early childhood educators therefore regard each child as a whole person, within the cultural context of their family/whānau and community.
- Underpinning this *holistic* view of the child is educators' knowledge of learning theory and their understanding of child development, including intellectual, physical, social, emotional and spiritual dimensions.

Relationships

- Children learn through responsive and reciprocal *relationships* with people, places and things.
- Early childhood programmes should provide opportunities for children to gain a rich understanding of their world, and to learn through trying out their ideas with adults and other children.

High quality programmes, environment and interactions

You may hear educators use the following words and phrases in relation to programmes, environment and interactions.

Assessment

- Assessment refers to the way in which educators and whānau use knowledge and understanding to further children's learning.
- Current good assessment practice identifies the child as a competent and confident learner. Assessment values children's work.
- Competent educators will notice, recognise and respond to children's strengths and interests.
- Effective assessment takes into account the whole child, and involves parents/whānau. Children contribute to assessment and are provided with feedback about their learning.
- *Portfolios* are a good way of keeping assessment records. A portfolio may contain a collection of dated and named pieces of the child's work, and photographic documentation of learning, chosen by the child or by adults. They may also contain parent education material and *learning stories* or *narrative assessments*.
- *Narrative assessments* positively describe children's learning through relating and interpreting their play activities and relationships, over time. These assessments may also indicate possible pathways for ongoing learning.
- You should be able to see and contribute to assessment information about your child.

Co-Construction

- The process by which the individual child, the physical and social environment and educators all contribute to the child's construction of knowledge and understanding is described as co-construction.

Curriculum

- Curriculum is defined in early childhood education as "the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development".
- *Te Whāriki* is the Ministry of Education's early childhood curriculum statement. All chartered services must provide programmes that are consistent with *Te Whāriki*. *Te Whāriki* emphasises the learning partnership between children and teachers, and parents/whānau.
- The full text of *Te Whāriki* is available on the Ministry of Education's website: <http://www.minedu.govt.nz>.

Diverse needs/ Special needs

- A child with diverse needs may require extra support to be able to participate fully in the service's programme. These needs may come from a physical or intellectual disability, behavioural needs or other unusual circumstances.
- Children with diverse needs have equal rights to good education, and services should plan for how they will include them in their programmes.
- The Ministry of Education employs special education workers who assist services to provide individual programmes and necessary support for children with special learning and developmental requirements.

Environment

- The environment of an early childhood service includes the physical setting, learning resources, and relationships among children, adults and families/whānau.
- A good environment gives children challenges and opportunities to explore both indoors and out. (See also page 6: High Quality Environment)

Evaluation

- *Evaluation* is a process used by early childhood services to find out about the quality of the programme, the environment, the learning interactions, and the outcomes for children and families/whānau.
- *Self-review* is a form of internal evaluation in which the service looks closely at itself and what it does, and uses what it finds out to set goals to improve quality.
- ERO provides external evaluation of the quality of services. Education reviews are carried out regularly in all licensed services. Reports confirm what is going well and make suggestions for improvement. The latest ERO report should be available from the service, or can be read on ERO's website.

Group times and routines

- *Routines* in early childhood services should be designed to meet children's individual preferences, not the convenience of adults. For example, children should be able to eat, or sleep when they need to.
- Daily practices such as mealtimes and flexible group times should have minimal impact on the child-initiated programme.
- *Group times* may give educators an opportunity to work with small groups or the whole group of children on a particular interest or project.
- Group times should not take up a lot of the session or day. Children should be able to choose whether or not to participate

Literacy and Numeracy

- In early childhood services children develop foundation knowledge, skills and understandings that support early reading, writing and understanding of mathematical concepts.
- These skills are developed through educators and children:
 - using a rich variety of language;
 - having fun with language;
 - reading stories;
 - using print for meaning, such as names, labels, recipes;
 - developing familiarity with print and number;
 - having a wide range of good quality resources such as puzzles, blocks, books, water and sand play; and
 - using the learning environment to test working theories about their world.
- Educators should use their interactions with children to extend literacy and numeracy skills within the context of children's interests.

Outings/excursions/trips

- Centre-based and homebased services will sometimes plan *outings* to give children different experiences. Outings might include visits to zoos, farms, parks, beaches, fire stations, and libraries.
- Services should have policies and procedures that show how they will keep children safe on outings. Services may need parents to help during outings.

Positive Guidance

- Adults should use *positive guidance* in managing the behaviour of children. Encouraging good behaviour usually works better than focussing on poor behaviour.
- Redirection or distraction is an appropriate approach to managing behaviour.
- It is illegal to use physical punishment or to deny food or water to children in an early childhood centre.

Scaffolding

- *Scaffolding* is a process through which educators support and guide children to build upon their emerging abilities and interests.
- *Scaffolding* can involve asking questions to extend children's thinking, making suggestions for children to try a different approach, encouraging children to problem-solve, use resources creatively, and demonstrating the use of equipment.

Socio cultural context

- The *socio cultural* approach to teaching and learning recognises and takes into consideration the wider world in which children learn and develop.
- Educators look at the child as part of a family and community, and also consider the influence of society and its cultural values on children's learning and development.

Te reo me ngā tikanga Māori

- *Te reo me ngā tikanga Māori* is Māori language and culture. Services are required to recognise the place of Māori as tangata whenua, and observe the principles of partnership in the Treaty of Waitangi.
- One of the ways to do this is by integrating Māori language and culture into the practices and activities of the service.

High quality educators, professional leadership

Words and phrases that you may hear educators use in relation to educators and leadership include:

Adults as Ongoing Learners

- Educators should keep up to date with current theories and practice in early childhood education.

Collaborative teaching

- Educators develop a shared understanding about children's learning through professional discussions, reflection about children's work and sharing assessments of children's learning.
- Educators work well as a team.
- Children experience consistency in their relationships with individual educators.

Parent education

- All services provide opportunities for parents to extend their parenting skills and understanding about children's learning.
- Some services provide training for parents to help organise and run the learning programmes.
- In some services parents can participate in training programmes that can lead to an early childhood qualification.

Pedagogy

- The art and practice of teaching.

Professional development

- Courses that managers and educators undertake to improve their teaching and management practice.

Qualifications

- In teacher-led services the minimum *qualification* is a Diploma in Teaching (ECE).
- There are many different pathways through which educators may have gained their qualifications. These include extra-curricular study, on-the-job training or full time study.
- In most early childhood services there will be some fully qualified people and others who are in training.
- The qualifications of educators should be displayed within the centre for your information.

Registration

- Teachers who have at least a Diploma of Education (Early Childhood Education) or the equivalent can apply to the New Zealand Teachers Council to become *registered teachers*.
- A teacher works for at least two years as a *provisionally registered teacher* (PRT) under the guidance of registered supervisors. If reports on their progress are satisfactory they can become fully registered at the end of this period.
- All teachers in kindergartens have to be registered teachers. From December 2007, half of teachers at all teacher-led services will have to be registered.

Service-based training

- Training that involves both on-the-job supervision and release from work for study and courses. Service-based training helps educators understand the link between practice and theory.

Effective Management

You may hear educators use the following words and phrases that in relation to management of services.

Complaints

- All services should have a complaints policy. This will be a written statement explaining how you can make complaints and how these will be dealt with.
- The complaints policy should be displayed in an obvious place along with the service's licence. It should provide you with clear steps to take and tell you exactly who you will need to contact.

- If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can complain to the Ministry of Education or ERO. If ERO receives serious complaints about a service, the Chief Review Officer can authorise a special review to investigate the allegations.

Funding

- Government part-funds early childhood services through the Ministry of Education. The *funding rates* are based upon differences in the structure of various early childhood services.
- Teacher-led services that offer higher quality through employing more registered educators receive a higher rate of funding. Parent-led services are funded at a lower rate.
- Most services also charge fees or seek donations and grants.
- Families with low to moderate income can apply for a childcare subsidy from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ).
- Early childhood services must have *audited financial statements* to account for how they spend their money. These statements must be available to parents.

Governance

- Governance is the arrangement by which early childhood services are owned and/or operated. Early childhood services have a range of governance arrangements.
- Some services such as playcentres, kindergartens and homebased care networks are governed by *umbrella organisations* that operate a group of centres/services within a region.
- Other community owned services will have a committee that is responsible for property, finance and personnel management.
- In private services the *owners* govern the service. These may be individual centres or groups of centres, some of which are owned by corporations.
- In all services parents should have opportunities to participate in making decisions.

Health and safety

- Services are responsible for the health and safety of children while they are at the service. Early childhood education regulations set out the *minimum standards* for health and safety.
- If you are concerned about any aspects of safety you should talk to the *person responsible*, or to the licensee.
- If you remain unhappy you can make a formal complaint.

Licence

- All centres other than licence-exempt services must have a *licence* from the Ministry of Education.

- To get a licence, a service must show that they meet Early Childhood Regulations and that the licensee is a fit person to hold a licence.
- Every centre must display its licence in an obvious place. The licence will show the centre's address, how many children the centre can have, the name of the licensee and other information.

Licence-exempt

- *Licence-exempt* services operate without licence. They receive limited government funding and ERO does not review them.
- The children's parents usually run the service, and are responsible for educating and caring for the children. At least half of all children have to have a parent or caregiver with them at all times. The services can operate for up to three hours a day.

Licensee

- The *licensee* is responsible for making sure that a centre meets the licensing requirements.
- At privately owned services the licensee may be the owner or a manager.
- Licensees in community-owned services may be a manager, the head teacher, the chairperson or a member of the parent committee or the president of the association to which the centre belongs.
- The licensee's name and contact details should be clearly displayed with the centre's licence.

Management

- Management structures vary between different services and types of service.
- Parent-led services are managed by the children's families or whānau.
- Community-owned services may have a management committee representing both parents and teachers.
- The management of privately-owned services is likely to include the licensee and supervisor or senior teacher. Sometimes parents may also be invited to participate in decision making.
- Involvement in the management of your service will give you a better understanding of how it operates as well as opportunities to support improvements.

Person responsible

- Under the regulations, a *person responsible* must supervise children and staff at all times when children are at the service.
- The *person responsible* must be a registered teacher and hold recognised qualifications. They must have at least a Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) or an equivalent qualification.

Ratios and group size

- In early childhood education, *ratio* is used to mean the number of children there are to each adult.
- Services with high ratios (plenty of adults) can usually provide better education and care than those with lower ratios. High ratios are particularly important for full-day services where there are large numbers of infants.
- *Group size* is the number of children attending at a particular time.
- Small group sizes are generally better for infants and toddlers. Some centres organise specific areas that meet the particular needs of infants and toddlers.

Rolls and registers of attendance

- All services are required to keep a record of who attends, for what hours and who is going to pick up each child. It is very important for the safety of the children that this information is accurate.
- These registers are used both for safety and to claim funding.
- Early childhood centres usually require parents or caregivers to sign their children in and out.

Subsidies

- Parents who are on a low or middle income, may be eligible for childcare subsidies to reduce the cost of sending children to an early childhood education service.
- Contact the nearest WINZ office or ask the people at the early childhood service for help with an application for a subsidy.

7. How to help your child settle into a service

Starting at an early childhood education service is a time of both excitement and nervousness for you and your child. This section gives tips to help settle your child.

Before your child starts at a service

Help your child prepare

There are many things you can do to ensure your child settles easily into the early childhood education service.

Help your child to develop social skills

- Teach your child how to get on with other people:
 - let your child spend time with other adults and children while you are there;
 - leave your child with other people sometimes, to get used to being away from you; and
 - help them to cooperate, share and take turns.
- Provide your child with choices, and give them help when they need it.
- Talk to your child about going to the service.
- Tell your child that the service is a good place and they will have fun.
- Tell your child what will happen: how they will get there, who will meet them and look after them, when they will have food, when they will rest and when they will be back.

Help your child develop learning skills

- Provide your child with a variety of experiences.
- Give your child many opportunities to play, make a mess, explore and experiment.
- Talk, read and listen to your child. This enhances 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.

Prepare yourself

It can be a difficult time for a parent, leaving a child and wondering if they will be happy. If you are a working parent you may need to be flexible with your hours in the first few weeks. You can stay with your child while they are settling into the service.

You may also want to sort out some alternative child-minding arrangements in case you cannot be at home on a day when your child is not able to attend the early childhood service.

Remember that separations are learning opportunities

See this as an exciting time for your child. It is a time for them to grow and learn about the world.

Take your child to visit the service before they start

Take your child to meet the teachers and show them around. You may want to go several times before your child actually starts at the service. Stay there and join in the activities. Show them it is fun. Talk about this visit when you are at home again. Children settle better when familiar with new surroundings.

Make sure you know how the service operates

Find out about things like pick-up time, what the daily programme is, how long children have to stay away if they have a contagious illness, and what children can take with them to the service. Ask the questions on page 9, and any others that are important to you.

Prepare the teachers

Talk to the teacher about your child before starting at the service. Tell the teacher about:

- things your child can do well;
- things your child has difficulties with, including any special learning or developmental needs;
- what your child is interested in;
- what settles or comforts your child;
- things that are important in your culture, and
- any health problems.

Starting at the service

Some children will be ready to join in the programme straight away. Other children may take a while to adjust to being away from you and to feel comfortable in a new place.

You and the teachers may need to help your child learn how to cope with the changes.

- Babies may take some time to settle into their new routines.
- You might try staying a little less time each day and setting up a pattern of saying goodbye: for example give two kisses, then go.
- Tell children that you will be leaving them and that you will be coming back later. You could leave them something that belongs to you, to look after until you return. Talk about what they'll be doing and who will look after them.
- Feel free to phone the service after you have left, to be reassured that your child has settled.
- If possible be regular in the times you arrive and go home – your child will feel more secure. If you are going to be unavoidably late, let the centre know so they can talk to your child and reassure them.
- Talk to the teachers about what upsets your child and how they can comfort your child.

All children respond differently to separation. Some children may show their feelings by reverting to baby behaviour. For example they may start to have bad dreams, or suck their thumb when they had stopped doing this. You can talk with the service about what might help with any differences in behaviour.

Your child's health

When your child first attends an early childhood education service he or she may be exposed to a whole new range of bacteria and viruses. Be prepared in the coming months for your child to catch new illnesses. If you are a working parent you may need to be flexible with your hours or try to organise an arrangement with a family member or friend that your child could stay with on days they are unable to attend the early childhood education service.

Make sure you are familiar with the service's sickness policy. It may affect the amount of time your child is away from the service after an illness.

After your child has started at the service

Take time to make good relationships with the teachers

- Set aside a time to talk to the staff about your child's day, special moments and achievements.
- Tell the teachers what your child is doing at home.
- Let the service know if anything at home might be affecting your child.
- If you have a major worry about anything at the service, like safety or the quality of the programme, talk to the person in charge.
- Respect and comply with service requirements such as collecting your child on time.

Take time to make relationships with other parents

- Introduce yourself to other parents, inquire about their children, or share travel arrangements.
- Try to attend any social events that your early childhood education centre organises.
- Talk over any worries you have with other parents.
- If appropriate join the parent committee.

Check that your child is happy and learning well

- Drop in sometimes during the day to see how your child is getting on with staff and other children, and to see what they are doing.
- Take time out with your baby for play and cuddles after you get home. Make time to ask your child about their day. Share older children's excitement about new friends and skills, and listen to any worries they might have.

Talk to the manager or a person on the committee or make a complaint if:

- children are not being supervised;
- adults spend a lot of time telling off, ordering, or shouting at children;
- adults are rough with children;
- the service is unsafe or premises or equipment is dirty;
- your child is unhappy about being left at the service, and this doesn't change over time;
- a child comes home injured, and the service cannot explain what happened; or
- children seem bored, angry or frustrated.

8. How early childhood education is regulated

The Education Act 1989 (Section 308) defines early childhood education centres as all places regularly catering for the education or care of three or more children under six who are not children of the caregiver.

All premises meeting this definition must be licensed in order to operate legally, and are required to follow the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1998. These regulations cover things such as:

- basic curriculum;
- provision of adequate resources and equipment;
- records;
- health and safety, including requirements to have adequate space, fences, kitchen facilities, toilets, sleeping areas, fencing, hygiene and safety checks, and policies on diseases that can be passed between people;
- first aid facilities and training;
- child protection;
- the number of staff needed and qualification levels;
- maximum numbers of children attending; and
- the right of parents to come in while their children are there.

Homebased care networks have separate regulations under the Education (Home-Based Care) Order 1992. These regulations cover most of the same topics, although the specific requirements in the Order are different from those for centres.

There is useful information about regulations on the Ministry of Education's early childhood education website: <http://www.ece.govt.nz>.

ERO's role in early childhood education

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

When ERO has particular concerns about a service that has been reviewed it will return for a follow-up or supplementary review. Supplementary reviews look at the specific concerns raised in earlier reviews.

Special reviews are carried out if there is reason to believe that there are serious issues needing immediate investigation.

Parents can use ERO reviews to help them choose a service for their child or to find out about the quality of education provided in that service.

You can read ERO reviews at: www.ero.govt.nz.

Useful Addresses

Education Review Offices

Corporate Office

Box 2799

Level 1, Sybase House, 101 Lambton Quay, Wellington 6140

Phone: 0-4-499 2489 Fax: 0-4-499 2482

Email: info@ero.govt.nz

Te Uepū-ā-Motu (Māori Reporting Services)

ERO Corporate Office (*see above*)

Email: erotu@ero.govt.nz

Auckland (Area One)

Box 7219 Wellesley Street

Level 5, URS Centre, 13-15 College Hill

Ponsonby, Auckland 1010

Phone: 0-9-377 1331 Fax: 0-9-373 3421

Email: auckland@ero.govt.nz

Moana Pasefika

Auckland Office (*see above*)

Email: auckland@ero.govt.nz

Hamilton (Area Two)

Private Bag 3095 WMC

3rd Floor, ASB Building, 214 Collingwood Street, Hamilton 3240

Phone: 0-7-838 1898 Fax: 0-7-838 1893

Email: hamilton@ero.govt.nz

Rotorua (Area Two)

Box 335

Floor 5, Zens Centre, 41 Arawa Street, Rotorua 3040

Phone: 0-7-348 2228 Fax: 0-7-348 1498

Email: rotorua@ero.govt.nz

Napier (Area Three)

Box 742

Level 1, 43 Station Street, Napier 4140

Phone: 0-6-835 8143 Fax: 0-6-835 8578

Email: napier@ero.govt.nz

Wanganui (Area Three)

Box 4023

249 Victoria Ave, Wanganui 4541

Phone: 0-6-345 4091 Fax: 0-6-345 7207

Email: wanganui@ero.govt.nz

Wellington (Area Four)

Box 27 002

Level 8, Southmark Building, 203–209 Willis Street, Wellington 6141

Phone: 0-4-381 6800 Fax: 0-4-381 6801

Email: wellington@ero.govt.nz

Nelson (Area Four)

Box 169

Floor 2, 241 Hardy Street, Nelson 7040

Phone: 0-3-546 8513 Fax: 0-3-546 2259

Email: nelson@ero.govt.nz

Christchurch (Area Five)

Box 25 102

4th Floor, Pyne Gould Corp Bldg, 233 Cambridge Tce, Christchurch 8144

Phone: 0-3-365 5860 Fax: 0-3-366 7524

Email: christchurch@ero.govt.nz

Dunedin (Area Five)

Box 902

Floor 9, John Wickliffe House, Princes Street, Dunedin 9054

Phone: 0-3-479 2619 Fax: 0-3-479 2614

Email: dunedin@ero.govt.nz

Other agencies**Barnardos New Zealand**

PO Box 6434

WELLINGTON

www.barnardos.org.nz

Christian Early Childhood Education Association of Aotearoa

29 Cobham Street

Spreydon

CHRISTCHURCH

Early Childhood Council

PO Box 90-547

Auckland Mail Centre

AUCKLAND

www.ecc.org.nz

The Federation of Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools in NZ

P O Box 888

HASTINGS

Ministry of Education

PO Box 1666

WELLINGTON

www.minedu.govt.nz

Montessori Association of New Zealand

PO Box 2305

Stoke

NELSON

www.montessori.org.nz

New Zealand Federation of Free Kindergartens

PO Box 341

PUTARURU

New Zealand Homebased Childcare Association

PO Box 5504

Papanui

CHRISTCHURCH

New Zealand Kindergartens Incorporated

PO Box 3058

WELLINGTON

www.nzkindergarten.org.nz

New Zealand Playcentre Federation

Private Bag 543

NGARUAWAHIA 3742

www.playcentre.org.nz

Pacific Island Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa

PO Box 23 763

Hunters Corner

AUCKLAND

Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust Board

PO Box 38 741

Wellington Mail Centre

WELLINGTON

www.kohanga.ac.nz

Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association

PO Box 11-863,

Manners Street,

WELLINGTON

www.nzchildcare.ac.nz