

## Connections to *Aistear* and *Síolta*

### Aistear

Themes: *Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking*  
Guidelines for good practice: *Learning and developing through play* (pp.52-70)

### Síolta Standards

1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3,  
6: *Play*, C6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7,  
*Research Digest* linked to the above *Standards*

## Using the Self-evaluation Tool

This **Self-evaluation Tool** supports you, as an individual practitioner or as a team, to reflect on how you provide for learning through play. Some aspects of provision for play are covered in the pillars, *Creating and Using the Learning Environment* and *Nurturing and Extending Interactions*.

### 1. This tool has **3 elements**.

- The importance of play for children aged 3-6 years
- The practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play
- Time and resources for play and playful activity

2. Each element has a **series of statements**. For each statement, choose which of the following best reflects your current practice.

Never/rarely	I seldom do this.
Sometimes	I do this if and when I remember.
Regularly	I try to do this as often as I can.
Almost always	I do this most of the time.

If you would like to make notes or record examples from your practice about any of the statements, a box is provided for this.

## Using the Self-evaluation Tool

3. After each element you will find **prompts for reflection**. As you consider these, think about your practice—what you do and how you do it. This will support you to identify what is working well and the challenges within each element.
4. Note changes you want to make.
5. After using the Self-evaluation Tool, you may find it useful to look at the sections, *Examples and Ideas for Practice and Resources for Sharing* at [aistearsiolta.ie](http://aistearsiolta.ie)
6. The Action Planning Template in the section, *Action Planning Tools* can help you plan specific changes you decide to make.

**Before working with this pillar, we recommend you work with *Curriculum Foundations*.**

Practitioners' names

Date

## Element 1: The importance of play for children aged 3-6 years

Play is essential for young children. They love to play, and while they are playing, indoors and outdoors, they are learning and developing important skills, knowledge and dispositions. As children interact with people and resources, they learn about themselves, others and the world around them. Through play, they encounter and solve problems and discover new ideas and master new skills. Pretend play is increasingly important at this stage as children imitate actions and events and gain greater understanding of how the world works. Play also lays important foundations for literacy, numeracy and abstract thought. Practitioners nurture learning and development through play by providing opportunities for young children to explore, to be creative and competent, and to be appropriately challenged.

	We show the importance of play for young children when	Never/ rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
1	we plan experiences based on our <b>knowledge and understanding of the children we work with.</b>					
2	we ensure it reflects children's <b>age and stage of development.</b> For example, in a room with 3-5 year olds, the play opportunities and experiences are differentiated to suit each individual child's age and stage of development.					
3	we reflect children's <b>competencies and interests.</b> We recognise that young children's play can involve complex concepts, for example, space travel, anthropology, geology, birth, agriculture, construction.					
4	we provide daily opportunities for children to experience a <b>range of types of play</b> like creative, games with rules, language, physical (including messy and sensory) and pretend play to support their <b>holistic development</b> as set out in aims and learning goals of <i>Aistear's</i> themes.					

## Element 1: The importance of play for children aged 3-6 years

	We show the importance of play for young children when	Never/ rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
5	we support the development of <b>dispositions</b> such as curiosity, perseverance, independence and resilience, for example, by saying, <i>give it a few more minutes or would you prefer to try doing it yourself?</i>					
6	we incorporate opportunities to develop <b>skills and knowledge</b> , for example, investigating 'change', representing ideas using symbols, predicting, making healthy choices.					
7	we keep <b>group sizes small (4-6)</b> so children can learn from each other and to enable us to support play effectively.					
8	we offer play opportunities, led by children, for <b>repetition and practice</b> to support mastery.					
9	we suggest playful <b>challenges</b> that may engage children, for example, <i>can you build a cylindrical tower with the cardboard cups?</i>					
10	we enable young children to <b>assess and take risks</b> and be challenged, for example, by providing opportunities to use a real hammer.					
11	we facilitate children who find it <b>difficult to play</b> by playing with them, being sensitive to their needs and providing appropriate play resources and supports.					

## Element 1: The importance of play for children aged 3-6 years

### Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to providing for play for children aged 3-6 years.
- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in relation to providing for play for children aged 3-6 years.
- What **aspects** of this work would you like to prioritise and focus on in the coming weeks?

You can use the *Examples and Ideas for Practice* and *Action Planning Tools* in the Practice Guide to help you plan this work.

Practitioners' names

Date

## Element 2: The practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play

The practitioner plays a key role in supporting young children's right to play and in ensuring they learn and develop through play. He/she provides suitable and enjoyable experiences and encourages children to challenge themselves. The practitioner is playful, enjoys being with children and is sensitive to their needs, feelings and interests. He/she creates a playful environment, follows children's lead, talks and listens to them, supports dispositions like curiosity, perseverance and independence, and provides props and resources to deepen experiences. The practitioner also observes and assesses children's play, in order to see what learning is taking place and to plan the next steps. In this way, the practitioner has a central role in supporting progression in children's learning and development through play.

	When considering the practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play,	Never/rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
1	we ensure there are <b>enough adults</b> in the room to support good quality play experiences for all children. This may sometimes mean having more adults than required per the minimum standards in the Pre-school Regulations (2006).					
2	we ensure children have opportunities to <b>play alone, with adults, with small groups of peers</b> and with <b>children</b> of different ages including siblings.					
3	we provide a <b>secure base</b> from which young children can play and explore, indoors and outdoors.					
4	we encourage play experiences that are <b>challenging, inclusive, safe and enjoyable indoors and outdoors</b> .					
5	we <b>invest time during the settling-in period</b> , to get to know young children's <b>likes and dislikes</b> regarding play and we give them time to get to know other children, us and the play opportunities in the environment.					

## Element 2: The practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play

	When considering the practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play,	Never/rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
6	we <b>plan for, resource, support and review play indoors and outdoors</b> , ensuring we <b>support children's holistic development</b> based on assessment information and the aims and learning goals of <i>Aistear's</i> themes.					
7	we focus on the <b>process of play</b> . For example, in the mud-kitchen, we consider what the children are learning about science, maths and language rather than urging them to complete the mud-pies.					
8	we play with children who are new to the group or those who find it difficult to play and <b>help them to enter play and connect</b> with other children. We help them develop play skills and to tune in to what other children are doing and we suggest ideas, for example, <i>the children are on the bus...we could put our hand out to stop it.</i>					
9	we <b>join</b> in children's play when invited and when appropriate and <b>follow their lead</b> . We facilitate and extend children's learning by <b>prompting, questioning, and thinking out loud</b> with them as they play, without taking over.					
10	we <b>observe</b> children's play and <b>document</b> important points using notes, photos and video clips and use these to support and extend learning. We use what we learn to help children <b>identify their own learning</b> and give feedback on children's <b>dispositions, skills and knowledge</b> to help them <b>see themselves as competent</b> , for example, <i>I saw how you helped Elaine to build the tower.</i>					
11	we encourage children to <b>resolve conflicts</b> themselves and we offer support and conflict resolution strategies when they need guidance. We are close-at-hand and <b>help reduce</b> conflict, for example, by being clear on rules regarding turn-taking and making sure there are sufficient quantities of materials. We <b>model</b> positive interactions and problem-solving strategies.					

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	When considering the practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play,	Never/rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
12	we introduce children to other <b>people and places</b> in the setting and in the <b>community</b> , like children and staff in other rooms or arranging a visit to the local park, vet, post office.					
13	we <b>build on children's interests</b> that are observed during play by looking at books, the internet, introducing new props, inviting a guest to visit.					
14	we play games with musical instruments and other items that make sounds, to help develop <b>listening skills</b> . We dance and sing lots of songs and rhymes so children can explore music, rhythm and sounds.					
15	we support <b>language development</b> by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>reading and telling</b> stories and encouraging children to tell their stories</li> <li>• <b>reconstructing stories</b> using photos and props so children can extend understanding</li> <li>• having <b>conversations that include open-ended</b> comments and questions</li> <li>• playing <b>language games</b></li> <li>• introducing new <b>vocabulary</b></li> <li>• saying <b>rhymes</b></li> <li>• using <b>puppets</b></li> <li>• playing <b>naming games</b>.</li> </ul>					
16	we help young children to <b>understand and name emotions</b> through play, for example, by using puppets, talking about pictures and experiences, reading books and telling stories that capture emotions.					



## Element 2: The practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play

	When considering the practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play,	Never/rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
17	<p>we support <b>early literacy</b> in play by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>providing <b>mark-making opportunities</b> indoors and outdoors</li> <li>adding literacy-based <b>materials</b> such as paper, pens, markers, books and posters to play areas, for example, to support children in designing buildings in the construction area or making menus for the café or road signs for the motorway in the small-world play area</li> <li><b>labelling</b> play areas</li> <li>encouraging children to <b>make their own books</b></li> <li><b>modelling literacy practices</b> – writing notes, pointing out words in different places.</li> </ul>					
18	<p>we support <b>early numeracy</b> in play by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporating opportunities for children to <b>match, compare, sort, count, sequence</b> and to explore concepts like <b>size, weight, height, shape, length and capacity</b>.</li> <li>using <b>mathematical language</b>, for example, as children compare the size of blocks while building a fort.</li> <li>adding <b>numeracy-based materials</b> to play areas, such as clocks, variety of types of numbers—wooden, sandpaper, shapes, patterns, money, phones, measuring tapes and rulers, calendars, for example, to support children in measuring ingredients to bake bread for the bakery or checking the time for the next train or keying in the correct numbers on the phone to ring the doctor.</li> <li><b>modelling numeracy practices</b> – checking the time, counting things, weighing ingredients or extending a pattern.</li> </ul>					
19	<p>we encourage <b>pretend play</b> by adding props to enable young children to imitate and learn about people and the world around them.</p>					

## Element 2: The practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play

	When considering the practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play,	Never/rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
20	we <b>take on and model roles in play</b> so we can help children connect and develop their play scenarios. For example, in the restaurant ask for menus, choose food, enquire about ingredients, ask for the bill and leave a tip. We use these opportunities to contribute ideas, extend children's knowledge of roles and introduce new vocabulary.					
21	we ensure children have lots opportunities for <b>physical play (including sensory and messy play)</b> and <b>creative play</b> with materials such as sand, water, paint, playdough, clay.					
22	we incorporate lots of opportunities to develop <b>large and fine motor skills</b> – running, climbing, swinging as well as using hands to handle and pick up things and to learn to hold crayons/chunky pencils.					
23	we encourage children to play lots of <b>games with rules</b> , table top and board games but also games with rules they devise themselves, for example, you must knock before you come in to the home-area.					
24	we provide <b>challenge to support progression</b> in learning and development, for example, providing opportunities to build more sophisticated ramps, extending art activities through different-sized brushes and materials, or providing resources to build more complex 3D structures.					
25	we ensure <b>all children</b> can <b>access all types of play</b> and we <b>address gender stereotyping</b> when we see it, for example, when someone says boys can't be nurses or girls can't be pilots.					
26	we prompt children <b>to reflect on their play</b> so they can create new meaning from their experiences. We talk about what they did, what happened and why that happened.					

## Element 2: The practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play

	Never/ rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
<p><b>27</b> we <b>interpret what we see and hear in young children's play</b>, ask them about it, and share the details of this with them, their parents and colleagues.</p>					
<p><b>28</b> we use information from play to inform our <b>curriculum planning</b>.</p>					



Practitioners' names

Date

## Element 3: Time and resources for play and playful activity

Providing ample time and a wide variety of resources including open-ended materials for play and playful activity is important for young children. They need on-going support, time and loving care from practitioners, older children and more capable peers to learn to play together and to support their learning and development. The practitioner creates relaxed daily routines, allowing young children to settle-in, enjoy and wallow in play. There is plenty of time to fully explore resources and share their delight with other children and supportive practitioners.

When providing time and resources for play and playful activity,	Never/ rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
<b>1</b> we ensure <b>transition times</b> such as arrival and departure, and <b>caregiving routines</b> such as toileting, rest-times and transitions from one part of the day to the next, are <b>playful</b> by slowing things down, playing games and having fun together. Feeding and meal times are also playful.					
<b>2</b> we ensure that the daily routine has <b>sufficient time for play</b> when young children can freely engage and get deeply involved in play, <b>indoors and outdoors</b> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children in sessional/part-time daycare have at <b>least one session of an hour to an hour-and-a-half</b> for freely chosen play each day. A significant proportion of time is spent outdoors at play also.</li> <li>Children in full daycare have at least <b>two sessions of an hour to an hour-and-a-half</b> for freely chosen play each day. A significant proportion of time is spent outdoors at play also.</li> </ul>					
<b>3</b> we ensure young children have time to <b>play alone, with other children and with practitioners</b> , as they choose and for extended periods.					
<b>4</b> we ensure there are numerous opportunities during the day for children to <b>explore at their own pace</b> , following their own interests, indoors and outdoors.					
<b>5</b> we support <b>all children by reflecting their home cultures, backgrounds and languages in the setting</b> , for example, we have familiar images and items from home including dress-up props and utensils.					

## Element 3: Time and resources for play and playful activity

When providing time and resources for play and playful activity,	Never/ rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
<b>6</b> we provide a <b>range of props and resources</b> to support <b>creative play</b> indoors and outdoors.					
<b>7</b> we provide a <b>range of props and resources</b> to <b>support games with rules</b> indoors and outdoors.					
<b>8</b> we provide a <b>range of props and resources</b> to support <b>language play</b> indoors and outdoors.					
<b>9</b> we provide a <b>range of props and resources</b> to support <b>physical play</b> which includes messy and sensory play indoors and outdoors.					
<b>10</b> we provide a <b>range of props and resources</b> to support <b>pretend play</b> indoors and outdoors.					
<b>11</b> we ensure children have a <b>sense of privacy</b> in order to play, while we observe unobtrusively. Materials to make dens and hidey holes are freely available.					

## Element 3: Time and resources for play and playful activity

When providing time and resources for play and playful activity,	Never/ rarely	Sometimes	Regularly	Almost always	Notes / Examples
<b>12</b> we ensure young children can <b>choose resources</b> including open-ended materials like blocks, boxes, art materials to explore and be creative, and we encourage them to use these in their own way.					
<b>13</b> we include a range of resources to support <b>literacy and numeracy in play</b> , for example, pencils, crayons, paper of different sizes and colours, recipe books, telephones, scanners, play money, measuring jugs, tape measures, clipboards, books and magazines.					
<b>14</b> we enable children to <b>find, use and return</b> resources in the environment for their play.					
<b>15</b> we review the environment on an on-going basis to ensure we adapt it to <b>provide on-going challenge to ensure progression</b> as children master skills and concepts. For example, we provide resources to encourage the creation of intricate patterns or introduce a new prop for pretend play like a travel brochure and a suitcase.					

## Element 3: Time and resources for play and playful activity

### Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to providing time and resources for play and playful activity.
- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in providing time and resources for play and playful activity.
- What **aspects** of this work would you like to prioritise and focus on in the coming weeks?

You can use the *Examples and Ideas for Practice* and *Action Planning Tools* in the Practice Guide to help you plan this work.