

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 birth-3 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
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 birth-3 years

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

| | We show the importance of play for babies and toddlers when | Never/ rarely | Sometimes | Regularly | Almost always | Notes / Examples |
|---|--|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| 1 | we plan experiences based on our knowledge and understanding of the children we work with. | | | | | |
| 2 | we ensure it reflects children's age and stage of development . For example, in a room with 1 to 2.5 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 competencies and interests . For example, if a baby or toddler shows an interest in an object or activity, we encourage them to explore it further and provide opportunities and the support necessary to do so. | | | | | |
| 4 | we provide daily opportunities for children to experience a range of types of play like creative, physical (including messy and sensory), language, pretend, and games with rules (for example Peek-a-Boo) to support their holistic development as set out in aims and learning goals of <i>Aistear's</i> themes. | | | | | |

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

| We show the importance of play for babies and toddlers when | | Never/ rarely | Sometimes | Regularly | Almost always | Notes / Examples |
|---|---|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| 5 | we support the development of dispositions such as curiosity, perseverance, independence and resilience. For example, we encourage babies and toddlers to stick at something a little longer by saying, <i>I know you can reach the ball, you're nearly there.</i> | | | | | |
| 6 | we ensure there are opportunities to develop skills and knowledge , for example, self-feeding, balancing, mark-making, identifying things and naming them, imitating and predicting. | | | | | |
| 7 | we keep group sizes small (4-6) so children can learn from each other and to enable us to support play effectively. | | | | | |
| 8 | we recognise that babies and toddlers may need lots of repetition and practice to support mastery and we support this kind of play. For example when a baby repeatedly drops an object for the adult to pick up, we respond. | | | | | |
| 9 | we enable toddlers to assess, take risks and be challenged , for example, <i>will you try another step or can you get the ball into that basket on the floor?</i> | | | | | |
| 11 | we facilitate children who find it difficult to play by playing with them, being sensitive to their needs and providing appropriate play resources and support. | | | | | |

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

Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to providing for play for children aged birth-3 years.

- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in relation to providing for play for children aged birth-3 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's role is especially important in the early years when babies and younger toddlers depend a lot on the adults around them. They need adults to provide them with suitable and enjoyable experiences, to play with them, to chat with them and to encourage them to gradually take on more challenging tasks. This role changes as toddlers get older and they start to play more with their peers. Practitioners play a key role in supporting babies' and toddlers' right to play and in ensuring they learn and develop through play. The practitioner is playful, enjoys being with children and is sensitive to their needs, feelings and interests. He/she follows their lead, talks with them, supports dispositions like curiosity and creativity, and provides ideas and resources to extend and deepen experiences. The practitioner also observes and assesses babies' and toddlers' 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 enough adults 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 babies and toddlers have opportunities to play alone, with adults, with small groups of peers and with children of different ages including siblings. | | | | | |
| 3 | we provide a secure base from which babies and toddlers can play and explore, indoors and outdoors. | | | | | |
| 4 | we encourage play experiences that are challenging, inclusive, safe and enjoyable . | | | | | |
| 5 | we introduce babies and toddlers to play gradually during the settling-in period , ensuring we know their likes and dislikes and giving them time to get to know themselves, other children, the environment and us. | | | | | |

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 plan for, resource, support and review play indoors and outdoors , ensuring we support children's holistic development based on assessment information and the aims and learning goals of <i>Aistear's</i> themes. | | | | | |
| 7 | we focus on the process of play . For example, as babies and toddlers are painting, we consider what they are learning about colour and texture rather than focusing on the completion of a picture. | | | | | |
| 8 | we join babies' and toddlers' play, following their lead. We facilitate and extend children's learning by prompting, questioning, and thinking out loud with them as they play without taking over. | | | | | |
| 9 | we observe and document important points which we see happening in play using notes, photographs and video clips and use these to help children identify their own dispositions, skills and knowledge and to help them see themselves as competent. For example, a toddler is using a shape-sorter, we watch to see if support is needed. When he/she succeeds, we comment, <i>well done on matching the shapes</i> . | | | | | |
| 10 | we build on babies' and toddlers' interests that are observed during play. | | | | | |
| 11 | we encourage children to resolve conflicts themselves and we offer support and conflict resolution strategies. We are close-at-hand and help reduce conflict and model positive interactions and problem-solving strategies. | | | | | |
| 12 | we talk with and tune in to babies and toddlers in a playful way, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating moments of connection and empathy, ensuring each child feels seen, heard and valued • showing emotions such as surprise, shock, happiness, and sadness • reacting to them using whispers, coos and laughter. | | | | | |

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 |
|----|---|--------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|------------------|
| 13 | we play one-to-one with babies and toddlers , enjoying games with rules such as <i>Peek-a-boo</i> , touching their tummies, toes and noses, and playing 'anticipation' games such as knee-bouncing, and finding and losing things. | | | | | |
| 14 | we support babies' and toddlers' language development by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading and telling stories, using open-ended comments and questions, sometimes using props and puppets • helping babies and toddlers play pretend scenarios that arise in stories, for example, <i>let's pretend you're a dog</i> • saying rhymes • introducing new vocabulary in play • playing naming games. | | | | | |
| 15 | we sing lots of songs and rhymes to enable babies and toddlers to explore music, rhythm and words. We play games with musical instruments and other items that make sounds, to help develop listening skills . | | | | | |
| 16 | we help babies and toddlers to name and understand emotions through play, for example, by using puppets, talking about pictures and experiences, reading books and telling stories that capture emotions, using lots of expressive language, gestures and facial expressions. | | | | | |

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

| | Never/ rarely | Sometimes | Regularly | Almost always | Notes / Examples |
|---|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| <p>17</p> <p>When considering the practitioner’s role in supporting learning and development through play,</p> <p>we support babies' and toddlers' early literacy by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading and telling stories, including introducing and using new words. • providing mark-making opportunities indoors and outdoors • adding literacy-based materials such as paper, crayons, books and posters to play areas, for example, adding a book about transport to the car area or having a notebook and chubby pen in the home corner. • labelling play areas with words and pictures. • modelling literacy practices – writing notes, pointing out words in different places. | | | | | |
| <p>18</p> <p>we support babies' and toddlers' early numeracy by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing mark-making opportunities indoors and outdoors, for toddlers to use a stick to make shapes in the mud or to make patterns in suds. • incorporating opportunities for babies and toddler to match, compare, sort and to explore concepts like size, weight, shape and length. • using mathematical language, for example, using numbers and introducing terms like heavier, longer, widest, first and last. • adding numeracy-based materials to play areas, such as clocks, phones, measuring tapes, measuring spoons and jugs, variety of types of numbers—wooden, sandpaper, different shapes. • modelling numeracy practices – checking the time, counting things, comparing the size of things. | | | | | |

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 |
|----|---|---------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|------------------|
| 19 | we introduce props to encourage pretend play to help babies and toddlers imitate and learn about people and the world around them. For example using familiar props like kitchen equipment to feed teddy or using open-ended materials such as blocks, blankets and boxes to make a train. We play with babies and toddlers modelling pretend roles, naming what is happening, introducing new vocabulary and extending learning and we recognise what babies and toddlers are doing, for example, <i>I see you're cooking in the kitchen.</i> | | | | | |
| 20 | we incorporate lots of opportunities for physical play to develop large and fine motor skills – roll, crawl, walk, dance, run, climb and play on the floor as well as supporting children to explore using their hands – handling and picking up things. | | | | | |
| 21 | we ensure babies and toddlers have opportunities to hold and manipulate objects, and to take part in sensory and creative play involving mouthing, smelling, tasting, touching, painting. | | | | | |
| 22 | we introduce babies and toddlers to other people and places in the setting and community, like the local pond, playground, nature walk, fire station. | | | | | |
| 23 | we provide challenge to support progression in learning and development. For example, we create opportunities for climbing increased heights, extend art activities through adding new materials, and provide slightly heavier/bigger blocks for building. | | | | | |
| 24 | we ensure all children can access all types of play , for example, we are aware of gender stereotyping and avoid references to boys' toys or girls' areas. | | | | | |
| 25 | we prompt babies and toddlers to reflect 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

| | When considering the practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play, | Never/rarely | Sometimes | Regularly | Almost always | Notes / Examples |
|----|---|--------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|------------------|
| 26 | we interpret what we see and hear , and discuss this with toddlers and their parents, and with colleagues. | | | | | |
| 27 | we use information from play to inform our curriculum planning . | | | | | |

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

Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to your role in supporting learning and development through play.
- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in supporting learning and development through play.
- 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 3: Time and resources for play and playful activity

Providing ample time and a wide variety of resources including open-ended resources for play and playful activity is important for babies and toddlers. 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 babies and toddlers to settle into, enjoy and wallow in their play. There is plenty of time to fully explore resources and to 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 |
|--|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| <p>1 we ensure transition times such as arrival and departure, and care-giving routines such as toileting, rest-times and transitions from one part of the day to the next, are playful by slowing things down, playing games and having fun together. Feeding and meal times are also playful.</p> | | | | | |
| <p>2 we ensure that the daily routine has sufficient time for play when babies and toddlers can freely engage and get deeply involved in play, indoors and outdoors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Babies and toddlers in part-time daycare have at least one session of an hour to an hour-and-a-half each day for freely chosen play. A significant amount of time is spent outdoors also. Babies and toddlers in full daycare have at least two sessions of an hour to an hour-and-a-half each day for freely chosen play. A significant proportion of time is spent outdoors at play also. | | | | | |
| <p>3 we ensure babies and toddlers have time to play alone, with other children and with practitioners, as they choose and for extended periods.</p> | | | | | |
| <p>4 we ensure there are numerous opportunities during the day for babies and toddlers to explore at their own pace, following their own interests, indoors and outdoors.</p> | | | | | |
| <p>5 we support all children by reflecting their home cultures, backgrounds and languages in the setting, for example, we have familiar images and items from home including dress-up props and utensils.</p> | | | | | |

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 |
|--|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| 6 we provide a range of props and resources to support creative play indoors and outdoors. | | | | | |
| 7 we provide a range of props and resources to support games with rules indoors and outdoors. | | | | | |
| 8 we provide a range of props and resources to support language play indoors and outdoors. | | | | | |
| 9 we provide a range of props and resources to support physical play which includes messy and sensory play indoors and outdoors. | | | | | |
| 10 we provide a range of props and resources to support pretend play indoors and outdoors. | | | | | |
| 11 we ensure children have a sense of privacy in order to play, while we observe unobtrusively. | | | | | |

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 |
|--|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| 12 we ensure babies and toddlers can choose resources including open-ended materials to explore and we encourage them to use these in their own way. | | | | | |
| 13 we include a range of resources to support literacy and numeracy in play , for example, paint, crayons, paper of different sizes and colours, measuring jugs and different types of books. | | | | | |
| 14 we enable toddlers to use resources by encouraging them to find and use things in the environment. | | | | | |
| 15 we review the environment on an on-going basis to ensure we adapt it to provide challenge to support progression as babies and toddlers master skills and concepts. For example, we introduce more challenge in the outdoor environment like steeper ramps. | | | | | |

