

Choosing a Quality Daycare Service for the Under 3's



The pre-school regulations ensure that service providers comply with the legislation in the following areas:

- Suitability and Safety of Premises.
- Space per Child
- Heating, Lighting and Ventilation
- Toilet and Nappy Changing Facilities
- Separate Food Preparation Area
- Health and Safety of Children
- Staffing Levels
- Child/Adult Ratio
- Rest/Sleep Arrangements for Children
- Medical Assistance
- Record Keeping
- Play/Care Programme (appropriate for all ages)
- Information for Parents
- Insurance Cover

If possible try to choose a service close to your home so that your child will not spend too much time travelling.

Checklist

It is strongly recommended that you visit the service while children are there. This will give you the opportunity to evaluate the service provision and premises.

Here are some points to consider

- Was a member of staff available to welcome you and accompany you around the service?
- Were you and your child made to feel welcome? (remember both you and your child will be using this service regularly so you both need to feel comfortable).
- Have a look at all rooms/areas in the service.
- Are the tables/chairs at suitable height for children?
- Did you like the setting - the overall environment, the layout, the activities, and the adult child interactions? Was the atmosphere relaxed, gently buzzing with activity?
- Did the children appear happy and stimulated?
- Was the environment child orientated, warm, secure and safe?

Parents of children under 3 years may choose from a variety of childcare services e.g. Childminder, full day-care, Crèche, drop in Crèche or Sessional day-care service.

The Childcare (Pre-school Services) Regulations 1996/97 govern all Pre-school facilities except those delivered by a family day-carer or child minder caring for 3 children or less.

Parents should contact the South Dublin County Childcare Committee or the Health Service Executive, Pre-school inspection team for a list of notified providers in their area. All services must be notified to the relevant Health Board unless exempt. Under the regulations a full day-care/ Crèche Service is a service which caters for children more than 3.5 hours per day - 5 days per week.

- Does the service have a clear/comprehensive child registration system?
- Does the service have written policies and procedures available for parents?
- Does the setting have definite policy guidelines on settling-in children that make provision for parents to stay with their child until both are happy?
- Does the service keep records on each child and discuss each child's development with their parents.

The importance of play - meeting the needs of pre-school children through a programme/curriculum.

Research has shown that quality play experiences are essential to children's overall development. A well-designed programme of activities with appropriate materials/equipment/adult interaction supports children's developmental needs through play.

Play is an educationally powerful process and learning occurs spontaneously with and without adult intervention. All children, particularly young children and babies, are very curious and want to explore, investigate and question their environment. They want to be active in their learning, reach out to touch, smell, see, hear and need to play and communicate with others. Young children need to be engaged through conversation, stories, songs and rhymes, as



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they like to hear and experiment with words and sounds. Children should be provided with activities, which promote their development in the following areas, Physical, Intellectual, Language, Emotional, Social.

Play facilities/Stimulation of babies 0-1 year

- Are there adequate and suitable facilities and materials provided for indoor play for babies?
- Toys and equipment for 0-1 year olds should include mobiles, musical toys, rattlers, small washable toys, play bricks, stacking bricks, cuddly toys, activity centres, pull along toys, books, pop up toys, textured toys, sound making items and play gyms.
- Do staff interact with baby when baby is awake?
- Are babies talked to, is there physical contact, individual attention, plenty of laughing and singing?
- Are the babies physical positions changed regularly to avoid cramp and to vary the baby's view of their environment?
- Is there space for safe rolling/moving around/crawling/shuffling?
- Is there appropriate seating for adults to nurse baby e.g. nursing chair?
- Are there age/stage appropriate actions games e.g. peek a boo, clapping rhyme games?
- Is the environment bright and stimulating?

Rest facilities

Young children should have time to rest/sleep during the day when they need to.

- Are there adequate and suitable sleeping facilities away from the general play area, provided for children under 3 years old?
- Are they suitably monitored while sleeping?
- Are the cots safe and accessible?
- Is the bed linen clean and changed for each child?
- Are there individual cots for sleeping?
- Are bibs removed when child is sleeping?
- Are there adequate and suitable rest facilities for children aged 2-5 years?
- Is staff aware of current precautions in relation to reducing the risk of Sudden Infant Death?

Play facilities for 1-3 years

- Are there adequate and suitable facilities and appropriate equipment/materials provided for indoor play for children 1-3 years?
- Is the following included in the care programme/curriculum
 - Art materials/activities e.g. paint, crayons, large sheets of paper
 - Games to encourage social skills/games with simple rules
 - Freeplay - do all children have choices?
 - Appreciation of nature
 - Opportunities for messy play e.g. sand, water, playdough, clay
 - Home corner - role/imaginative play
 - Physical play - crawling, climbing, running, jumping, ring games, ball games
- Is there a schedule for use of T.V. and video (not always in use)?
- Is there an area to display the children's work?
- Is the equipment accessible to the children - at child's level?
- Are the toys and equipment, safe clean and suitable.
- Are all materials, equipment, games and facilities age/developmentally appropriate to the children's needs?

Outdoor play

- Are there adequate facilities for outdoor play?
- Is the playing surface suitable and safe and securely fenced?
- Is there a variety of playing surfaces?
- Is the equipment safe, suitable for age/stage of children?
- Are children given the opportunity to be active every day?
- Is the outdoor playspace free from animals and their litter?

Some other point to consider when visiting a Day-care Service

- Are the children showing an interest in what they are doing/actively involved in activities?
- Do staff interact with all children in a friendly supportive way?
- Do staff encourage the children to use their own initiative?
- Are there opportunities for all children to choose activities rather than be directed?
- Is there a book/quiet area with cosy seating and are children encouraged to use this?
- Are there opportunities for children to play in small groups to encourage co-operation and interaction?
- Are there opportunities for children to develop their 5 senses through a range of activities?
- Are there activities available specifically for babies to promote their overall development?
- Are the needs of babies addressed specifically?

Do the Staff:

- Enjoy working with children?
- Observe and assess the children's interests and achievements and plan activities that will extend their learning in order that each child's development is catered for?
- Talk to the children and listen to what they are saying?
- Support bilingual parents and children by using their home language where possible?
- Have sufficient knowledge and understanding to be able to support parents and children with Special Educational Needs? All children should be treated as individuals within the day-care service but there may be additional considerations for parents of children with Special Educational Need.
- Have an overall awareness of children's safety and well being?
- Have training and are qualified in the area of care and provision for children from 0-6 years and have a sound knowledge of how to support children's developmental needs?
- Have up to date training in basic First-Aid?
- Treat children sensitively if they are upset?
- Respect the needs and wishes of parents and children?
- Work in close collaboration with parents and relevant Health Service Executive Staff in order to ensure that any special needs a child may have are identified and appropriately catered for?

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