

# The NZ Parent Guide to Childcare and Education Services (Birth to 6 Years)



**Dr Sarah Alexander**

Higher Dip Teaching, Kindergarten Dip;  
Montessori Dip Distinction (London), M.A. (hons.), Ph.D. (Otago)

## Parents' Choices

At this point of time as a parent with a very young child or children you may be just responding to things that come your way and not thinking much about what you do.

But it is important that you try to make choices that are you are comfortable with so you have fewer regrets later - rather than making your choices solely on the basis of what others expect of you or what you see others doing.

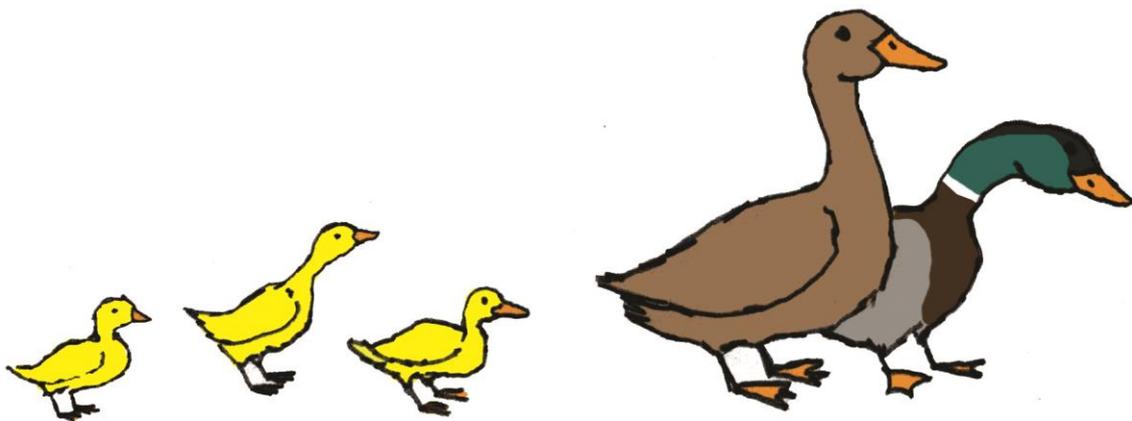
### A Poem

*If I had my child to raise all over again,  
I'd build self-esteem first, and the house later.  
I'd finger-paint more, and point the finger less.  
I would do less correcting and more connecting.  
I'd take more hikes and fly more kites.  
I'd stop playing serious, and seriously play.  
I would run through more fields and gaze at more stars.  
I'd do more hugging and less tugging. ~ By Diane Loomans ~*

This booklet has been designed to support you. It gives information and thinking points to help you be better informed and make the best decision you can make now for your child's well-being, your peace-of-mind and your family.

Happy reading and all the best!

*Sarah Alexander*



Follow the duck pictures on each page for different topic information and thinking points

© 2014, 2016 online by [www.myece.org.nz](http://www.myece.org.nz)



Poem reproduced with the permission of The Quantum Life Institute, USA.

# Getting Organised – No More Guilt or Sleepless Nights

## Getting our ducks in a row...

As parents, when making childcare/ early childhood education arrangements first we must find out what we need to know.

Ensuring that we tick off all the small and big questions and issues makes the final decision we make, whatever that might be, the best decision.

Our children are our treasures. Like the mother duck caring for her babies by leading them and ensuring they are staying close by, we (mums and dads and caregivers) are protective and we are our children's leaders.

The decisions we make in regard to care and education during the early years of our children's development have a big impact on them, not only now but throughout their lifetime.

But there's no need to worry and lose sleep over this because the power is in us to seek out information, be confident with our choices, and tackle any issues that arise.

Let's acknowledge and get on top of any feelings of guilt about being a stay-at-home parent or not, putting our children in care or not, or relying on strangers to educate our children or not.

With a little help from this Guide, you can do your home-work well and enjoy achieving a childcare/ early childhood education arrangement that both you and your child are really happy with.

But first I should just explain what is meant by early childhood education. In New Zealand every early childhood service is expected to provide care for children and an educational curriculum. The term 'early childhood education' is used interchangeably with 'childcare' because services provide both of these key functions. Though it is relevant to note that at services such as daycare, kindergarten, and home-based / family daycare where the parent leaves the child and does not stay then staff must act in loco parentis (taking on some of the functions and responsibilities of the parent) so the care component is a lot greater than say at a Playcentre where parents often stay with their child and can see what is going on.

Now to the pond! Splash, splash, and in we go... turn to the next page...



## Some Common Questions and Dilemmas

(see the colour coded answers on the next page)

**What are my lowest cost options?**

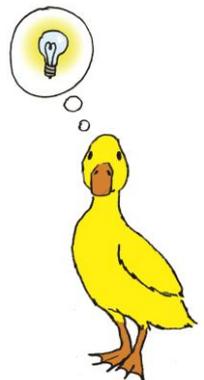
**My biggest fear is that our language and family culture will be undermined by putting our child into the mainstream education system early**

**Are there services that provide year-round long hours of care?**

**I want my child to receive individual attention where I take him and not be just a number**

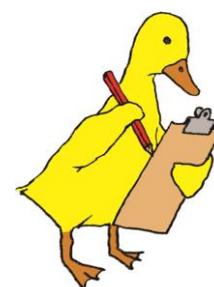
**Can I find a way to remain well-connected with my child?**

**I don't want to leave my baby with someone not known to us**



## Arrangements to Consider

- ● ● Care by a family member
- ● ● Be a stay-home parent
- ● ● Have child at work
- ● ● Nanny at child's home
- Paid caregiver/educator at his/her own home
- ● ● Shared care arrangements on alternate days with another family at each other's houses
- ● Playgroup or Playcentre Association playcentre
- Kindergarten (under a Kindergarten Association)
- ● Service located within the local neighbourhood community the child is living in
- Commercially operated centre providing care on a bulk scale for a large number of children
- Centre providing for a small number of children and high ratios of adult to children
- Parent work-place childcare facility
- Special purpose service, e.g. Te Kohanga Reo, Pacific Island centre, Christian based centre, Jewish preschool, Rudolf Steiner school, etc.
- Early intervention centre catering specifically for children with behavior, developmental, and special health needs



## Taking the Leap and Letting Go

“The service she is booked in for has a good reputation so I am hopeful it will be positive. Scared though”

“It was hard to leave him with strangers initially but he really enjoys going so the decision is easy now”

“I will consider one day of childcare a week when she is 18 months. The number of carers per child will be the most important factor as I can see the importance of personal attention”

“If you know that a centre supports breastfeeding and you had to go to work, you would think that’s cool I can carry on breastfeeding. I never thought one of the questions could be ‘how do you feel about breastfeeding?’. If I had another child I would be asking that question”

### There are many different care and service options you may not be aware of

Read up on these at: [www.myece.org.nz](http://www.myece.org.nz)

Visit a minimum of four different types of ECE services for comparison

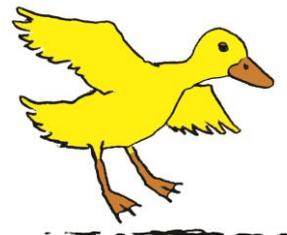
Talk with other parents who have been there and done that, for reassurance

### Do you need to:

- Arrange a start date with your employer that will give time to make sure your child is properly settled in care?
- Make your employer aware that over the first month you may need some time off as your child might not have good immunity yet to the bugs that go around?
- Organise a lunch box, drink bottle, extra or different play clothes, sunhat, other things...?

Make a list of the things you will need to do. Planning ahead will make the transition a lot easier for both your child and you.

Go to [My ECE](#) for advice articles on settling your child in, how to handle the ‘dreaded drop off’, and how to tell if your child is truly happy and settled in well.



## What Children Need

- Love and security
- New experiences and stimulation (including play and language)
- Recognition and achievement
- Responsibility

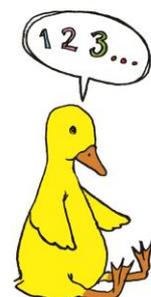
These are the 4 basic needs of childhood. Make sure the early childhood service you select can meet these needs for your child.

*See References on Page 15*

## The Code of Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education and Care

1. To be enabled wherever possible to receive care exclusively or primarily from parents and family (e.g. enrollment policy does not force a child to attend hours outside of what the family needs)
2. To experience early education and care that is of the highest standard
3. To receive skilled care and learning opportunities appropriate to meeting needs and personal choices
4. To have continuous, meaningful and caring relationships with the adults responsible for them in the programme that includes supportive relations with parents and family
5. To be kept safe from harm, including protection from child abuse, bullying, and risks to health
6. To have privacy respected
7. To be included regardless of size, special ability, or disability and be supported to exercise independence and develop self-esteem
8. To be treated with respect including being involved in all decisions affecting them by receiving information in a way that is understandable, having opportunities to express views, ask questions and receive truthful responses
9. To receive positive guidance free from coercion and discrimination
10. To complain if necessary and have complaints as put forward by parents/ caregivers taken seriously

For the latest copy of the "Code of Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education and Care" go to: <http://www.myece.org.nz/code-of-rights-for-children>



## Formula for the Finest Childcare Situation

1. Not too many babies or children
2. Laughter, fun, and every child and family member feels accepted and respected
3. Teachers/ carers really want to be there and love their work
4. Heaps of play space inside and outside
5. Variety of play areas and materials, including children's and adult activities such as cooking and gardening, within the outdoor and indoor spaces
6. Safe noise levels maintained
7. High attention to correct hand-washing and hygiene practices
8. Children's interests, personality and family values known and appreciated
9. Always something on offer so more choices and less down-time (passive watching, aimless wandering, sitting in front of screens, sitting in vehicles)
10. Lots of talking, discussion, and building of shared memories
11. Children's personal privacy and space respected, such as when using the toilet or wanting peace to play uninterrupted
12. Cuddles and affection shown to children

### And add to this...

13. Adults well trained in young children's care, development and learning (unless children's parents are providing the care and education)
14. Adults who hold expectations for children's learning and development
15. Adults who seek help, information and resources to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching, methods of care and response to the individual needs of children and their family

### Equals...

A quality early childhood service in which children will thrive and parents find truly remarkable and recommend highly to others for many years after leaving



## The Benefits of Early Childhood Education for Children

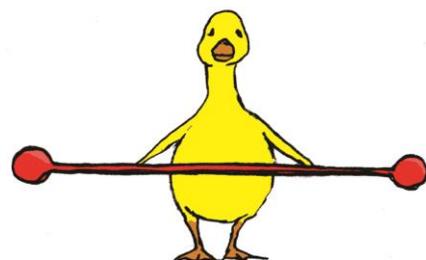
### Who benefits most from participating in early childhood education?

- Children from economically deprived homes
- Children who receive little intellectual stimulation at home
- Preschool aged children who attend 10 – 15 hours weekly
- Children who have had a healthy start to life and are in good health
- Children with a special need that is able to be supported by the ECE service
- Eldest child in the family
- Girls

### Who is least likely to benefit from participating in early childhood education?

- Children from economically advantaged homes
- Children whose parents engage in stimulating interaction with them
- Any aged child in non-family care in excess of 15 hours weekly
- Under 2 year-olds who haven't been breastfed for 4 months or more
- Children with a sensory integration disorder
- Youngest children in the family
- Boys

*See References on Page 15*



## Risks and Benefits

### Benefits

The benefits of using early childhood education and care vary from child to child, family to family, and depend on the early childhood service used.

Benefits may include: making new friends, learning new skills, having fun, parenting advice, and parents having time out or an opportunity to pursue a career and boost family income.

A mountain of research has shown that the type of early childhood programme (e.g. Montessori, daycare, kindergarten) does not matter much in terms of children's longer-term academic gains. As a result of attending any type of organised early childhood programme children may later show:

- Small improvements in their language, maths, and reading ability
- Higher achievement at school than expected if the child is from a disadvantaged home background.

But it is reassuring for stay-at-home parents to know that children who do not attend an early childhood service are not disadvantaged if they have a great home learning environment before starting their formal education at primary school. Family characteristics are substantially more predictive of a child's academic success than attendance in an ECE programme.

### Caution

However the benefits of going to a high quality early childhood programme can 'wash out' overtime, especially when the child goes on to attend a primary school that is less effective.

Spending more time in an early childhood programme does not give added benefit. It is the experience of participating in a programme and not the amount of time spent that matters. Here's an analogy: 'having a bath is nice and can be good for you too, but spending too long in the bath can be bad for your physical health and mental state. Plus there is also the question of what you might be missing out on by staying in the bath for way longer than you need to'.

### Possible harm it may cause

Research shows that the more time children are in a formal early childhood programme in the first three years the greater the risk that their mothers will become emotionally distant and less sensitive to them. Children who attend childcare / early childhood education are more likely to:

- Get sick more often and need antibiotics for treatment
- Be more anxious
- Show problem behavior including aggression

Knowing the risks means you will not be surprised and will cope better when a problem arises. Think about what you could do now to reduce the chance or severity of problems and maximise the potential benefits. For example, check that your child's immunisations are up to date and the service your child goes to have a policy on the care of sick children which it enforces to reduce the risk of the spread of illness and infectious diseases.



## Money, Money, Money

“Why does the service charge for 52 weeks in the year? Surely children deserve a holiday?”

“When it’s closed for statutory holiday and school holiday breaks we’re not charged which is just as well because I can’t work and earn during those times”

“When my child turned 3 we were asked if we wanted to sign up for the 20-Hours ECE and told it would mean a discount, so that we would pay about \$80 for 21 hours of care. But I was under the understanding that the 20 hours was fully subsidised by the government and any charges for add-ons were optional”

## Did you know that...

Early childhood services can set their own fees policies and may even ask families to agree to pay for care not provided on holidays – this is something to ask of the different services you visit when making your childcare decision.

Families are consumers and purchasers and have a right to question any charges. To learn about funding rules and childcare charges go to [www.myece.org.nz](http://www.myece.org.nz)

Financial assistance for families includes a child care subsidy available through WINZ

For children with a disability or special need that cannot be met within a regular early childhood programme there is free specialist advice and support through the Ministry of Education’s special education services. This may take a while to access so the earlier that you or your early childhood service contact Special Education Services the better.

Government gives ECE services up to 30 hours of funding per child. Services cannot make parents pay fees for any hours covered by the 20 Hour subsidy. The Government gives this funding with the expectation that the service provider spends it on the children and does not make an excessive profit.

Childcare centres and kindergartens receive a higher rate of funding from government per hour per child compared to other services such as kohanga reo and playcentre, so at some types of services your help with donations or assistance may be needed and valued more.



## Code of Ethical Conduct for Early Childhood Services

The Code is voluntarily embraced by early childhood services and provides a resource for responsible decision-making and action.

The full version can be found at [www.myece.org.nz](http://www.myece.org.nz)

Ask if your service is a member of the national early childhood professional organisation, ChildForum. Early childhood service members of ChildForum are expected to abide by the Code of Ethical Conduct.

### **1. An ethic of care**

Early childhood services care for and care about children. The significance of caring and relationship both as an educational goal, and as a fundamental aspect of what early childhood services do is recognised.

### **2. Compliance with the law and maintenance of social cohesion**

Early childhood services observe standards consistent with the law and maintenance of social cohesion for the well-being of all their members.

### **3. Well-informed and professionally connected**

Early childhood services stay well-informed by, for example, enabling the adults who work for them to engage in relevant professional development, inviting parent/family critique and input into what they do, and holding membership with a national early childhood professional organisation.

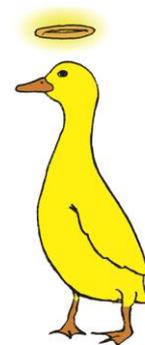
### **4. Accountability, honesty and openness**

Early childhood services accept they are accountable and maintain a climate of openness and transparency.

### **5. Socially and professionally responsible**

Early childhood services act in a socially and professionally responsible manner.

Go to [www.childforum.com](http://www.childforum.com) for more information



## Three Facts about Signing Up to a Government Funded Early Childhood Centre or Home-based Service

Even if your child is only one month old, every child who attends an early childhood service is now given an ID number by the Ministry of Education and details and records are placed in the public education system. This information might be shared with other agencies, officials, and people that the Ministry approves of without your knowledge. It may also be used to track your use of early childhood education and to follow you up for whatever reason.

Any assessments, evaluations and notes about your child may be viewed and examined by the Education Review Office and the Ministry of Education – unless you specifically request confidentiality.

Families with a nanny from a licensed home-based agency can be required to make their house and property compliant with education and health and safety regulations.

## When Things Go Wrong – Dealing with Problems

Every early childhood service is legally required to display (or provide) a copy of its Complaints Procedure and it must state the contact details for the relevant regional office of the Ministry of Education.

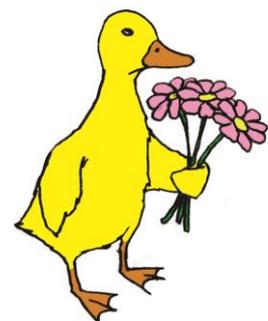
Should you not be informed by the Ministry of Education of the outcome of its investigation of your complaint then contact the Ministry and ask for an update. If you are not satisfied with how your complaint has been dealt with, then complain again. It is your right to be listened to and to have your complaint adequately investigated.

The Consumer Guarantees Act 1993 applies to ECE services just as it does to shops and other businesses. By virtue of the Consumer Guarantees Act, there is a guarantee that educational and care services will be delivered by the ECE service with reasonable skill and care. The Disputes Tribunals can hear claims about a breach of contract, the Consumers Guarantees Act and the Fair Trading Act.

### Complaint form

To lay a complaint with your early childhood service there is a standard complaint form you can use. This form is available online and can be downloaded and printed from: [www.myece.org.nz/parent-complaint-feedback-form](http://www.myece.org.nz/parent-complaint-feedback-form)

Complete the form and give it to the service owner, manager, or person responsible for running for the service.



## It's a Feeling... Knowing it is Right

“My wife and I are so extremely pleased with the level of care and attention our daughter receives at the centre that we only wish we had taken our son there before he started school. The staff are super-friendly and so supportive. They made our daughter feel at home from day one and their communication is reassuring. The family-feel you get and caring nature of all the staff there is truly amazing. She has the best time there, and they regularly go out on trips and special activities away from the premises. I've recommended the centre to all our friends with children and will continue doing so for many years”

“When arriving from out of town to spend time with our mokopuna, the teachers are very welcoming, manaaki and aroha very much in evidence. The current programme plan was explained and how our mokopuna strengths and interests were leading the teachers into the ongoing activities for the tamariki. Tino pai to mahi, and thanks for knowing our boy so well!!”

“We consider the kindergarten to be an outstanding centre, extending the children in a caring, safe environment with exceptional staff and small class sizes. The team of staff have a true passion for early education, instilling a real love of learning in the children and providing continuous feedback to parents. We were very sad to see our children leave the kindergarten but knew they left fully prepared for school, both academically and socially”

“It's hard to predict when you're in the middle of those busy pre-school years what an amazingly positive impact Playcentre will play in your life. I treasure my years learning alongside my children at Playcentre and our family continues to be part of this amazing community through our children's school years. And on top of all that the Playcentre is lucky to have a beautiful outdoors setting of gardens and native bush, plus a recently renovated interior that makes it a real pleasure to be in”

“I put my children into home based education because I believe that they need structure and routine just like they would if they were at home. My children have formed close relationships with the other children who are now like siblings. The educator is amazing! I have formed a strong relationship with her and often ask for guidance. I truly believe that my children are such cool kids and that has a lot to do with her, helping me raise them”

Read more parent reviews online at [My ECE](#)

A free copy of a checklist to take with you when you are visiting services is available by going to: <http://www.myece.org.nz/ece-checklist-for-quality>



## References

### Taking the Leap and Letting Go (Page 6)

Boyd, W. (2014). *Parents' Choices of Child Care*. NZ Research in ECE journal, 17, 51 -69.

Farquhar, S.E. & Galtry, J. (2003). *Developing Breastfeeding-friendly Childcare to Support Mothers in Paid Employment and Studying*. Report to the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, Wellington.

### What Children Need (Page 7)

Kilmer-Pringle, M. (1980). *The Needs of Children*. London: Hutchinson.

### Your Child's Rights (Page 7)

*Code of Children's Rights in Early Childcare and Education*. Published by My ECE, New Zealand. Go to: <http://www.myece.org.nz/code-of-rights-for-children>

### Benefits and Disclosure of Risks (Pages 9, 10)

Alexander, S. (2008). *Assessing the Evidence on Early Childhood Education/Childcare. A systematic review of the best evidence*. Wellington, NZ: ChildForum. Available at [www.childforum.com](http://www.childforum.com)

Apps, P., Mendolia, S., and Walker, I. (2013, April). *The Impact of Pre-school on Adolescents' Outcomes: Evidence from a Recent English Cohort*. Working paper supplied by Professor Ian Walker, Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster, UK.

Carroll-Lind, J. and Angus, J. (2011). *Through Their Lens: An Inquiry into Non-Parental Education and Care of Infants and Toddlers*. Wellington, NZ: Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Tukder-Drob, E. M. (2012). *Preschools Reduce Early Academic-Achievement Gaps: A longitudinal Twin Approach*. Psychological Science, 23(3), 310 – 319.

### Money, Money, Money (Page 11)

More facts about ECE funding and subsidies can be found at [www.myece.org.nz](http://www.myece.org.nz)

## About My ECE

My ECE is a free independent website designed to provide parents and families with good information about early childhood education and childcare and answer questions.

It includes a directory of early childhood education services, showing ratings and reviews to help parents find, learn about and compare services in their area.

## The Author



Dr Sarah Alexander has spent her working life aiming to improve the quality of early childcare and education for young children to ensure children get the best possible start.

Sarah has five children (three girls and two boys) and as a locally and internationally respected expert in early childhood education she is known for her extensive experience and her willingness to share her knowledge.

She is a published researcher and her areas of expertise include the quality of ECE, effective teaching, early education policy, gender and men in ECE, providing for gifted children, parent education support, and infant health and breastfeeding. Sarah is also the founder of the ChildForum national early childhood organisation and the NZ Research in ECE journal.

Sarah holds a long list of teaching and academic qualifications with over 30 years of experience working in the field.

Sarah knows what bad childcare is like and wants no child to experience early childhood education and care that is harmful. Her passion for the importance of transparency around childcare and the quality of childcare led to the development of My ECE; giving power to parents and helping parents to make informed decisions about their child's care and learning.

