

The Kiwi Parent Guide to Early Childhood Education



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My ECE
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About the Kiwi Parent Guide to Early Childhood Education

Every parent has worries about leaving their baby or young child in the care of strangers. It is instinct to want your child to be well-cared for, and to be with people they feel secure with and can trust. Also, you will want your child to be in a good environment for learning – a good environment is a necessity, and not a luxury.

The reason *why* this is so, is the enormous development that takes place in the early years of a child's life. By the time children start school, they have already acquired language and other skills and formed attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

This Guide is for anyone considering using an early childhood service, or looking to move their child to a different or better early childhood service.

After reading this Guide you will know about the different options for early childhood education (ECE) and aspects to consider. You will also learn what you can expect from an early childhood service, how to tell if something is going wrong, and what to do if it is.

Seven Steps to Making the Best Choice

1. Begin by reading this booklet.
2. Then make a list of what the non-negotiables are for you when it comes to choosing any early childhood service (e.g., Location? What's your maximum budget? Do you want your child to be with lots of other children or in a smaller group?)
3. Go to the [National Register of ECE Services](https://www.myece.org.nz) and review details of services before making a list of the ones you would like to check out. (<https://www.myece.org.nz>)
4. Take a copy of the My ECE Checklist (it's on page 10) when you visit services.
5. Compare your findings for each service on the Checklist and choose a service you are happy with and that meets most, or all, of the Checklist items. If none are suitable then go back to the [National Register of ECE services](https://www.myece.org.nz) and broaden your search. Also, think about whether using an ECE service would work better in conjunction with a personal option (see page 5 for personal options – for example employing a full-time nanny and participating in Playcentre a couple of mornings a week; or enrolling at a preschool for mornings and your child picked-up by a home-based educator at lunch-time for care until you finish work in the evening).
6. Re-read Section 2 of this booklet before your child's first day at a service.
7. Two to three weeks after starting your child, evaluate how well it is working out and whether to reconsider your choice or not. Refer to Section 3 for guidance on looking out for your child's interests and speaking-up if there are problems at the service.

Section 1: Options and Making Your Selection

What is an Early Childhood Education Service?

Early childhood services are defined as those that are licensed under the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 for the care and education of three or more children under the age of six years.

Who Can Provide an Early Childhood Education Service?

Any individual person, community group, business, or corporation can set-up and run an ECE service, providing the service is approved and meets licensing requirements.

What is the Difference Between an ‘Early Learning’ and an ‘Education’ Service?

Education is about teaching and learning, and education involves care due to the young age of the children. Teachers inform, encourage and guide children’s learning whilst also providing highly skilled and sensitive care.

In contrast **early learning** is something a child can do on their own without need for a planned curriculum or teaching. Early childhood services that promote themselves as early learning may be telling you that they are more about child-minding than education.

Will my Child Achieve More Highly at School Because of Participating in ECE?

The answer to this question is that it depends on whether, and how much, the ECE service adds to what you are already providing for your child.

Should your home be well-resourced with toys and books and space for your child to play, and if you or other family members have time to talk and play with your child and do things like cooking and grocery shopping together, then you are already providing a learning-enriched environment.

Should you be tertiary educated you may be better educated than some or all the people who teach your child at an ECE service – parent education level has a significant influence on children’s educational achievement.



What Parents Want

The most basic thing that every parent wants for their child is to be happy, and to come home alive and unharmed at the end of the day.

For me as a mum, I also want to know my child will experience a great environment for learning, thinking, play, and friendships. I look to see if the adults/ teachers have warmth, energy, genuine interest in my child and my child's world, an ability to connect at a personal level with my child, and can say and do the right thing at the right moment to capture my child's interest and promote involvement and understanding.

What Children Need

As they grow every child's basic needs are for:

- love and security,
- new experiences and stimulation (including play and language),
- support and recognition for what they do, and
- independence and responsibility.

Also, keep in mind your child's age, abilities, personality, interests, and health needs when choosing an early childhood service that will be good for your child.

Formal Options

There are different types of ECE services. Below is a list of the broad categories of services and a short description of each.

You also need to know that services within the categories are not all the same. For example, some centres are more like factories, organisations, or schools, while others are more like homes, have a small group size and can do many of the things that a home educator can, like going on trips to the mall and to the beach.

There are no restrictions on where your child can attend ECE. You can choose to enrol at a service within or outside your local area.

It is possible to enrol with two or more services, providing that the enrolment at each is for different days and times.

Home-based ECE services come in two forms. You can choose from having a nanny in your own home or taking your child to an educator's home. Educators can care for up to 4 children under the age of 6 years at any one time in their home, and may also care for school-aged children before and after school and in the holidays. The agencies providing home-based services employ visiting teachers to check on the safety of homes, supervise educators and nannies, and liaise with families on the education and care of their child.

Education and Care Centres go by many different names including preschool, daycare, crèche, nursery school, and learning centre. Kindergartens are under the same regulations as other centres and are no longer part of the free public education system. These centres differ in ownership, size, religion, culture, languages spoken, and approaches to care and education.

Te Kōhanga Reo are overseen by the Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust Board. Kōhanga reo are unique as they also serve a very special purpose of helping to preserve the Māori language by teaching the next generation of speakers and supporting all whānau members.

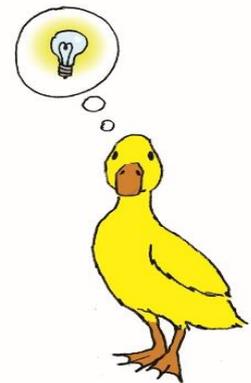
Playcentres are under a national organisation and each playcentre is run by the parents and families who use it. Parents play and learn alongside their children.

Hospital-based ECE services are for children under the age of 6 who are staying in the hospital and receiving hospital care.

Early intervention centres provide support and an education service for parents and their children who have significant disabilities or whose developmental progress is at risk. Special needs may for example include: Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, developmental dyspraxia, autism spectrum disorder and brain injury.

You may decide to use or not to use an ECE service at the present time. In any case, it's always useful to have explored options and know what you like and what is available.

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



Personal Options

In addition to, or instead of, any of the above formal options you may decide to:

- Take your child to work with you. This option can suit people who run small businesses and have flexibility to schedule breaks, etc. Parents who work in offices may be supported by their employer to have a cot by their desk.
- Arrange shared care with another family or neighbour (e.g., on Mondays and Tuesdays Lucy is cared for by Aroha's dad at Aroha's house, and on Thursdays and Fridays Aroha is cared for by Lucy's mum)
- Privately employ a nanny.
- Ask the help of a family member such as a grandparent.
- Join a local play group.
- Get involved in local activities – such as story-times at the library.

Factors that May, or May Not, be Important to You

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
childcare?

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

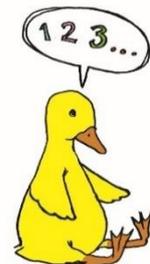
Does the Quality of the ECE Service Matter?

The answer to this question is **yes** it does matter. By choosing an ECE service that is high-quality you are ensuring your child gets the best possible start to their education. Four key indicators of quality that international research has shown to have a significant influence on child outcomes are as follows.

Group size: There should be no more than 20 to 25 children per group and no more than 8 under 2-year-olds if the under 2s are cared for separately. (Note that in NZ there is no restriction on class or group size in centres and centre licences can be for up to 150 children (0 – 5 years) or 75 children under 2 years, at any one time.)

Staff training and education: When leaving your child in the care of others, these people should have received the relevant training. ECE qualified teachers have undertaken supervised practice in ECE settings. They have studied such things as: child development; theories of early learning; ECE curriculum; assessment of infant and toddler learning; engaging with parents; early language acquisition; supporting positive pro-social behaviours; team-teaching; and ECE rules and regulations. So, ask the ECE service which of its teaching staff are qualified in ECE – in case some, or all, of the ‘teachers’ are not.

Adult:child ratios: Young children are dependent on adults for support. Therefore, there should be at least 1 adult to every 3 or 4 children under 2 years, and at least 1 adult to every 6 children aged 2 to 3 years. (Note that in NZ the legal requirement for education and care centres is 1 adult to every 10 children aged 2 years and older with 1 adult for the first 6 children, and 1 adult to every 5 children under 2 years of age.)



A stable staff: Staff stability is about whether children can be sure of having the same teacher or educator caring for them from one day to the next. It takes time for a new teacher to really get to know a child and provide optimal teaching and learning for the child. Services with low staff turnover (high teacher retention rates) pay their teachers well and provide a safe and happy workplace.

Is More Time in ECE Better for Children than Less?

There's a sweet spot for weekly ECE attendance of between about 12 and 30 hours a week – less than that and children do not get full educative benefit while more than that brings risks. Maximum educative gains are usually received at about 15 hours.

Another way to look at this would be that the first one or maybe two scoops of ice-cream give great enjoyment on a hot summer day. Once you are up to three or more the enjoyment is probably maxed out. If you continue having more then you are missing the benefits of fruit and veges for your calorie intake.

One risk that comes with children being in ECE for long hours is that parents have less opportunity to learn how to parent and be confident in their parenting.



The Formula for Remarkable Quality Early Childhood Education

Wonderful, truly remarkable early childhood education (ECE) is produced when the following ingredients of quality are present and come together.

1. The ECE service doesn't feel over-crowded and everyone knows everyone's name.
2. You can hear laughter and see that being at the service is enjoyable for everyone.
3. Diversity is embraced and the service has an inclusive culture (e.g., It includes men in its teaching staff. Children with disabilities are included in all aspects of the programme).
4. Parents and family members can visit and participate anytime they wish.
5. Opportunities are provided for families to be involved in the curriculum and events.
6. Interest is shown in children's home activities and learning, and family views on care are respected.
7. Children's individual needs are catered to.
8. There is ample play space both inside and outdoors for the number and ages of children, with a good variety of play areas and materials (e.g., sandpit, puppets, musical instruments, cooking, and gardening).
9. There is always something on offer for the children to do, so more choices and less down-time (not passive watching, aimless wandering, or screen time).
10. Children's personal privacy is respected, such as when using the toilet.
11. High attention is given to keeping children safe, and to hand-washing and hygiene.
12. The adults/ teaching staff:
 - are trained and qualified in early childhood education;
 - draw on research-based evidence and expert advice to reflect on what they do and enhance their teaching and support of children and families; and
 - have adequate sick and holiday leave, and are well paid (at least at the same level of pay as school teachers with equivalent qualifications and experience).

“Implementing the formula for quality in early childhood education is not a luxury but a basic necessity given the importance of the early years in a child's development and the amount of time that so many of our children spend in ECE from a very young age.” – Dr Sarah Alexander

Beginning your Search and Making your Selection



Begin your search using the National Register of ECE Services which can be found online at <https://www.myece.org.nz>. Type the name of your city into the SEARCH. You can search within different categories of services (such as homebased, language nests, and Playcentre). You can click on the Extended Search button to search by other criteria such as for a private or community service, and number of children. You may have noticed signs for services in your local area – look the name of these up in the Register too.

Prepare a list of the names and addresses of services that interest you. The best services are usually staffed above minimum adult:child ratio requirements for child supervision, so there will almost certainly always be someone who is available to show you around, even if you arrive without an appointment.

Try to visit at least four ECE services with your child so you have a basis for comparison. On the next page is the [My ECE Checklist](#) to complete when visiting services. If someone is not available to show you around, still record your impressions using the Checklist. These first impressions are what you saw and felt before the service knew you were visiting and had time to prepare or put on a show.

Don't be afraid to ask questions - you are the one who is choosing the service and not the other way around. You might decide you don't like a service and leave after a quick tour. Or, you may get positive vibes and stay longer to give your child some time to play and for you to observe and find out more.

Importantly, you should also consider who you are leaving your child with. In centres this includes the service managers and teaching staff, cooks, and admin staff if they have contact with children. In home-based services this includes the educator along with everyone who lives in the same household, and the visiting teacher or co-ordinator who is assigned by the service to oversee the educator. You should meet the van driver/s if the service provides a pick-up and drop-off service. Does each person have the personal characteristics and personality that you think will be good to have around your child?

Note that the service is responsible for ensuring that background checks, including police checks, are done. It is mandatory for all staff and volunteers to be vaccinated against Covid-19 but not against other transmissible vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, mumps, and whooping cough. You have a right to ask about vaccination status but workers also have a right not to disclose should they choose not to.

If you don't find a suitable service after visiting four, extend your search and consider other options.

Before you decide which service to enrol at, you might find it helpful to talk through your thoughts, feelings, and findings with someone else such as a friend or work colleague.

My ECE Service Checklist

	Service Name:	Service Name:	Service Name:	Service Name:
PRACTICAL CONCERNS	✓ or ✗	✓ or ✗	✓ or ✗	✓ or ✗
Is the service in a location that is convenient?				
Is it in a safe location?				
Is it in a single-storey building or on the ground floor?				
Are the hours suitable?				
Can I adjust the hours my child attends if I need to?				
Do the fees meet my budget?				
Have I been adequately informed about any extra costs? (e.g., stationery, holiday charges, late pick-up charge)				
Does my child like this service and the people at it?				
Do I feel welcome and comfortable in the service?				
Is it able to support my child's learning, and any health and disability needs?				
Is support shown for parents to breastfeed on site?				
Is the name and contact details of the service owner or operator available in case of emergency and for parents to make a complaint directly to if necessary?				
QUALITY ESSENTIALS				
Is the number of children manageable for the teaching staff so my child is more likely to receive individual attention?				

Is it a relaxed and emotionally-safe environment, with laughter, cuddles and affection shown, and everyone enjoying being there?				
Does it embrace diversity – e.g., include men in its teaching staff and welcome children with disabilities?				
Does it have an open-door policy, allowing families to visit and stay when they wish?				
Are opportunities regularly given to families to join curriculum activities and attend special events?				
Is interest shown in what children do at home, their pets, and so on?				
Are parent views on their child's care asked for and respected (e.g., for sleep, diet, etc)?				
Is there ample play space and a good variety of play areas and materials for the number and ages of children, both inside and outdoors?				
Are children actively involved in activities (not wandering around, passively watching, or doing nothing)?				
Is children's privacy respected (e.g., toilets have doors which children can close when they wish)?				
Is high attention paid to correct hand-washing and hygiene practices for children and adults?				
Are children actively supervised? (i.e., every child has an adult with them or close by who is watching and able to quickly intervene if necessary)				
Will my child be supervised and taught by a person/s who is trained and qualified in early childhood education (Qualified means an early childhood education qualification at Level 7 for centre teachers and at least Level 4 on the NZQA Framework for home-based educators)?				

Other things I want to check out are:

More copies are available at <https://www.myece.org.nz/ece-checklist-for-quality/232-finding-early-childhood-education-checklist-for-quality>

Section 2: What to Expect

Enrolling and Getting Ready

Once you have chosen an ECE service or a combination of services to use, it is time to enrol and get ready to start.

Paperwork

The service will ask you to complete an enrolment form and agree with its policies and charging practices. Read the forms and agreements carefully before signing. Negotiate any aspects - for example, if you or the service will supply food for your child's special dietary requirements.

As part of enrolling, you will be asked:

- if your child has any allergies, is on any medication, and has any medical conditions;
- who has legal access to your child and about any access and custody agreements;
- the names of person/s (14 years or older) who you agree can collect your child;
- contact information for you during the day, and emergency contacts; and
- your child's doctor's name and contact information.

Before, or on, your child's first day you will be asked to show or supply:

- proof of your child's name and date of birth, and
- your child's immunisation certificate (from the Well Child book or ask your doctor).

Preparations

Check with the service what things it expects parents to supply. You may need to get your child a lunch-box, a drink bottle, or some extra baby bottles. Organise some spare play clothes and underwear (or nappies), and a sunhat (unless the service supplies this).

Perhaps get a spare car seat to leave at the service if you expect there will be times when you'll ask someone else to pick up your child. Put your child's name on all items.

Children in group care can get sick, and quite often. So, check with your doctor that your child has had all the recommended vaccinations. It can be a good idea to prepare a plan for what you will do when your child is sick. (If your child becomes sick during the day, who will pick your child up? How much work leave do you have? Who will stay home?).

Connections to help smooth the transition

Should you not know other families, it can help to smooth the transition to organise a playdate for your child with another child. During your familiarisation visits (see page 18), notice if there is another child who is about the same age and see if you can talk with the child's parents and extend an invite.

It can also be helpful if your child's key teacher (see page 15) or homebased educator meets you and your child in your home environment. Invite the teacher or educator to visit (perhaps for morning tea or an evening coffee?). This will help your child to see them as people who are interested in them, and not as strangers.

Fees, Funding, and Financial Assistance

“We are not charged when it’s closed statutory holidays and term breaks. This is just as well because I can’t work and earn during those times”.

“When my child turned three, we were asked if we wanted to sign up for the 20-Hours ECE. We were told it would mean a discount and so for 21 hours of care we would pay \$80. But I was under the understanding that the first 20 hours was free and that any charges were optional?”

Fees and funding

ECE services can set their own fees policy. However, families have a right to question fees and any other charges. The Ministry of Education sets some rules around what families can be charged.

The Government purchases 20-Hours of ECE on behalf of children 3 to 5 years of age whose families sign up to the scheme. Services are not allowed to charge parents for the first 20 hours of care but may request parents pay an optional charge for any extras such as cooked lunches. Services are also subsidised for up to 30 hours per child of any age per week, or an additional 10 hours if the child is already on 20-Hours ECE.

More information on funding rates and grants paid to services can be found at <https://www.myece.org.nz/funding-and-government-grants> If you are interested in how much your service earns per hour for your child, you can roughly calculate this by adding the hourly funding rate to what you pay the service.



Other charges and costs

Services may have additional charges, such as a pre-enrolment fee and/or a bond - check if this is refundable or not. Contentiously, some services charge parents for care when they are closed for statutory holidays or for reasons outside of the parents control. Some services charge parents a penalty fee if they are late picking up their child even by a few minutes. To learn more, go to <https://www.myece.org.nz/costs-subsidies-funding>

Financial assistance

You may be eligible for a WINZ Childcare Subsidy for up to 50 hours a week depending on your household income level, if you are in paid employment, in training, are ill or disabled, caring for a child in hospital, or caring for a child for whom you get a disability allowance.

If you are not in paid employment, studying or in training you may be able to access a subsidy for up 9 hours a week. Find out more, go to: www.myece.org.nz/financial-assistance-families-can-get/88-winz-childcare-subsidy

The Primary Caregiver or Key Teacher System at Centres

Every centre should have a '[primary caregiver](#)' or 'key teacher' system in place. Note that this is especially important in large centres with many children and adults. When children have someone at the centre who is their main carer and personal advocate then you know you are not putting your child into an institutional or traditional orphanage style set-up.

How does it work?

A teacher will be allocated to be your child's primary caregiver. Your child may be given a second primary caregiver so that when one is on a meal break or away, your child will not be left without a primary caregiver. Other staff and teachers will continue to care for and work with your child, but your child's primary caregiver/ key teacher will have overall responsibility for your child and your child's well-being within the group.

What are the main benefits?

Having a primary caregiver/ key teacher for your child enables quicker, smoother, and more efficient communication between the service and you. It gives you a main point of contact on any matter to do with your child. And, your child will then have a dependable adult friend to watch over them from day one!

The Early Childhood Education Curriculum

Te Whāriki is the name of the [early childhood education curriculum](#).

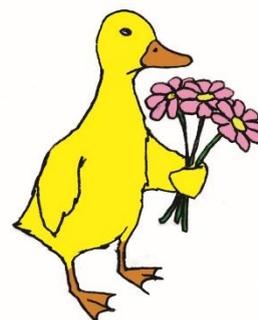
Te Whāriki helps to ensure that children are getting support to develop the foundation skills for learning. The curriculum document sets out expectations, required capabilities, and goals for supporting children's learning.

Children are viewed as individuals and if a service is successfully implementing Te Whāriki then you will not see a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

Teachers must follow children's individual progress and assess their learning.

Check the documentation on your child's learning at the service.

- Do the learning stories, observations and other assessments and planning show a good understanding of your child?
- Does the educator or teachers show they have a good understanding of your child?
- Are they helping your child to continue to develop and extend learning?
- Are you invited to contribute and provide feedback, and involved in setting goals?



Code of Ethical Conduct for Early Childhood Services

The Code of Ethical Conduct sets out the standards of conduct every family who enrolls with an early childhood service can expect of it, and what is expected of every service in the sector. Services voluntarily abide by the Code of Ethical Conduct.

The code sets out four standards.

Our Code of Ethical Conduct

1. A STRONG ETHIC OF CARE

We care about every child in our care. Caring and relationship is as an educational goal and a fundamental aspect of what our service does

2. COMPLIANCE

We comply with all relevant regulations and rules as a crucial part of doing well for our community and society and by everyone in our service.

3. PROFESSIONALISM

We are a professional service that operates in strongly professional ways.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

We are accountable to users for the safety and goodness of the service provided, and to the public for our use of funding. We maintain a climate of openness and transparency.

Each standard has a list of criteria that must be met. For a full copy of the Code of Ethical Conduct go to <https://oece.nz/public/information/ethics/code-of-ethical-conduct>

Children's Rights

An early childhood service that respects children and honours their rights will tell you of their commitment to this. It may include a copy of the Code of Children's Rights in its information pack when you enrol, show a link to the Code on its website, and prominently display a copy on its parent noticeboard.

CODE OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Every infant, toddler, and young child has rights and this includes within early childhood education services (as made plain by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1992 and the New Zealand Human Rights Act 1993).

Ten Rights

1. To have their parents, family and whānau stay with them and participate in the early childhood programme.
2. To experience early childhood 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 their care and education in the service.
5. To be kept safe from harm, including protection from child abuse, bullying, and risks to health.
6. To have their 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.

<https://www.myece.org.nz/code-of-rights-for-children>

Starting and Settling-In

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

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

Ask to do some familiarisation visits with your child before starting. Families are not charged fees for these visits as children are not yet officially on the roll.

When it is time to start, you can expect to be asked to give your child a kiss or wave goodbye and leave your child with a teacher (nanny or educator) for 5 – 15 minutes. Your child may be upset (or not) to see you go, but by leaving for a short time and coming back, and increasing gradually to 1 hour and then longer, this will build your child’s trust that you will return.

While some children are fine to be left on their own from the first day, others are not. Much depends on their age, if they have friends already attending, and how comfortable they feel in the setting (see p. 13 about connections). It can be difficult to know what to do when your child is clingy, sad, or does not want you to leave. The following may help:

- A teacher (educator or nanny) sees that you are about to leave and will approach and be the person to play with your child. Teachers find that taking the time to sit with an unsettled child, usually over a book or a quiet activity such as art, playdough, or puzzles (whatever your child likes) can make a difference.
- Ask if your child can bring something from home next time to help them to be part of the group, help to break the ice and get attention from other children (e.g., pet rabbit).
- If your child has an attachment object, such as a teddy or blanket, ask that they be allowed to keep this with them.

It is natural for parents to feel tearful when leaving for the first time, or be worried during the day about what is happening for their child. Good practices at services are to ask parents what the best ways of communicating with them are, and to keep them updated. This might be by phone, text, email, or a secure online link to photos or video. It is reassuring to know that you will be contacted if your child is not settling-down.

Signs that your child is settled in the service are that your child:

- is excited about or looks forward to going, and is happy to go through their morning routine getting ready to leave home;
- is eager to get involved and happy for you to leave;
- is pleased to see you at pick up time, but is also engaged and happy to keep playing even though it is time to go home;
- talks happily about what they do at their ECE service, if they are old enough to communicate this, or maybe tries to recreate their experiences at home; and
- has formed an attachment to a teacher and is happy to see them.

Section 3: Looking Out for Your Child and Speaking-Up

The Inspection and Licencing System

The Ministry of Education is the regulatory authority. It is responsible for licensing and ensuring all early childhood services are fit for purpose and continue to meet regulatory standards.



The Ministry does not however do annual inspections.

Unannounced spot checks are rare. Often the Ministry will not know a service is breaching health and safety or other requirements until there is a serious incident or it receives complaints from parents, prompting an investigation and/or a compliance check.

Depending on what it finds, the Ministry may downgrade the service's licence from a full to a provisional or a suspended licence until improvements are made. Services must prominently display a copy of their licence to show parents and visitors what licence is held and any conditions placed on the licence. You may like to check which services have had a licence change due to breaches – go to the annual lists published online at [Early Childhood Education Services Breaching Minimum Licensing Standards](#)

Issues with Openness and Transparency

ECE services operate in a competitive environment, creating a risk that some providers and owners will choose to put reputation and business first. To get answers when something has happened, parents sometimes find the only options available to them are to: engage a lawyer to represent them, make requests to the Ministry of Education or other agencies such as WorkSafe for information under the Official Information Act (1982), or go to the media.

Sometimes, teaching staff want to tell a child's parent the truth or share a concern that affects their child, but are constrained by a confidentiality agreement with their employer. To be employed at the service, they may have been asked to agree to promote and extend the employer's business interests and not say or report anything that might hurt the reputation of the service.

What Goes on When You are Not at the Service

Do you know what really goes on when you are not there? Everything might seem fine, but should any of the following happen then definitely look more closely into what is happening:

- There is a serious incident at the service but you are told little or nothing other than that everything is okay and it is business as usual.
- Your child has unexplained injuries or frequent injuries.

- Your child's behaviour changes, or your child no longer wants to go to the service or be around certain adults or children.
- The teachers are looking stressed, over-worked, or have lost energy and enthusiasm for their work.
- You hear uncaring, mocking, or angry voices.
- Children and parents are prevented from saying goodbye when their teacher leaves.
- Staff keep changing – there is high staff turnover.
- A mistake is made more than once, such as forgetting to give a child their prescribed medicine - this is a sign that other things could be going wrong too.

Some ways to get insight into practices at the service are to:

- Vary your drop-off and pick-up times, and visit during the day, to see the service in its natural state when it is not expecting you.
- Make time to chat with other parents and discuss your experiences.
- Listen to your child and notice any changes in your child's mood and responses to people at the service.
- Review the service's policies and procedures for anything that sounds odd or concerns you (e.g., it may allow marshmallows to be eaten but it should not as marshmallows are a high choking risk for infants and toddlers).

Making a Complaint

If you wish to make a complaint to your ECE service, a complaint form is available to print and use – go to <https://www.myece.org.nz/making-a-complaint/59-parent-complaint-form>

Serious matters should be reported to the Ministry of Education. It is best to put your complaint in writing because then you have proof of the complaint if you do not hear back from the Ministry and see no action or improvements. 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 have your complaint adequately investigated. Addresses for regional Ministry of Education offices can be found at: <https://www.myece.org.nz/making-a-complaint/56-reporting-problems-and-complaints>

If you not wish to contact the Ministry of Education yourself, and would prefer anonymity, you can make an online report in confidence by going to:

<https://www.myece.org.nz/report-early-childhood-education-service>

Informing the Police

If you believe a child has been, or is likely to be, harmed, do not hesitate to contact the police for advice or to report. This includes sexual abuse, emotional and physical harm.



ECE as a Very Positive Experience



When reflecting on their experience of ECE, families mention different things. But, the one thing that comes through strongly is the importance of relationships – caring relationships and social connections. Here is a selection of quotes from families who have used different types of services.

“This KINDY is the BEST! I looked at 8 pre-schools before choosing this one. If you drop your kids off, but decide to stay a while to play, they’ll often offer you a cup of coffee (but you’re welcome to go get one anyway). It’s got kids from all walks of life and lots of cultures - which we love for our kids. There’s good old-fashioned fun - like a rope swing, nails, hammers, and saws (I was terrified at the start - but my boys have loved creating items from the woodwork table).”

“Having had all four of our children come through playcentre until they left for school, I can only look back with very happy memories of a precious time in our lives. The friends I made through playcentre are still friends 4 years on and our children still have wonderful memories of the place where they, to this day, have a real sense of belonging.”

“In home-based education my children have 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. I have formed a strong relationship with the educator and often ask for guidance. My children are such cool kids and I truly believe that has a lot to do with her, helping me raise them.”

“My wife and I are so extremely pleased with the level of care and attention our daughter receives at the centre. The staff are super-friendly and so supportive. They made our daughter feel at home from day one and their communication is reassuring. She has the best time there, and they regularly go out on trips and special activities away from the premises.”

“You will often see the staff down on the ground with the kids, not standing over them. You can tell they really embrace the ethos of family and care. The children are their priority. I also love how you are welcomed into a wonderful community of children that learn how to care for one another. Not separated into age groups. It’s a perfect setting for nurturing a child’s development.”

“When arriving from out of town to spend time with our mokopuna, the teachers were very welcoming. Manaaki and aroha very much in evidence. The 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!!!”

“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.”

About My ECE

My ECE provides parents and the public of Aotearoa NZ with straightforward information on early childhood education (ECE), and it supports parents and caregivers to form their own opinions when choosing an early childhood service.

The My ECE website includes a National Register of ECE Services. Parents and caregivers are provided the opportunity to give positive and negative feedback, by adding their comments and ratings to services in the Register. The reviews support other families to form their own opinions and can inspire services to improve and keep doing well.

The Author

Dr Sarah Alexander is a highly qualified early childhood teacher, teacher educator, and a former university academic in child development and educational psychology.

She is an international expert in the field of ECE and has researched, published, and spoken extensively on issues of how to define, measure, and improve quality.

Sarah has five children (three girls and two boys) and so from a parenting viewpoint she is familiar with the joys and tribulations of relying on early childhood education.

As the Chief Advisor to the Office of Early Childhood Education, Sarah works closely with the early childhood sector and helps to keep the public, policy makers and officials informed on ECE matters.

