



The Kiwi Parent Guide to Early Childhood Education

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My ECE ©2023

my **ECE** ★★
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Introduction

Getting your Ducks in a Row

The ***Kiwi Parent Guide to Early Childhood Education*** is for anyone considering using an early childhood service for the first time or changing their current childcare arrangement.

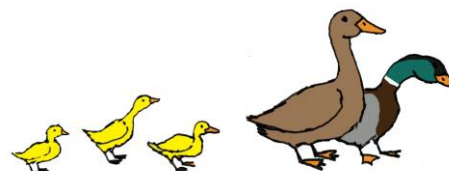
Every parent has worries about leaving their baby or young child in the care of people they don't know. It is instinct for parents to want their child to receive good care and be with people they feel secure with. An educational environment is also important – it is a necessity and not a luxury especially if children are spending more than a few hours a day in care. 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.

It is therefore important to get your ducks in a row before choosing a service and leaving your child. You also need to know what to expect and what to do if things are not going well.

In this Guide is information on different early childhood service options, what quality looks like, how to go about making your selection and a checklist, the enrolment and starting process, what you can reasonably expect from any early childhood service, and how to tell if something is going wrong and what to do if it is.

The 7 Steps to Finding a Good ECE Service

1. First read this guide.
2. Then make a list of your non-negotiables, such as how far you are prepared to travel for a good ECE service and if you want your child to be with lots of other children or at a smaller boutique centre or home setting.
3. Go to the National Register of ECE Services for the names and addresses of services in your area, compare the features of these, and create a short-list of the services that appeal to you most. The online link is <https://www.myece.org.nz/service>
4. Visit each service on your list. Use the My ECE Checklist (it's on page 13) during the visits so you will remember to ask and check on the things that are important.
5. When you have completed the visits, compare your findings for each service and choose the service that you are most happy with and that meets most, or all, of the Checklist items. If none are suitable then go back to the National Register and broaden your search.
6. Before your child's first day at a service, re-familiarise yourself with the guidance provided in Section 3 on "what to expect".
7. Two to three weeks after your child starts, evaluate how it is going and re-familiarise yourself with the guidance in Section 4 on "looking out for your child and speaking-up".



Section 1: Options

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.

Read more: <https://myece.org.nz/regulations-licensing-criteria-early-childhood-services-nz/>

Who Can Provide an Early Childhood Education Service?

Any person, community group, business, or corporation can set-up and run an ECE service, providing licensing requirements are met and the service is granted a licence by the Ministry of Education.

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

Education is teaching and learning. **Education** also 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. Children are regarded as competent learners. **Early childhood education** means education provided to children in the early childhood stage of human development, i.e., education for children approximately 0 – 6 years of age.

Learning is different from education. Learning is possible anywhere, anytime, can take any form and be what is considered good or bad for a child to learn, and does not require a planned curriculum or any teaching or guidance to take place. **Early learning** is a popular replacement term for daycare or child-minding. An **early learner** is one who is not a competent learner.

Who can Work in ECE?

Any person 17 years of age or older can be responsible for children at an ECE service.

Service providers are legally required to conduct background checks on all teaching staff and volunteers, and make sure they are police vetted.

It is not mandatory for staff and volunteers to be vaccinated against vaccine-preventable diseases such as whooping cough, measles, and mumps, so should your child be too young to be protected you may choose to delay your child’s entry into ECE.



The Early Childhood Services Available

Below is a list of the broad categories of licensed publicly-funded services and a short description of each. Privately-owned and commercially operated services are publicly-funded at the same rates as community and not-for-profit services.

There is no restriction on where your child can attend a licensed ECE service, as there is no zoning system like there is for public schools. You can choose to enrol at a service within or outside your local area.

It is possible to use two or more licensed services, providing that your child's enrolment at each service is for different days of the weeks or 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.

Read more, go to <https://myece.org.nz/home-based-ece-family-daycare/>

Education and Care Centres go by many different names including preschool, daycare, crèche, nursery school, and learning centre. These centres differ in ownership, size, religion, culture, languages spoken, and approaches to care and education.

- private centres
see <https://myece.org.nz/private-early-childhood-centres-commercial/>
- community-based centres
see <https://myece.org.nz/community-based-childcare-and-early-learning-centres/>
- Montessori centres and Steiner centres
see <https://myece.org.nz/montessori-rudolf-steiner-nz/>

Kindergartens are also education and care centres. Kindergartens operated by Kindergarten Associations are no longer part of the free public education system.

Read more, go to <https://myece.org.nz/kindergarten/>

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

Read more, go to <https://myece.org.nz/te-kohanga-reo/>

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.

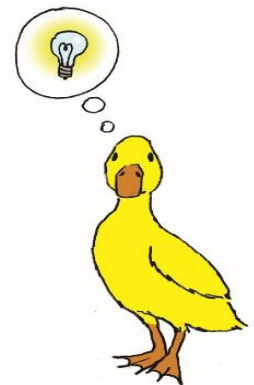
Read more, go to <https://myece.org.nz/playcentre/>

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 a licensed ECE service at the present time. In any case, it's always useful to know what's available and explore your options.

"I will consider childcare when my daughter is 18 months. The number of other children and carers per child will be the most important factor as I can see the importance of personal attention". (Mum of Aroha, 5 months)



Personal Options for Your Child's Care

In addition to, or instead of, a licensed ECE service 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 an office environment may be supported by their employer to have a cot by their desk. Read more at <https://myece.org.nz/taking-your-child-to-work/>
- Arrange shared care with another family or neighbour (e.g., Mondays and Tuesdays your child goes to Aroha's house, and Thursdays and Fridays Aroha comes to your house). Read more at <https://myece.org.nz/shared-childcare-with-another-family/>
- Privately employ a nanny. Read more <https://myece.org.nz/nanny-childcare-home/>
- Ask the help of a family member such as a grandparent, neighbour, or friend.
- Choose to be full-time with your child, as your child's carer and primary educator.

Does Going to ECE Give Children an Academic Advantage at School?

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 an educationally 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.

How Many Hours of Participation in ECE are Optimal?

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 vegetables for your calorie intake.

One risk that comes with children being in ECE for long hours is to parent-child attachment. A second risk is that children can feel and may become institutionalised, creating anxiety from a young age with potential for other negative outcomes such as a greater incidence of aggressive behaviour. A third risk is that parents have less opportunity to learn how to parent and be confident in their parenting.

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.

What Parents Want

The most basic thing 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 is it that you want for your child? Write it down here: _____

Thinking about what you want for your child gives a good starting point for looking at the various options available for ECE and deciding which to go for.

Section 2: Choices to Make and Choosing

Does How the Service Conduct Itself Matter?

How the service conducts itself matters in terms of your experience of it and outcomes for your child. For example, some services take complying with regulations as an absolute necessity while others may see what they can get away with until such time as an incident occurs or they are reported.

Therefore, when selecting an early childhood service for your child be sure to ask the service manager or administrator if it follows the *Code of Conduct for Early Childhood Services*. Check also for evidence of this – does it prominently display a copy of the *Code of Conduct* on its parent noticeboard or does it include a copy in its parent enrolment information?

What is the Code of Conduct?

The *Code of Conduct* sets out the standards of conduct every family who enrolls with a licensed early childhood education and care service can rightly expect of it.

As part of meeting the *Code of Conduct* services are asked to uphold *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* as Aotearoa/NZ's founding document and support the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

The standards of conduct expected of services are that they:

1. Demonstrate a strong ethic of care and respect children's rights.
2. Ensure legal requirements are always met.
3. Act professionally.
4. Are transparent and accountable.

There are detailed requirements for each of the four standards.

See the requirements in full or get a copy of the Code of Conduct by going to <https://oece.nz/public/information/early-childhood-services/code-of-conduct/>

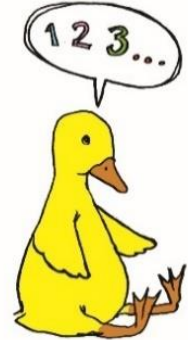
Does the Quality of the ECE Service Matter?

The answer to this question is **yes** it does matter. By choosing an ECE service that is high-quality your child will get the best possible start to their education.

Four key indicators of quality shown by international research to have a significant influence on child outcomes are as follows.

Group size: Ideally there should be no more than 20 to 25 children per group and no more than 8 or 10 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. Centre licences can be for up to 150 children (0 – 5 years) or 75 children under 2 years – so it is possible for children to be in an extremely low-quality environment unless the service chooses to implement small group sizes).

Read more, go to <https://myece.org.nz/group-size/>



Adult:child ratios: Very young children are dependent on adults for support. Ideally you want to see 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 minimum for education and care centres is 1 adult to every 5 children under 2 years, and 1 adult to every 10 children 2 to 5 years - with 1 adult for the first 6 children. The legal minimum is not quality)

Read more, go to <https://myece.org.nz/ratios-of-adults-to-children-how-much-of-a-concern/>

Staff training and education: When leaving your child at an early childhood service that is licensed and government funded, you trust that the people caring for your child are professionals. To be appropriately qualified professionals they must undertake ECE studies and supervised practice in ECE settings. Study in ECE includes: child development, theories of learning, ECE curriculum and assessment, engaging with parents, early language acquisition, supporting positive pro-social behaviours, team-teaching, and ECE rules and regulations. Ask the ECE service which of its teaching staff are qualified in ECE – in case some, or all, of the ‘teachers’ have not completed a recognised ECE teacher training course.

Read more, go to <https://myece.org.nz/staff-adults-qualifications/>

A stable staff: Staff stability gives children certainty of who their teacher/s or educator is from one day to the next, and the emotional security that comes from this is important for a child’s ability to cope and thrive in ECE. Moreover, 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. Ask the ECE service about its staff turnover rate and how frequently it uses temporary or relief staff. Read more, go to: <https://myece.org.nz/primary-caregiving/>

* For more detailed information on these and other structural indicators of quality go to another article I have written, which can be found online at:

<https://oece.nz/public/information/childcare-choices/structural-indicators/>



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.
1. Diversity is embraced and the service has an inclusive culture (e.g., teaching staff include people of different genders. Children with disabilities are involved in all aspects of the programme).
2. Parents and family members can visit and participate anytime they wish.
3. Opportunities are provided for families to be involved in the curriculum and events.
4. Interest is shown in children's home activities and learning, and family views on care are respected.
5. Children's individual needs are known and met.
6. 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).
7. 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).
8. Children's personal privacy is respected, such as when using the toilet.
9. High attention is given to keeping children safe, and to hand-washing and hygiene.
10. 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).

“Quality 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 care from a very young age.”

“The quality of the early childhood service is remarkable when it can show it is truly good for children in every way and delights parents in going beyond their expectations.”

– Dr Sarah Alexander

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

Beginning your Search and Making Your Selection

Begin your search using the National Register of ECE Services. The ECE Service Register can be found online at <https://www.myece.org.nz/service>

Search for services within your area or location, read what the listing for each service says about its features and qualities, see the reviews, and its rating. Prepare a list of the names and addresses of the services that interest you.

Try to visit at least the top four ECE services on your list so you have a basis for comparison. Take your child with you as it's important to see how your child reacts to each service. You may choose to arrive at each service without making an appointment first so you can see what it is like in its natural state.

On the next page is the My ECE Checklist to complete when visiting services. 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 as soon as you can. 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.



If you are not allowed to look around and stay and observe, still record your (initial) impressions using the Checklist.

Should you not find any of the first four services on your list to be suitable, extend your search to more ECE services.

It may be that you and your child really like a service and it is great in every way except it does not offer long enough hours. In this case you might consider still using the service, but combining it with a personal option such as a nanny or asking a grandparent to help.

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 picks and drops children off at home. Does each person have the personal characteristics and personality that you think will be good to have around your child?

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

My ECE Service Checklist

Below are the main items in the Checklist for Choosing an Early Childhood Education. To get and print a full copy of the checklist go to: <https://www.myece.org.nz/ece-service/>

Try to visit at least four ECE services so you have a basis for comparison. Don't be afraid to ask questions – you are the one who is choosing the service and the service is not choosing you. 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 observe and find out more.

If you don't like the initial services you selected consider broadening your search to other options such as to home-based care if you had previously only been looking at centres or vice versa. Also consider if it would work for you and your child to combine two different types of services e.g., home-based care and kindergarten. Or other options you might combine with using an ECE service include: shared childcare arrangements with another family, taking your child to work, or an au pair or nanny

PRACTICAL CONCERNS

- Is the service nearby or convenient to get to?
- Is it in a safe and worry-free location?
- Is the service provided in a single-storey building or on the ground floor?
- Are the hours the service offers suitable?
- Can the hours my child attends be adjusted if needed?
- Do the fees meet my budget?
- Can I afford and am I happy to pay the service's extra fees and charges?
- Did my child enjoy visiting the service and like the people there?
- Did I feel welcome and did I feel comfortable the whole time I was at the service?
- Does the service support the culture(s) and language(s) of my child and family?
- Is the service inclusive of all peoples? (*e.g., teachers and parents of different genders*)
- Is the service right for my child's needs and interests? (*e.g., allergies, wheel chair accessible, structured timetable and play or unstructured*)
- Is the name and after-hours contact details of the service owner or operator provided for parents to contact directly in emergencies? (*e.g., if child is locked in service and staff have gone home; if child collapses and goes into hospital and information on any falls or accidents whilst at the service is needed; or child hasn't been brought home as promised*).

GROUP SIZE AND ADULT TO CHILD RATIO

- Centre: The total number of children in the centre, and the number of children to adults, is not too many that a child could feel lost, unnoticed, or overwhelmed.
- Home setting: The number of regular visitors, other people living at the educator's home and school-aged children also being cared for is not too many that a child could feel lost, unnoticed, or overwhelmed at any time.

STAFF STABILITY

- There are few changes of staff and low staff turnover – children have the same staff caring for them daily and most staff have been at the service for 3 or more years.

TRAINED AND ECE QUALIFIED STAFF

- Centre: The centre can guarantee that at least one adult who is qualified as a trained teacher of under-5s in early childhood education will be always with children.

- Home setting: The educator has successfully completed higher than a Level 4 early childhood education qualification or holds a Level 4 ECE qualification plus nursing or other relevant qualification.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

- There is a warm and happy atmosphere (*giggles and laughter, cuddles, and caring comments*).
- There are soft surfaces and soothing equipment (*e.g., natural lawn, swings, cushions, carpet, water-play area*).
- Children's privacy is respected (*e.g., toilets have doors which children can close when they wish*).
- Each child has one or two adults (*it may be two in a centre setting*) who has primary responsibility for their care and well-being within the group. (*This is a special person that the child can go to and will form a close relationship with, i.e., a 'primary caregiver' or 'key teacher'*).

ENGAGING WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

- The service has an open-door policy (*parents can arrive at any time to check on their child and stay when they wish*).
- Opportunities are regularly given to parents and families to be involved in the curriculum and activities.
- Parents' views on the care of their child are regularly asked for and respect is shown for parents' wishes (*e.g., to support child's sleep patterns, etc*).
- Breastfeeding is supported by the service (*non-judgemental attitudes shown, comfy place to sit and breastfeed, breastmilk can be stored at service*).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Children are actively involved in activities and are not wandering around, waiting, or doing nothing.
- Interest is shown in what children do at home, their pets, and so on, and connections are made between learning at home and learning at the service
- The same activities are not put out for the children every day - instead materials and equipment may be rotated, activities are varied, and new activities are introduced to stimulate interest and add challenge.
- Children are encouraged to think about their thinking and learning (*i.e., metacognition, for example say a child is having difficulty doing a puzzle the adult could talk with the child about what strategies they have tried so far, what might work or not, and why*).
- The adults/teachers have expectations for infant, toddler and older children's learning and achievement and set goals that they work to support children to achieve.

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Children are actively supervised at all times (*each child should have an adult with or near them who sees them and is able to quickly intervene if necessary*)
- High attention is given to correct hand-washing and hygiene practices for children and by all adults.
- There is good ventilation in sleep-rooms and use of Co₂ monitors in all rooms to ensure Co₂ levels do not go above 800 ppm (*this reduces the risk of airborne infections*).
- Children's clothing is always appropriate for the activity being undertaken, the weather conditions and temperature (*e.g., sunhats in summer, shoes outside, dry socks*).
- The service asks all staff who have contact with children to consider their vaccination status depending upon level of risk of transmission (*e.g., infants under 6 months are at greatest risk of whooping cough and this is something for the service to make staff who work with infants aware of and remind them that a booster every 10 years is recommended*).

Go to this link to get a pdf copy of the full checklist <https://www.myece.org.nz/ece-service/>

Section 3: 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 fees. Read the forms and agreements carefully before signing. Negotiate any aspects - for example, will you or the service supply food for your child's special dietary requirements? As part of enrolling, you can expect to 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:

- proof of your child's name and date of birth, and
- your child's immunisation certificate (ask your family doctor) showing what vaccinations your child has received and dates.

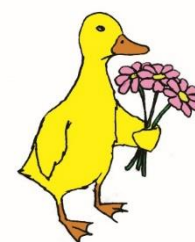
Preparations

Children in group care can get sick, and quite often. It can be a good idea to prepare a plan for what you will do when your child is sick – for example: should your child become sick during the day, who will pick your child up? What work leave do you have?

Find out what the service expects parents to supply. You may need to get your child a lunch-box, a drink bottle, or some extra baby bottles. Also, it pays to get 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 plan to sometimes ask someone else to pick up your child who will not have a car seat in their car.

Connections to help smooth the transition

Should you and your child not know any other families at the service, it can help to smooth the transition to organise a playdate for your child with another child. During the familiarisation visits (see page 19), notice if there is another child who is about the same age, chat with the child's parents, and ask if they would be happy for their child and yours to have a playdate. It can also be helpful if your child's primary educator or key teacher (see page 18) meets you and your child at home. Invite the teacher or educator to your home (perhaps for morning tea or an early evening coffee?). This will help the teacher or educator get a better idea of what your child's interests are and help your child to see this person as someone who is interested in them and that they can rely on.



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”. (Parent)

“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?” (Parent)

Fees and other Charges

ECE services can set their own fees policy. However, families have a right to question fees and any other charges. Services may have additional charges, such as a pre-enrolment fee - 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.

Read more, go to <https://myece.org.nz/guidance/fees-costs-childcare/>

Funding

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 provided within the 20 hours such as cooked lunches.

All services receive funding 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 on the OECE website – go to <https://oece.nz/public/information/fees/government-ece-funding-rates/>

If you are interested in the amount your service earns per hour for your child, you can roughly calculate this by adding the hourly funding rate to the amount in fees and other charges that you pay.

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.

Should you not be in paid employment, studying or in training you may still be able to access a subsidy for up to 9 hours a week depending on your household income level.

Find out more, go to: <https://myece.org.nz/winz-childcare-subsidy>



The Early Childhood Education Curriculum

Te Whāriki is the name of the curriculum that all licensed early childhood services are expected to implement. 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?

Read more, go to <https://myece.org.nz/te-whariki-curriculum/>

The Primary Caregiver or Key Teacher System

Every centre should have a 'primary caregiver' or 'key teacher' system in place. This is especially important in centres that have many children and adults, where children can get easily lost in the crowd. When children have someone at the centre who is their main carer and personal advocate then you know you are putting your child into a caring rather than an institutional style set-up.

How does it work?

A teacher will be allocated to be your child's primary caregiver. Other staff and teachers will care for and work with your child too, but your child's primary caregiver will have overall responsibility for your child's well-being and learning within the group.

What are the main benefits?

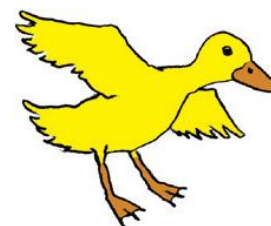
Having a primary caregiver for your child enables quicker, smoother, and more efficient communication between the service and you. It gives you a main point of contact on any matter to do with your child. And, your child will then have a dependable adult friend to watch over them from day one!

Find out more about how primary caregiving works for children and at centres – go to an article at <https://myece.org.nz/primary-caregiving/>

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.” (Parent)

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



Ask to do at least 3 to 5 familiarisation visits with your child before starting. Families are not charged fees for familiarisation visits since children are not yet officially on the roll.

On the first day of officially starting at the service, you can expect to be asked to give your child a kiss or wave goodbye and leave your child with a teacher (or educator) for 20 – 30 minutes. Your child may be upset (or not) to see you go, but by leaving for a short time and coming back, and increasing to 1 hour and then longer, this will build your child’s trust that you will return.

While some children are fine 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. 16 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 (or educator) 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 show other children and help break the ice (e.g., their 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. 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 or their educator and is happy to see them.

Section 4: Looking Out for Your Child and Speaking Up

Children's Rights

Is your child shown respect and are your child's rights protected and honoured by the service? Below for your information is a copy of the Code of Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education. The code can be found online at <https://www.myece.org.nz/code-childrens-rights-early-childhood-education/>

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 be kept safe from harm, including protection from child abuse, bullying, and risks to health.
2. For their parents, family and whānau to have the opportunity to stay with them and participate in the early childhood programme.
3. To experience early childhood education and care of the highest standard.
4. To have continuous, meaningful, and caring relationships with the adults responsible for their care and education in the service.
5. To receive skilled care and learning opportunities appropriate to meeting needs and personal choices.
6. To be included regardless of size, special ability, or disability and be supported to exercise independence and develop self-esteem.
7. To receive positive guidance free from coercion and discrimination.
8. To be treated with respect including being involved in all decisions affecting them by receiving information in a way that is understandable, and given opportunities to express views, ask questions and receive truthful responses.
9. To complain and have complaints as put forward by parents/caregivers taken seriously.
10. To have their personal privacy respected, for example when using the bathroom as well as privacy of information.

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 to their teacher before the teacher leaves permanently.
- 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.

Teaching staff may want to tell a child's parent the truth or share a concern that affects their child, but depending on their employer they may be constrained by a confidentiality agreement. The teachers or educator may be required to promote the service's business interests and not say or report anything that might hurt its reputation.

Regulatory Requirements and How the Compliance System Works

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



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.

As a parent how will you know if a service has had licensing issues?

- Services must prominently display a copy of their current licence to show parents and visitors what licence is held and any conditions placed on the licence.
- Should a service have had its licence downgraded last year or the year before, this will be shown on its listing in the National Directory of ECE services.
- Annual lists of the names of services that have received a licence change due to breaching minimum standards can be viewed online at <https://oece.nz/public/information/standards/>

Making a Complaint

If you wish to make a complaint to your ECE service about a matter affecting your child that may be able to be easily resolved, such as teachers not making sure that your child gets to eat at lunch-time, a complaint form you can use for this can be found at:

<https://myece.org.nz/parent-complaint-form/>

To support your child to have their voice heard and needs responded to, there is a complaint form available for parents to complete on behalf of their child – see:

<https://myece.org.nz/child-complaint-form/>

For serious matters, including not meeting minimum regulation standards or breaching staffing or funding rules such as charges for 20-Hours ECE, see the options and guidance for reporting at <https://myece.org.nz/reporting-problems-complaint/>

If you believe a child has been harmed, or is at risk of harm, please directly contact the police for advice or to report. This includes physical and sexual abuse.

Parents' Positive Experiences of ECE

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.”

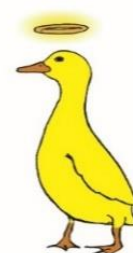
“In home-based education my children have routine just like they would if they were at home. My children have formed close relationships with the other children who are now like siblings. I have formed a strong relationship with the educator and often ask for guidance. My children are such cool kids 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.”



Back cover

The Author

Dr Sarah Alexander is an international expert in the field of early childhood education and care and has researched, published, and spoken extensively on issues of how to define, measure, and improve quality.

She is a highly qualified early childhood teacher, teacher educator, and a former university academic in child development and educational psychology. Sarah authored the Ministry of Education's Synthesis of the Best Research Evidence on "Quality Teaching".



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

Sarah has five children (three girls and two boys) and as a parent she is familiar with the joys and tribulations of trying to arrange reliable and quality childcare.

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.

