



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Aistear

Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

A Guide for Families

Prepared by the National Council for
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Purpose

This guide has been developed to help families understand how *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* can support babies, toddlers and young children’s learning and development in early childhood settings. Because early childhood marks the beginning of babies, toddlers and young children’s learning journeys, the Framework is called *Aistear*, the Irish word for journey.

What is Aistear and where can it be used?

Aistear is Ireland’s curriculum framework that provides information to support early learning and development from birth until children start primary or special school. *Aistear* was first published in 2009 and was updated in 2024.

If your baby, toddler or young child goes to a crèche, a childminder, a playgroup or a pre-school, the early years educators use *Aistear* to guide and support early learning and development.

Aistear guides and supports all curriculum approaches in early childhood settings, including Montessori, High Scope, Steiner, Reggio, Naíonraí and other play-based approaches.

Aistear describes the types of learning experiences that are important for babies, toddlers and young children. It includes the Vision, nine Principles and four Themes (Figure 1).

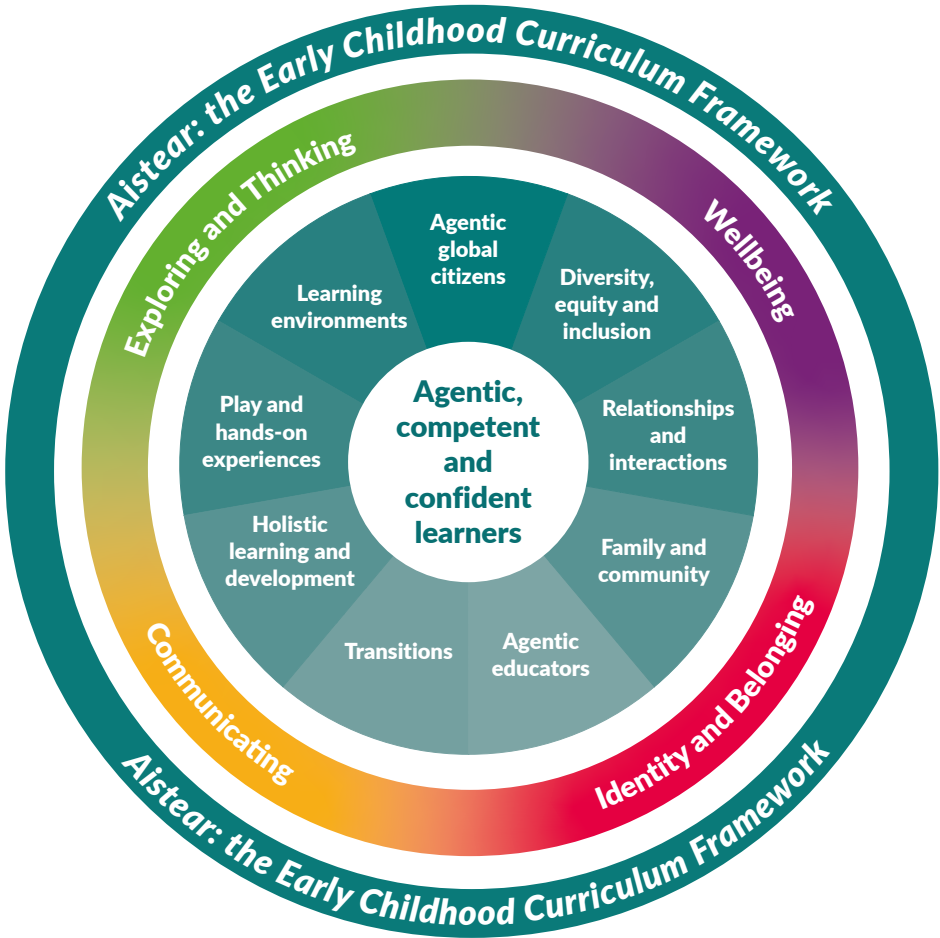


Figure 1: Contents of Aistear



What is the Vision of Aistear?

Aistear's Vision is to help every baby, toddler and young child thrive. It presents them as capable, confident and able to make choices about their own learning. *Aistear* supports every baby, toddler and young child to learn at their own pace and in a way that suits them best. It recognises their potential and respects that each baby, toddler and young child has rights as well as their own interests, needs and strengths.

What are the Principles of Aistear?

Aistear is based on nine Principles which are the foundation of the Framework (Figure 2). Each of these are explained below with examples of how your baby, toddler or young child might experience them in early childhood settings. Families and early years educators can work together to help babies, toddlers, and young children experience these Principles every day.

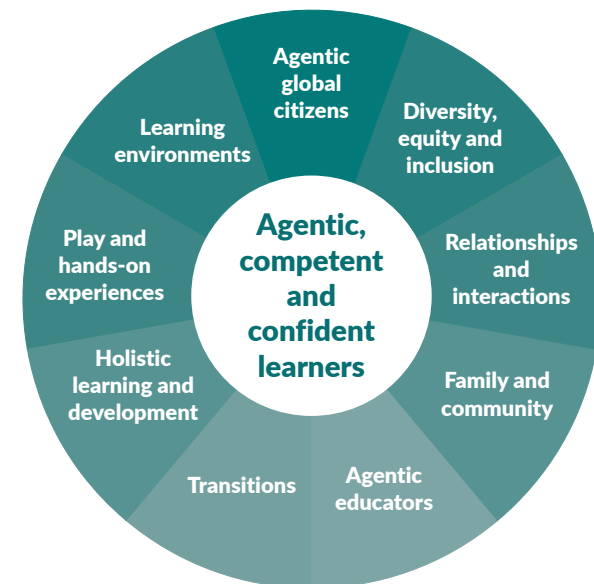


Figure 2: Aistear's Principles

Agentic Global Citizens

The Agentic Global Citizens Principle is about being a citizen of the world. It describes the rights of babies, toddlers and young children. These rights include the right to play, to be cared for and to be included. The Principle also focuses on babies, toddlers and young children's growing responsibilities to care for themselves, others and the environment.

On a day-to-day basis the Agentic Global Citizens Principle means babies, toddlers and young children:

- are noticed, respected, protected, listened to and nurtured to ensure they feel safe and loved
- are independent and make choices
- learn how to care for themselves, others and the environment through play and hands-on experiences.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Principle is about the right of everyone to be respected and treated fairly. Every baby, toddler and young child has a right to belong and should be supported and helped to participate and to develop to their individual potential. Any challenges that a baby, toddler or young child might experience because of their background or ability should be addressed.

On a day-to-day basis the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Principle means babies, toddlers and young children:

- feel they belong and are involved in play and in experiences that they like
- see their family, community, culture(s), language(s) respected and celebrated
- are kind to themselves and others and can stand up for themselves and others if they are being treated unfairly.

Relationships and Interactions

The Relationships and Interactions Principle is about the importance of being with other people and feeling loved and cared for. Babies, toddlers and young children need to be with others and to have the time and space to get to know the important people in their lives. In early childhood the key person and early friendships are really important.

On a day-to-day basis the Relationships and Interactions Principle means babies, toddlers and young children:

- are given time, space and freedom to be on their own and with others – their family, friends and early years educators at a slow, relaxed pace
- have their friendships and key person relationship nurtured. A key person is an early years educator who is assigned to your baby, toddler or young child in the early childhood setting
- are supported to learn to manage their emotions and to handle difficult situations.

Family and Community

The Family and Community Principle is about recognising the importance of family and community in supporting learning and development. Families provide love and care for the babies, toddlers and young children in their lives and in turn the babies, toddlers and young children bring joy, hope and happiness to the lives of others.

On a day-to-day basis the Family and Community Principle means babies, toddlers and young children:

- understand that their extended family and community are important in their lives and that they learn very important things from them
- see their home language(s), culture(s), songs, music, dance and stories valued and shared with others
- see their family and early years educators working together to help them reach their individual potential.



Agentic Educators

The Agentic Educators Principle is about early years educators having the knowledge, experience and freedom to use *Aistear* to care for and educate the babies, toddlers and young children they work with. Early years educators notice and nurture early learning, and work with families to support babies, toddlers and young children reach their individual potential at a slow, relaxed pace.

On a day-to-day basis the Agentic Educators Principle means babies, toddlers and young children:

- feel happy and enjoy the company of early years educators who respect and nurture their learning and development through play and hands on experiences
- have their interests and experiences from home and community recognised and, where appropriate, built on by early years educators who know them and their family well
- feel safe and know that they are with people who care about and protect them from harm.

Transitions

The Transitions Principle is about babies, toddlers and young children learning to handle change. They experience big changes like going to a childminder or starting preschool. Every day they experience small changes like feeding, toileting, moving between home and other places. All transitions are important and babies, toddlers and young children need time, love and support to learn to cope with them.

On a day-to-day basis the Transitions Principle means babies, toddlers and young children:

- get plenty of time, attention and support from early years educators to become used to change as part of life
- learn to understand change by talking about it and by reading and hearing stories about it
- know that their families and early years educators talk and work together to make transitions as positive as they can be.

Holistic Learning and Development

The Holistic Learning and Development Principle is about understanding that babies, toddlers and young children are learning all the time and that they learn many things at the same time. Knowing what they enjoy doing, how they communicate, and who they like to be around ensures that babies, toddlers and young children are provided with a variety of learning experiences.

On a day-to-day basis the Holistic Learning and Development Principle means babies, toddlers and young children:

- are supported by early years educators who understand that learning and development is connected to the home, community and other places that babies, toddlers and young children spend time
- enjoy it when early years educators notice what they are interested in, what they like and don't like and what they might need extra help with
- reach their individual potential when early years educators support and progress their learning and development, provide good quality play opportunities indoors and outdoors and encourage them to take part in real life tasks.





Play and Hands-on Experiences

The Play and Hands-on Experiences Principle is about babies, toddlers and young children having opportunities to play and do things for themselves, indoors and outdoors. These experiences help them to learn about themselves, their family and the world around them. Having time and freedom to play on their own and with others, including other babies, toddlers and young children and educators is central to their learning and development.

On a day-to-day basis the Play and Hands-on Experiences Principle means babies, toddlers and young children:

- have the time, space and resources to play and explore indoors and outdoors on their own, and with others
- are active and use their senses and their bodies to learn about the world
- are active and experience risky and adventurous play outdoors in all kinds of weather that provides opportunities for physical challenges and opportunities to assess risk.

Learning Environments

The Learning Environments Principle is about the importance of the physical space and resources provided indoors and outdoors. It also includes the daily routines, the transitions, the relationships, the interactions and is inclusive of every baby, toddler and young child. Experiencing nature and the locality they live in is a very important aspect of the learning environment.

On a day-to-day basis the Learning Environment Principle means babies, toddlers and young children:

- see themselves and their family, community and culture(s) represented in the play areas and resources provided
- are included and feel involved in organising the environment indoors and outdoors
- have freedom to move from inside to outside and can access resources that are safe, interesting and that also challenge and extend their learning and development.



What are the Themes of Aistear?

Aistear presents early learning and development using four Themes (Figure 3). Each of the four Themes describe what babies, toddlers and young children should learn through Aims and Learning Goals.

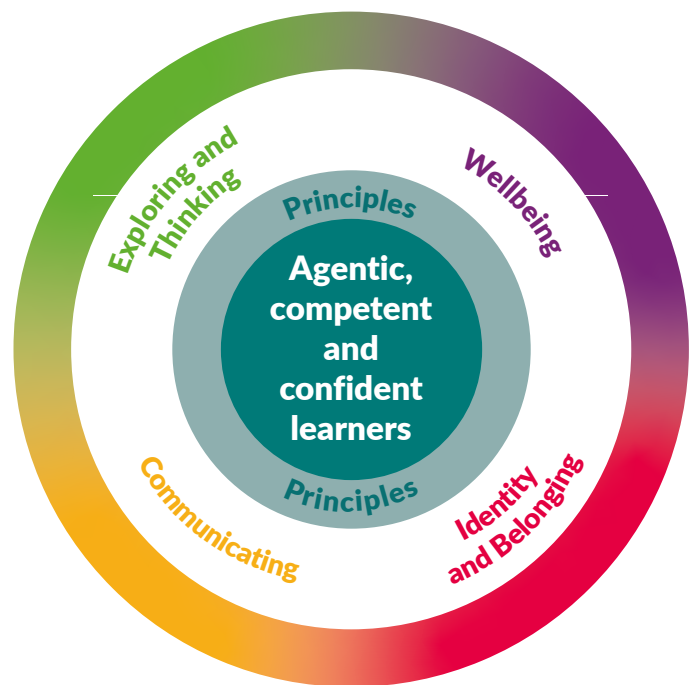


Figure 3: Aistear's Themes

Wellbeing is about babies, toddlers and young children being confident, happy and healthy.

The Aims and Learning Goals focus on supporting their physical and mental health. Wellbeing places value on relationships and on the importance of play and hands-on experiences indoors and outdoors.

Identity and Belonging is about babies, toddlers and young children having a positive sense of who they are and feeling that they, their family and community are valued and respected.

The Aims and Learning Goals focus on building a sense of belonging and having good relationships with themselves and others. Identity and Belonging highlights the importance of being kind and of listening and being listened to.

Communicating is about babies, toddlers and young children sharing their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others.

The Aims and Learning Goals recognise that each baby, toddler and young child communicates and interacts in their own way and at their own pace. Sharing and receiving information in many different ways helps babies, toddlers and young children broaden their understanding of their world and the people in it.

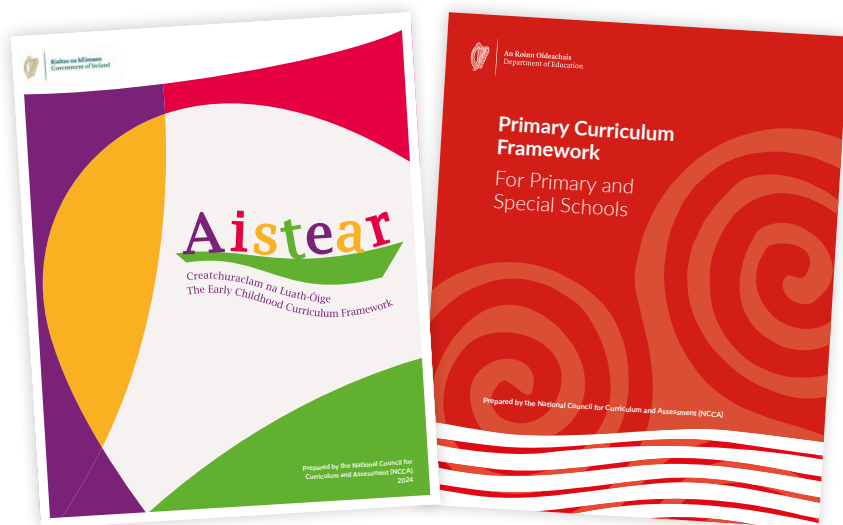
Exploring and Thinking is about babies, toddlers and young children being curious and making sense of the things, places and people in their world.

The Aims and Learning Goals focus on babies, toddlers and young children using their senses, thinking, and moving to explore and understand the world around them. Playing by themselves, with others helps them learn and develop to their individual potential.

Aistear and the Primary Curriculum Framework

When your child moves to primary or special school, they will experience the *Primary Curriculum Framework* which is for junior infants to sixth class in primary and special schools. The Framework builds upon your child's previous experiences with *Aistear* and provides progression of learning for your child. There are connections between *Aistear* and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* to ensure your child continues to have experiences they like as they move to school. For example, both Frameworks describe the importance of relationships and interactions, the learning environments, transitions and learning and developing through play.

Before your child starts school, early years educators may prepare information for you to share with your child's new teacher about your child's learning and development. By sharing this information with their new teacher, it may help your child to move to primary or special school as the teacher will know your child's interests and strengths. It also helps the teacher know areas where your child may need extra support. Sharing this information supports your child's primary or special school to be ready to welcome them and to continue to support your child's learning and development as they move on from their learning experiences in early childhood settings.



Families and early years educators working together

It is important for families and early years educators to work together. *Aistear* explains that babies, toddlers and young children need people in their lives who love them, who know their likes and dislikes, and who share important information about them on a regular basis.

Families and early years educators should work together to help the baby toddler or young child settle into the new environment and benefit from all the fun and exciting learning and development opportunities provided. Families can share important information on an on-going basis with early years educators about their baby, toddler or young child. By providing meaningful learning experiences that connect with the everyday lives of babies, toddlers and young children at home, early years educators can nurture and extend their early learning and development.



Where can I find *Aistear*?

Aistear is available in English and in Irish. To view the Framework go to <https://curriculumonline.ie/early-childhood>

