



Choices

This booklet is for parents, whānau and caregivers who want to find out more about early learning and early childhood education and how to choose a learning option that suits your child, family and whānau.

Why early learning is a great start

Early learning is the learning that happens from birth. Your child learns everywhere and all the time through everyday activities such as cooking, shopping, going to the park and sharing stories and songs. You play a big role in your child's early learning, even by simply talking with them.

What your child learns in the early years makes a big difference to how they learn for the rest of their lives. This period is when children grow and develop their understanding of themselves as capable, competent learners and communicators.



Benefits of early childhood education

Early childhood education (ECE) builds on your child's early learning.

ECE provides children with the chance to learn, socialise and interact with other children and adults. It helps your child to develop into a positive, confident and capable person with a love of learning that will help them at school and throughout their life.

Your child will learn how to:

- make friends
- play and explore
- listen to others, talk about their own ideas, be creative, and become independent
- get on better with other children and adults outside of their immediate family
- take turns, negotiate and share
- think, problem-solve and reason
- understand their own feelings and those of others
- develop language, reading, thinking and maths skills ready for school
- begin to understand and make sense of the world around them.

These are important skills that help children to be more confident and curious about the world.



WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?

Types of early learning options

There are many early learning options and services to choose from. Some services offer all day education and care and others offer part day education and care or sessions.

Some services are teacher-led and some are parent-led.

In teacher-led services the teachers are mainly responsible for making decisions on what children will be learning about at the service.

In parent-led services the parents and whānau are involved in providing education and care for the children.





Teacher-led services

Education and care centres

There are many different types of education and care centres that offer ECE services. They either:

- offer all day or part day education and care
- enrol children for a set number of hours per day or by days per week
- accept enrolments from birth up to school age or subject to a specific age range.

Some education and care centres follow an education philosophy, for example Rudolf Steiner, Montessori or Reggio Emilia.

Some education and care centres offer services with a focus on a language or culture. For example, Puna Reo provide an education and care environment in Māori language and culture settings.

At least half of the adults who educate and care for children enrolled in education and care centres must be qualified ECE teachers. Depending on the number of children attending, at least one teacher must be ECE qualified, registered and hold a current practicing certificate.

Kindergartens

Kindergartens offer a wide range of ECE services. While most enrolled children are aged two years and over, some kindergartens enrol younger children. There are many different ways in which they operate including:

- a variety of start and finish times
- some are open all year and some offer school holiday programmes
- bilingual services that promote and integrate Māori language and culture
- services that promote and integrate Pasifika languages and cultures.

Many kindergartens are situated on school sites or next door to a school.

Parents and whānau can be involved in sessions, provide practical assistance or join a parent/whānau group to work with the teaching team in planning and running the kindergarten.

Kindergartens are managed by a local kindergarten association.

Home-based early education services

Home-based ECE services have educators who educate and care for groups of up to four children at a time in either the educator's home or the children's own home.

Home-based care might include:

- all day or part day education and care
- access to a mobile toy library
- resources to support learning
- regular outings.

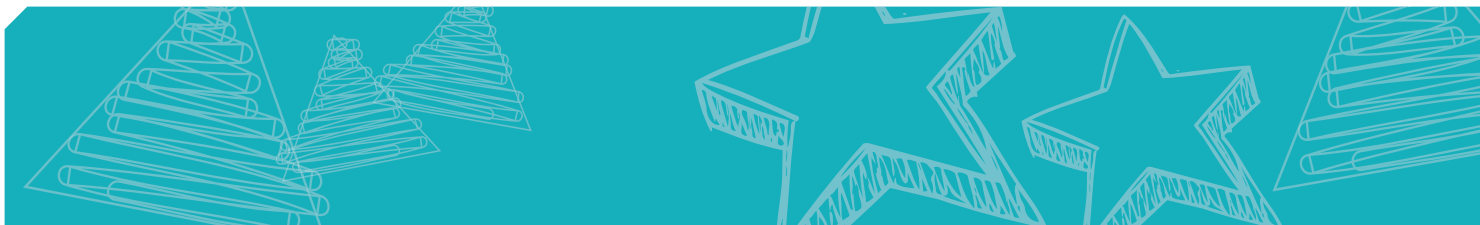
All educators are supported by a coordinator who is a qualified, registered ECE teacher and holds a current practicing certificate.

Coordinators regularly visit the educator and children to check on the children's learning progress and wellbeing.

Some coordinators may be able to help parents choose the right educator for their child.



"My daughter is four years old. I chose a Russian home-based educator for her early childhood education. It is very important that my daughter is well cared for while I study, and that she is able to speak Russian and learn about Russian culture with the educator."



Parent-led services

Playcentres

Playcentres are community-based ECE centres run cooperatively by parents and member families. Playcentres value parents as the first and best teachers in their children's lives and create learning communities to ensure families feel welcome.

Each playcentre offers:

- learning through play for children from birth up to school age in small mixed age groups
- half day sessions for up to five sessions a week
- free parenting education programmes
- informal parent support and mentoring to member parents.

Playcentres are part of a regional association for management and programme support. Regional associations are managed by the national New Zealand Playcentre Federation.

“As a mother of young twins, I was overwhelmed. Playcentre gave me support, adult interaction, and extra hands to hold my babies. My twins are four now, and I’ve watched them grow into confident, competent learners. They’ve built relationships, explored the world, and learned so much about being part of a group... and so have I.”

Te Kōhanga Reo

Te Kōhanga Reo offers a Māori immersion environment for tamariki and their whānau, and caters to tamariki from birth to school age.

The following key goals are the foundation of Te Kōhanga Reo Kaupapa established in 1982:

- total immersion in te reo Māori me ōna tikanga in daily operations
- whānau decision-making, management and responsibility
- accountability
- health and wellbeing of mokopuna and whānau.

The key goals of Te Kōhanga Reo assure that there will be:

- security of te reo Māori
- a supportive, caring environment for mokopuna
- whānau (collective) sharing of responsibilities, knowledge and expertise
- greater respect and appreciation of each other.

Further information about Te Kōhanga Reo can be accessed at Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust's website www.kohanga.ac.nz, or you can phone Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust on **(04) 381 8750**.





Parent-led services cont...

Playgroups

Playgroups are community-based groups run by parent and whānau volunteers.

Sessions are held regularly for no more than four hours per day and are often set up in community halls.

To be a playgroup, more than half the children attending must have a parent there with them.

Playgroups are not licensed although they may be certificated in order to receive government funding.

Parents and whānau who run the sessions receive information, support and training from the Ministry of Education.

Ngā Puna Kōhungahunga

Ngā puna kōhungahunga are playgroups that encourage learning in and through Māori language and culture.

“It is a priority for us that our daughter’s early learning is based on kaupapa and tikanga Māori, that it values whānau and whanaungatanga and validates and enables te reo. We feel strongly that tamariki Māori have a right to succeed and thrive as Māori, and our daughter’s access to the Puna is crucial to her wellbeing and development.”

Pasifika Playgroups

There are playgroups in Pasifika languages and cultures including Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island, Niuean, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan and Fijian.

“It teaches and encourages kids to speak their mother language and prepares them for their future in primary levels.”





“Te Kura’s early childhood education service has been a great experience for both my children and our family. We live 33km from the nearest township, on a sheep and beef farm. We felt it was impractical to attend any ECE centre more than once a week. Te Kura filled this gap brilliantly.”

Other services

Te Kura

Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu – The Correspondence School (Te Kura) offers learning programmes for children aged three to five years who:

- live too far away from ECE services, kōhanga reo or playgroups
- can’t attend because of health reasons
- shift homes at least once a term.

Te Kura teachers:

- work with you and your children to develop a programme to help you plan activities and learning experiences for your child
- can loan you a range of books, puzzles, educational games, CDs and DVDs, posters and art materials
- organise regional events and achievement days.

Hospital-based services

If your child is a patient in a hospital, there is likely to be a playroom available for your family’s use and an ECE programme provided by a hospital play specialist. There is no cost and no need to enrol.

Ask to talk to the hospital play specialist on your child’s ward to find out more.

You can email info@hospitalplay.org.nz to find out which hospitals have ECE programmes.







HOW DO I CHOOSE?

Things to consider

Think about what is important to you and your family and what you think will be best for your child's education and wellbeing.

Explore early learning options near you, research online, look in your newspaper, or ask other whānau members, parents and neighbours about their experiences.

Some of your decisions may be based on practical issues such as:

- cost
- how close it is
- the hours the service is open
- whether you can get there easily.

Visiting a service

- Visit several services to find one that suits you and your child.
- Ask for the person in charge so you can ask questions.

When you visit the service take your child with you and look at what's going on in the service and how your child reacts.

Feel free to visit a service more than once – each time you can learn a little more.

It is good to talk to the staff and ask about anything you want to know. You may like to talk to other children and parents and join in with what they are doing.




Things to think about when you visit a service

- How welcome do you feel?
- Are adults and children kind to, and respectful of each other?
- Do the children seem content and absorbed in their tasks?
- What is available for children's play and learning?
- Do you and your child like the indoor and outdoor spaces?
- Are there opportunities for challenge?
- How many children are enrolled and will this be overwhelming for your child?



Questions you could ask

- What is the turn-over of staff, children and their families?
 - Are there age restrictions for enrolment?
 - What is the staff to child ratio and how many adults are available to the children?
 - How does the service respond to individual children's differences/preferences:
 - sleep – can you bring your own blankets? What sleep routine/s does the service have?
 - meal times – what times do the children eat? Can children easily access water when they are thirsty? If your child has allergies, how will the service support you and your child?
 - toileting – if you wish to use cloth nappies is this encouraged? How will the service support you in toilet training your child?
 - Will your child be assigned to a group with a primary caregiver?
 - What will happen if your child becomes upset for some reason?
 - If your child has/will have a sibling at the service, will they be separated from each other?
 - What will your child learn and how often will you be provided with updates on their learning and development?
 - Are there opportunities for your child to make choices about activities which reflect their interests?
 - What is the fees structure, and does the service receive government funding?
 - Can the service provide advice on applying for Work and Income's childcare assistance?
 - If you are looking into a teacher-led service you might be interested in knowing how many staff are qualified.
 - How much involvement will be required of you and your whānau?
 - In what way/s and how often does the service communicate to parents and whānau about their child's learning and development?
- 



Questions you could ask cont...

If your child is a **baby** or **toddler**:

- Is a primary caregiver assigned to babies and/or toddlers?
- What is the staff to child ratio for babies and/or toddlers?
- If your child is breastfed, is this encouraged and supported and if so how?
- How are babies fed at meal times?



If you are looking for a service that can support your child's **identity, language** and **culture**:

- Will the service celebrate and support your child as a bilingual learner, and if so how?
- Are there teachers or adults that share the language/s your child speaks at home?
- Are there conversations held in the language/s that your child speaks at home between children and children, or adults and children?
- Are there examples of labelling, pictures, play equipment etc that reflects the written language and culture of your family and other families enrolled in the centre?

Questions you could ask cont...

If your child requires support for **special education needs** you may also wish to ask:

- What experience do the teachers and adults have in supporting children with similar needs to your child?
- How will teachers and/or adults engage with the things your child is passionate about?
- How will teachers and/or adults ensure your child is welcomed by the other children and can learn alongside them?
- If relevant, what experience have other parents of children with special education needs had with the service?
- Is there suitable access to rooms and toilet facilities?
- What are the grounds like eg level, or steep and uneven?
- Is there good off-street parking for easy access?
- Is the service close to anything that may cause noise distractions, such as an airport or main road?



YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

How much does it cost?

ECE services and kōhanga reo are able to receive government funding for up to six hours a day (a maximum total of 30 hours per week) for all enrolled babies and children. Additional fees might also be charged by an ECE service or kōhanga reo and the amount will vary.

20 Hours ECE

20 Hours ECE funding is a higher rate of funding and means that parents can't be charged fees for these 20 hours.

Most ECE services and kōhanga reo offer *20 Hours ECE*, your child will be eligible if:

- they are aged between three and five
- you have completed the '20 Hours ECE Attestation' section on your child's enrolment form.

If your child attends more than one ECE service you can split the *20 Hours ECE* claimed but you cannot claim:

- the same hours twice
- more than six hours per day or 20 hours each week in total.

Fees, donations and subsidies

ECE services and kōhanga reo:

- can charge fees either on a daily, weekly, or sessional basis
- must be able to show you how they are charging you for the hours outside of *20 Hours ECE*
- can ask you for a donation which is voluntary and does not need to be for anything specific
- may request optional charges for *20 Hours ECE* for specific additional features provided above the minimum regulated requirements.

Families may be entitled to the childcare subsidy administered by the Ministry of Social Development (Work and Income). For more information search online www.workandincome.govt.nz freephone 0800 559 009.

How do I get there?

Getting to and from services can be hard especially if you don't have a car. Other options include:

- a "walking bus" arrangement where you take turns with other parents, whānau or caregivers to walk with groups of children
- sharing transport and or child minding with another family
- some services and kōhanga reo have a bus or van to pick up children and whānau and drop them home again.

How involved can I be?

You can be as involved as much as you like in settling and participating with your child at their ECE service, kōhanga reo or playgroup. Join in, have fun and play with your child because this helps you and your child get to know the teachers and begin to feel at home there. Talk to the people there about ways you can be involved.

It is valuable to share information about your child's interests, family history or whakapapa and culture with the service, and to take along special treasures, taonga and photographs of special people. Share news about what has happened at home, such as important family events and stories.

Some services are run by parent committees or have parents and whānau who volunteer to help during the day, or stay with their children.

A strong relationship with the service means you will be able to work together to support your child. You will find out more about how your child learns and they will get to know more about your family and the important people in your child's life.

Your child's service will regularly talk to you about their progress, interests, abilities and development and include you in decisions about your child. They should also give you information about the services operation and Education Review Office reports.

What if I think my child needs help?

If you would like to chat to someone about your child's early learning and/or development, or if you think your child might need special education support you can talk to:

- your child's teacher, kaiako or educator
- your doctor
- a public health nurse
- your iwi health authority
- someone in your local Special Education office.

To contact your local Special Education office search online www.education.govt.nz email special.education@education.govt.nz or freephone 0800 622 222.







SETTLING IN



Tips to help with settling in

Once you have made a choice and enrolled your child in a service, here are some tips to help with settling in:

- before leaving your child for the first time spend time with them at the service to help them become familiar with the service (it may take as long as a few weeks before you and your child feel familiar with the environment)
- if your child is old enough:
 - show them where the toilets are
 - encourage them to ask questions and talk to the teachers and learn their names
 - encourage them to hang up their own bag and to know where it is
- spend time with them doing the different activities and exploring the service
- meet some of the other children, introduce your child and find out their names
- for the first few times that you leave your child at the service leave them only for a short time
- let your child know when you are leaving and what time you are coming back and keep to this time
- say goodbye and then leave (if you stay this could confuse them) the staff will look after them and reassure them
- you can ring the service a little while after you've left to check if they have settled
- try to keep to set times for arriving and leaving so they feel more secure
- check to see whether you can take their favourite blanket or toy along in the early days as this may help.



Talking to the teachers about your child

It is important that you talk with the service's staff about how you can work together to best support your child. You may wish to tell them about your child's:

- special words and ways of communicating
- favourite ways of being comforted
- sleep routines – when and how they like to go to sleep
- toilet training
- favourite foods and special food needs
- favourite colours, toys, music and songs
- life and family – important things that may be happening and anything that might be upsetting them
- medication and allergies
- things they like, don't like, are good at, find a challenge etc.

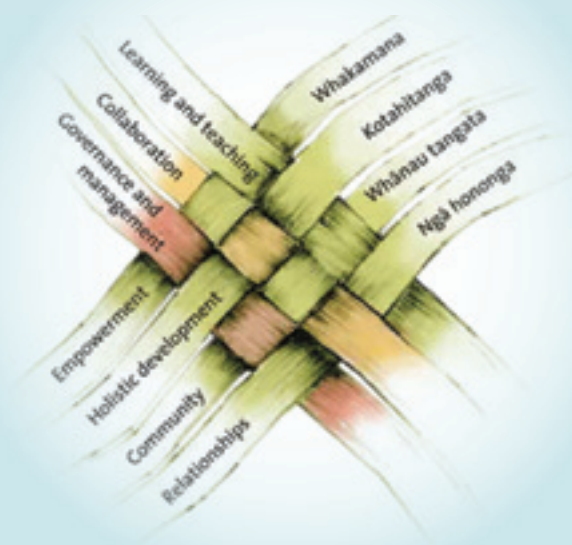


OTHER INFORMATION

What your child learns

Te Whāriki is the early childhood curriculum. It sets out the learning experience goals for children up to school age.

A service should have a planned programme that is guided by Te Whāriki in both educating and caring for your child. You should also see the cultures of individual children attending the service reflected in their programme.



Education Review Office

Licensed ECE services and kōhanga reo are usually reviewed every three years by the Education Review Office (ERO). You can find the most recent ERO report for an ECE service or kōhanga reo on the ERO website or you can ask the service to see a copy of their latest ERO report.

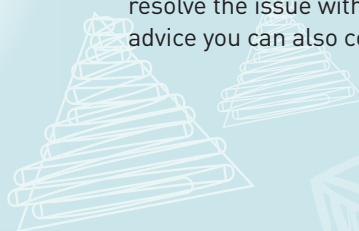
Sometimes the information in a report may no longer be reflective of the ECE service or kōhanga reo. Talk to the service about their most recent report's recommendations and find out what progress has been made since its last review.

ERO also has a helpful booklet called He Pou Tātaki – How ERO reviews early childhood services. Search online www.ero.govt.nz email info@ero.govt.nz.

How do I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy with anything happening at a service, check first with the service for their complaints process.

In a licensed service this should be displayed on a noticeboard beside the licence. If you are unable to resolve the issue with the service or want further advice you can also contact the Ministry of Education.



FINDING OUT MORE

The Ministry of Education's website has information about:

- early learning
- ECE
- special education needs support.

Visit **www.education.govt.nz**, you can also visit **www.parents.education.govt.nz** for practical information about education for parents and caregivers.

To find out contact information for our regional offices visit our website or phone our National Office on **(04) 463 8000**.

Information on the childcare subsidy

The Work and Income website has information about the childcare subsidy.

Visit **www.workandincome.govt.nz**
Freephone 0800 559 009

The Education Review Office

The ERO website has information about reviews of ECE services and kōhanga reo and other helpful information.

Visit **www.ero.govt.nz**



Resources for parents and whānau

Copies of this booklet may be ordered from Ministry of Education Customer Services.

Please quote item number 711079.

You can place your order online at **www.thechair.co.nz**

by email **orders@thechair.minedu.govt.nz**

freephone **0800 660 662**, or freefax **0800 660 663**.

Two pocket handouts about early learning and ECE may also be ordered:



- **Early learning – a great start.**
This pocket handout provides information for you about the benefits of early learning.
Please quote item number 710931.
- **Early childhood education – be involved get enrolled.** This pocket handout provides information for you about getting involved in ECE.
Please quote item number 710932.

Published 2014 by the Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6011, New Zealand.
www.education.govt.nz

© Crown copyright, 2014

All rights reserved, enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-478-43947-2 (Print)

ISBN 978-0-478-43948-9 (Web)

