THE COLOUR OF MY DREAMS
SUPPORTING CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO WELL-BEING

Donegal County Childcare Committee Ltd.
CHILDHOOD

Childhood is a time for learning about the essentials, about the heavenly world and the earthly, about goodness, beauty and truth.

Childhood is a time to be loved and to love, to express fear and to learn trust, to be allowed to be serious and calm and to celebrate with laughter and joy.

Children have the right to dream, and they need time to grow at their own pace. They have the right to make mistakes and the right to be forgiven.

Children need help to develop self-mastery, to transform themselves and bring forth their highest capacities. Children have a right to be spared violence and hunger, to have a home and protection. They need help to grow up healthily, with good habits and sound nutrition.

Children need people to respect, adults whose example and loving authority they follow. They need a range of experience - tenderness and kindness, boldness and courage, and even mischief and misbehaviour.

Children need time for receiving and giving, for belonging and participating. They need to be part of a community, and they need to be individuals. They need privacy and sociability. They need time to rest and time to play, Time to do nothing and time to work.

They need moments for devotion and room for curiosity. They need protective boundaries and freedom for creativity. They need to be introduced to a life of principles and given the freedom to discover their own. They need a relationship to the earth, to animals and to nature, and they need to unfold as human beings within the community.

The spirit of childhood is to be protected and nurtured. It is an essential part of every human being and needs to be kept alive.

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Terms and Symbols

‘Adult’ is used to describe Parents, Early Childhood Practitioners, Childminders, Health Professionals, Teachers, Students and all those working with young children in any capacity.

‘Childcare Setting’ refers to any setting caring for and educating young children including the home, Pre-school Playgroup, Naionra, Nursery, Full Day Care or Infant Class.

‘His’ and ‘Her’ is used intermittently to mean both boys and girls.

This symbol means that more ideas on a particular topic can be found in a different section
INTRODUCTION
Donegal County Childcare Committee (DCCC) has a strategic focus to support and develop the provision of quality and accessible childcare facilities and services in County Donegal. In line with these objectives, the National Childcare Strategy and context, the DCCC vision and mission are:

**DCCC Vision:**
“To excel in the development and support of quality childcare in County Donegal to bring about positive outcomes for children and families.”

**DCCC Mission:**
“Proactively working in partnership and effecting positive change with our partners, providers and key stakeholders and administering the National Childcare Investment Programme on behalf of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.”

The Colour of My Dreams: Supporting Children’s Right to Well-being

The Colour of My Dreams: Supporting Children’s Right to Well-being is a practical resource written for Parents, Childcare Practitioners, Childminders, Students or anyone with an interest in the promotion of children’s well-being. This publication aims to assist the adult to better understand, support and provide for children’s right to well-being.

The Colour of My Dreams: Supporting Children’s Right to Well-being is presented in ten individual sections, each section considering a different but interconnected dimension of well-being. The first section highlights the importance of adult well-being and why this is vital in providing for children’s well-being. The document is presented in an accessible, easy to follow format. Each section begins with a description of what a specific area of well-being means and is followed by an explanation of why it is important for children’s overall learning and development. The final how component is the most extensive, offering practical suggestions to support and enhance well-being through effective adult-child interaction strategies and everyday learning opportunities.

Acknowledgements

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“The spirit of childhood is to be protected and nurtured. It is an essential part of every human being and needs to be kept alive.”
What is adult well-being?

Adult well-being generally describes a positive mental attitude to work, to life and to ourselves. When adults are resilient to the demands of their role, whether as a Parent or as a Childcare Practitioner, they are more likely to be able to respond appropriately to children’s needs. Working with young children is an emotionally challenging task and the energy and well-being of the adult is a valuable resource that merits close attention.

Adults can spend a great deal of their time supporting, praising and caring for children, sometimes without even realising it. Whilst carrying out this highly demanding role, whether it is in the home or in a childcare setting, it is all too easy to neglect your own personal well-being. Self-care is not something we should take for granted – nor is it selfish behaviour. It is our right and when we are responsible for the care and well-being of children, it is also our duty.

Why is the well-being of the adult important?

Your success as an individual, or the success of a childcare service, is largely dependent on the energy and positivity of the people within it. The well-being of the adult is central to the ability to respond and work effectively with young children. Children learn from what they see – adults are their role models and need to be able to model control and emotional competence. When a situation or workload becomes challenging or overwhelming, the adult will become stressed and the quality of interactions and relationships with children could be compromised. From a young child’s perspective, an adult is not approachable if they are anxious, worn out or irritable (see section 5 for more ideas on adult-child relationships).

How can I nurture my own personal well-being?

There are a number of very practical things that you can do to safeguard your own personal well-being. These can be adapted to both a home and work situation.

Create self-care Golden Rules

1. I will give myself the same care and attention that I give others.
2. I have the right to express my feelings and opinions.
3. I am not an endless resource for others. I must stock up on reserves and not get too drained.
4. I have needs too. These may be different from the needs of my family, friends or colleagues.
5. I do not have to say ‘yes’ to all requests or feel guilty if I say ‘no’.
6. I cannot solve all problems, I can only do my best.
7. There is no such thing as the perfect person, making mistakes and learning from them is allowed.
8. I have the right to be treated with respect.
9. I have the right to deal with others without being dependent on them for approval.
10. Time for unwinding is time well spent.

Provide an emotionally calming environment

- Prepare a calming thought – use this when you begin to feel wound up.
- Adopt a ‘quiet signal’ to use with children – a bell, rain stick or tambourine is better than a shrill shriek!
- Prepare calming activities and be able to produce these at short notice (games, music, shake yourself quiet).
- Have ‘Good News Newsflashes’ – share observations of good behaviour, effort, kindness.
- Display rules in picture and written form to help children to self-regulate.
- Use a positive praise approach – for example ‘catch them being good’.

Devise a staff care plan

When you work as part of a team in a childcare setting, adults need to be proactive in looking out for themselves and their co-workers. This can be achieved by developing a ‘staff care plan’.

- Be prepared to share the work with more challenging types of children’s behaviour – regardless of Key Worker responsibility.
- Create an environment where it’s acceptable for staff to say ‘I need time out’ (a five minute break can relieve a tense situation).
• Make time for ‘team talks’ – a quick briefing session in the morning before the children arrive can boost staff morale, offer mutual encouragement and give people the information they need for the day ahead.
• Provide opportunities for staff to share what they feel confident or pleased about in their work.

Occasionally, the stresses and strains of normal everyday life can lead to us ‘getting it wrong’ with children, despite our good intentions. This can be balanced by being open and honest with children, provide a credible apology and explain in a manner that they understand. For example:

• Acknowledge the error ‘I made a mistake’
• Express remorse ‘I’m sorry’
• Ask for forgiveness ‘Please forgive me’
• Show an intention to change ‘Let me make it up to you’ for example, choose a favourite activity.

It is a good idea to encourage children to use the same process with their peers.

Finding a work-life balance that suits you personally is very important to adult well-being. This means establishing patterns where there is a balance between work and other interests, aspirations and responsibilities – including your responsibility to yourself.

What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?
• Staff Care Plan
• Staff Training/Professional Development
• Positive Behaviour Policy

“Children have a right to be spared violence and hunger, to have a home and protection. They need help to grow up healthily, with good habits and sound nutrition.”
What are children’s rights?
Do you respond sensitively to children when they are upset? Do you crouch down to listen to a child tell you what happened at school? Do you greet children personally each morning when they arrive in the childcare setting? If you answered “yes” to these questions, these are a few of the many ways you are respecting children’s rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To protect the belief that all children everywhere deserve to live in dignity and to be treated according to their best interests, the United Nations (UN) developed a Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. When countries approve an international convention, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they enter a binding agreement to meet the provisions and obligations set out in that convention. In 1992, Ireland approved it without reservation.

Why is it important to promote children’s rights?
When children are taught appropriately about their own rights, they learn about the rights and freedoms of others at the same time. As their own self-respect grows, so too does their respect for others, including peers, parents and other adults. For example, they understand that they have a right to express their views, and they have a responsibility not to hurt others when doing so. When parents understand the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, they can build better families. Parents can be better role models to their children. They can better protect their child’s rights, viewpoints and best interests. This may involve speaking up for a child’s right to be included, for example, pressuring agencies for resources to support a child with special needs.

The early childhood setting not only plays a significant role in promoting children’s right to education but also in promoting children’s rights in general. The holistic approach adopted within the broad framework of early childhood education is essentially an integrated set of actions for promoting and ensuring children’s rights. For example, an early childhood setting that provides opportunities for children to learn and develop, to be healthy, well nourished and protected from harm, to feel a sense of individual identity and self worth, to think for themselves, to express their views and to interact and participate, is promoting children’s rights in the most practical sense.

How can I provide learning opportunities, play activities and early years practice to promote children’s rights?
Even young children are entitled to know about their human rights. Families and Practitioners can engage in activities that help children learn about their rights and help them put their rights and responsibilities into practice as they prepare to be responsible citizens. Children’s rights are central to child centred planning and provision in early childhood settings (see section 4 for more ideas on learning holistically through play).

Provide for young children’s right to education
- Provide an early childhood curriculum that is relevant and meaningful to the experiences and backgrounds of all children.
- Listen and respond to the views of children in all matters that affect them for example, new activities, changes to routine, visitors to the home or childcare setting.
- Provide a balance between child-chosen and adult initiated activities.
- Ensure all children, including children with physical disabilities, have easy access to play materials, equipment and facilities, for example, sinks, toilets, coat hooks.
- In partnership with parents, and the child where possible, develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to specify learning targets that are to be achieved by the child over a set period of time and the teaching strategies, resources and supports necessary to achieve these targets.
- Provide children with an individual space, such as a basket or box, for personal possessions or creative work.
- Use positive behaviour strategies that respect children’s right to safety, privacy and dignity.
- Provide children with healthy, nutritious snacks and meals.
- Access up to date information and advice regarding children’s rights from agencies such as Barnardos and the Children’s Rights Alliance.
Enable children to be active participants in their own learning

- Provide opportunities for children to take part in conversations and discussions. Arrange planned circle time activities with a ‘Tell us’ theme, ensuring each child has an opportunity to participate and be heard – (pass the teddy or pass the microphone will assist turn taking) For example, ‘Tell us about your favourite toy’, ‘Tell us about someone that you love’, ‘Tell us something about your best friend’.
- Ask children for their opinion on everyday matters, encourage them to make choices and decisions, listen to their thoughts and ideas and empower them to direct their own learning experiences. For example, ‘Where should we go shopping?’ ‘Where would be a good place to put the new picture?’
- Set tasks and activities to ensure that all children experience success regardless of their ability.
- Show responsiveness and sensitivity to the child when you are engaged with her, for example, eye contact, active listening.
- Ensure regular observation and assessment is part of your daily practice to enable you to ‘tune in’ to children’s individual learning styles and preferred learning strategies.
- Respect and show value for children’s individual efforts, for example, creative efforts.
- Provide opportunities for children to take the lead, to initiate activity and to be independent.

Activities for Learning about Rights in the Home and in the Childcare Setting

*I am Special (young children)*

We are all special. Let children know how special they are by taking turns and sharing some of the ways you are special to each other. I am special because (I can bake a cake). You are special because
(you can tie your shoes).
I am special because (I have blue eyes). You are special because (you have glasses).
I am proud of myself because (I made my bed). I am proud of you because (you sing really well).
I have special feelings about (my baby sister). You have special feelings about (Granda).

Understanding responsibilities
Help children think more about responsibilities by talking together about ways you each do good things without being told. (I took you to football practice) (I tidied my room).
Get children to think about helping by asking them what they do to help get ready for bed... for dinner... to help a friend feel happy. Share with children ways you help too.

Wants-Needs-Rights (older children)
Encourage children to think about the difference between wants, needs and rights by completing these sentences:
I want (to be the best Daddy I can be). I need to have (friends).
I have a right to (feel safe).
I want to (learn to fly an airplane). I need to do (things with my imagination). I have a right to (decide what is best for me).

Now engage children by asking them to talk about their wants, needs and rights using the same sentence starters. A child might say ‘I want (a new doll)’. ‘I need (to brush my teeth)’. ‘I have a right (to go to school)’.

Make three lists — one called wants, another needs and another rights. Talk about the differences between the three lists. Can you decide on a definition for wants? For needs? For rights?

Do a similar activity about how we all take responsibility: You might say, ‘I have a responsibility to (take care of you when you are sick)’. A child might say, ‘I have a responsibility to (walk the dog every day after school)’.

What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?
- The Rights of the Child
- Health, Safety and Nutrition
- Special Educational Needs
- Child Protection

“Children need time for receiving and giving, for belonging and participating. They need to be part of a community, and they need to be individuals. They need privacy and sociability. They need time to rest and time to play, time to do nothing and time to work.”
What is self-identity?
Children's self identity is their understanding of who they are and their place in the wider world. In the years from birth to eleven, children's sense of their own identity develops; they come to understand their unique place in the world and the many different roles they have within their family, school and community. It is important that children develop a positive sense of their own identity and that they feel valued and respected as a unique individual. This contributes to children's understanding of themselves, relationships with others, self-esteem and self-belief. This is particularly important for children with additional needs, physical disabilities or speech and language difficulties, as they are more vulnerable to being excluded.

Why is it important that the child’s self-identity is valued?
The child's sense of self is closely linked to his family, home environment and community. For most children, the home environment is a safe, protective place where they are accepted for who they are. However, the transition to a new environment (preschool or school) can challenge this sense of acceptance. For the first time the child's name, speech, behaviour and traditions may not be the same as the rest of the group. The child's name may be mispronounced, his speech may sound different and he may be surprised to find that everyone is not the same skin colour. Just at a time when he may be missing his family and familiar, protective surroundings, he may struggle to find a firm foundation for his individual sense of identity.

How can we help children understand and value who they are and promote a sense of belonging outside the home?
When the child's transition to a new environment is handled with respect and understanding, it broadens her sense of self and leads to a positive developmental experience. A skilled adult can help the child to understand and articulate her own identity and to foster spiritual connections by learning to respect the perspectives of others and recognise the responsibilities to the world in which she lives. It is important for the child's emotional strength to feel a sense of connection and belonging to a particular group. Belonging provides a framework for her sense of security. It is difficult for a child to feel comfortable or secure if customs or things that are familiar to her at home are not apparent in her wider surroundings.

To promote a sense of belonging in the childcare setting, provide learning experiences that are meaningful to each individual child. It is important that the curriculum should develop from a blend of children's abilities and interests and the intended learning outcomes. In this way the curriculum can be adapted to meet the individual needs of the children within the setting (see section 5 for more ideas on adult-child relationships and section 10 for more ideas on developing self-esteem).

Learning opportunities, play activities and early years practice to promote children’s self-identity and sense of belonging
Play provides an important platform for forming, building and maintaining friendships and relationships. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ ways to play therefore, differences in children or their abilities can easily be accommodated. Through experience of inclusive play, in which all children feel included and supported, children gain a truer understanding of the world and the many differences between people.

Inform children about difference and diversity
- Have group discussions about the way individuals in the group differ in appearance and attributes.
- Play fun games where one member of the group is hidden and encourage the rest of the group to describe the missing child/adult.
- Use the diversity of music/song/dance as a fun way to promote awareness of different cultures – parents may be able to participate or help you with this.
- Teach children simple words or phrases in different languages, for example, please, thank you, hello, goodbye.
- Provide play activities that enable children to understand how it feels to be someone else, for example, to be blind, deaf, or isolated. Use persona dolls or puppets to help children understand feelings and perspectives other than their own.
Show value and respect for all children
• Demonstrate respect for differences in culture, language and family background. Help children verbalise what they know and understand about families. Talk together about how families are the same and how they are different. Discuss how pets are part of a family and have rights too. Display photographs of children’s families in creative ways, for example, on a family tree or on a low level notice board.
• Treat all children equally and fairly, for example, avoid ‘hovering’ over a child with additional needs as they become independent.
• Include children’s ideas in programme planning and show them that you value their contribution - draw peer attention to this ‘great idea’.
• Respect children’s right to choose, to participate or not to participate.

• Respect children’s need for space, quiet time, alone time.
• Spell and pronounce children’s names correctly.
• Get to know children’s preferred learning styles or learning strategies and provide opportunities for these. For example, does she prefer playing outdoors? Does he prefer quieter types of play? Does she work things out by talking them over? Does he learn best by exploring natural materials like sand and water? Is she a visual learner? (see section 2 for more ideas on respecting children’s rights through play).

Demonstrate positive interactions and communication
• Surround children with messages of love, respect, approval and understanding.
• Improve your listening skills by waiting a few seconds before responding so that children realise that you are taking their comments seriously.
Ask open, probing questions, for example, ‘Why did that happen?’ ‘What do you remember about …?’ ‘I wonder what would happen if …?’ ‘How did you do that?’ ‘Tell me how it works?’

Act as a scribe for what children say – write their precise comments on their artwork, on wall captions or in their scrapbook or folder.

Offer genuine praise and explain to children why you are praising them and what for.

Ensure children get regular and frequent individual attention (other than in response to distress or care needs), for example, read a favourite story, listen to an experience from home.

Use a ‘Buddy System’ for a new child or a child who has difficulty mixing with others for example, pair a new child with a more socially able child (see section 5 for more ideas on relationships).

Provide an inclusive learning environment

- Ensure that different cultures, family types, abilities and occupations are reflected across books, posters, play equipment, cooking utensils and dress up clothes. Also ensure that dolls have appropriate facial features and skin tone, for example, an African doll, an Asian doll or a European doll.
- Provide paper, paint, crayons and pencils that allow children to create different skin tones.
- Display all children’s creative work in a prime position to demonstrate the value placed on their efforts.
- Reflect the home language of all children in the setting through dual labelling of areas, belongings and play resources.
- Place equal value on indoor and outdoor play experiences.
- Employ bi-lingual staff or invite bi-lingual students to come to your setting for work experience.
- Familiarise staff with the Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers published by the Office of the Minister for Children.
- Access up to date information and advice regarding culture and diversity from agencies such as Pavee Point and access a Diversity Training Programme for childcare staff.

What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?

- Equality and Diversity
- Positive Behaviour
- Partnership with Parents
- The Rights of the Child

"Children need moments for devotion and room for curiosity. They need protective boundaries and freedom for creativity. They need to be introduced to a life of principles and given the freedom to discover their own."

The Colour Of My Dreams: Supporting Children’s Right to Well-being
What is play?

Play is a natural channel for young children’s thinking, learning and development and is central to their holistic well-being. All children need and have a right to play. Play is what children do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons. Play physically strengthens children’s bodies, expands their minds and influences many dimensions of development and is a powerful tool for learning. For young children, play is a way of strengthening meaningful relationships and co-operation with others and supports the development and use of language. An enriched play environment, indoors and outdoors, will stimulate children’s imagination, extend their sense of wonder, enable them to experience success and develop a positive attitude towards learning. To achieve this, children need appropriate periods of time for learning through sustained involvement in play.

Holistic learning and development through play

Together with a sound knowledge of the child’s individual stage of development, even the most everyday activity can become a valuable holistic learning experience.

Imaginative Play

Imaginative play develops self-expression as well as giving children the opportunity to explore their experiences. Children solve problems during imaginative play, as they act out things that have happened or could happen. Imaginative play helps children to see things from others’ point of view. It develops social skills, as children often play together for such activities, as well as fine and gross motor skills. For example, dressing up will require children to use fine manipulative skills, whereas running around pretending to be an action figure will help develop co-ordination and balance.

Manipulative Play

Manipulative play can be an individual activity such as puzzles, activities carried out alongside other children, such as building with bricks, or in groups such as a shared creative project. As well as developing fine motor skills, by engaging with children the adult can extend thinking, make suggestions and encourage children to complete tasks. Language skills are also enhanced by probing children’s thinking and encouraging them to describe what they are doing.

Creative Play

Considerable learning takes place through creative play. Children learn about the properties of materials, patterns, shapes, textures and symbols. Creative play offers the opportunity for children to develop fine manipulative skills because of the precise nature of many of the movements involved in activities such as painting, cutting and drawing. Participating in dance, music or movement activities enables children to practice a range of physical skills and can provide a therapeutic outlet for children to express emotions.

Physical Play

Physical activities are not only healthy, as they encourage children to eat and sleep well, but also develops self-confidence and physical confidence. Physical play develops both fine and gross motor skills as well as muscle control. It develops an awareness of space and develops an ability to take risks. Outdoor play often involves others and so it develops skills of turn taking and co-operation. Young children’s spiritual disposition is evident through their open-minded, inquisitive approach to life. Outdoor play offers rich opportunities for spiritual development and independent growth.

Why is it important to consider learning and development in a holistic way?

When we think of young children, we tend to think of them in terms of their small physical size. It is important to remember that, although children will develop physically over time, they are whole human beings from birth. If different aspects of children’s development is divided into individual strands the child comes to be seen as a collection of different bits and pieces instead of a whole person. When children are developing physically, they are also developing ideas, feelings, relationships and thinking skills at the same time. Development and learning are therefore interconnected and interdependent and when we view child development in this way and plan activities accordingly, we are taking a holistic approach. The physical, social and emotional context in which children live has a powerful influence on the effectiveness of learning opportunities.
For example, children’s ability to develop relationships with others is affected by their ability to communicate, to move and to think.

It is important to remember that while children learn much through unassisted play, learning is enriched and extended when the adult is involved through sensitive and timely intervention. A framework for holistic learning and development is provided by an adult who creates a meaningful play environment, interacts with children when appropriate, co-constructs learning through questioning, suggestion, demonstration and encouragement, and monitors and assesses both the children and the activity to inform future planning.

Children can occasionally require an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to provide a focus on a specific aspect of learning or behaviour. An IEP does not have to be complicated and can be used for short term learning support as well as long term. An IEP is a written document prepared for an individual child, which presents a record of the child’s strengths, needs and progress. The IEP specifies learning targets that are to be achieved by the child over a set period of time and identifies the strategies, resources and supports necessary to achieve these targets.
How can I provide holistic learning experiences and opportunities?

- Closely observe children during the course of natural day-to-day activities. This is central to recognising where children are in a learning process and where they are capable of going.
- Informed by observation and assessment practice, plan a curriculum that is meaningful and relevant to all children and that focuses on children’s emerging abilities.
- Enable children to reach a new concept or skill by acting as a scaffold for their learning. For example, give supporting information to a child struggling to understand a concept or provide physical support to a child learning to ride a new bicycle.
- Recognise the interconnected nature of children’s play as it affects learning in areas such as language, literacy, creativity, emotional and social development. For example, during outdoor walks point out road signs, colours, communicate with people and show an appreciation for nature.
- Acknowledge and support children’s individual learning preferences, for example, a preference to explore and learn through movement, touch, or vision to maximise learning potential.
- Value creativity and the arts as ways for children to make meaning and sense of themselves and their world, for example, through language, art, dance, movement or music.
- Provide opportunities for discovery learning through self-selected activities, and encourage the development of children’s abilities to observe, predict, explore, investigate, imagine and problem solve.
- Use daily routines such as eating, toileting, dressing and resting as opportunities for learning and social development, therefore ensuring these times are engaging, stimulating and offer varied opportunities for learning.
- Respect the needs and rights of children to make choices and decisions by empowering them to take responsibility for the functioning of parts of the day’s routines as well as the care of their environment and resource.
- Recognise the need for children to practice skills and consolidate their learning by providing opportunities for repetition of experiences and extension of their ideas.
- Ensure that the play environment develops, changes and evolves according to the changing needs and interests of children. An unchanging indoor or outdoor environment will limit children’s opportunities for challenge, development and progression in learning (see section 5 for more ideas on relationships and section 9 for ideas on nurturing spiritual growth).

What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?

- Curriculum and Learning through Play
- Special Educational Needs
- Planning, Observation and Assessment
- Partnership with Parents
- The Rights of the Child

"Children need people to respect, adults whose example and loving authority they follow."

The Colour Of My Dreams: Supporting Children’s Right to Well-being
What are secure relationships?

From the moment children are born, they begin to form relationships with the people around them. These relationships are an essential part of their early life and contribute largely to their overall development. Initially children’s main relationships are with their parents, but as children grow older, other relationships begin to form and become a significant part of their lives. These relationships can include people both inside and outside the family, for example, close family members, Childminders or Childcare Practitioners. The most important aspect of any relationship for children, especially babies, is that it is a secure relationship. Essentially, secure relationships are those which are responsive to all the needs of a child. These needs can include their physical, emotional and developmental needs. With the help of secure relationships, children can explore the world around them and be confident that if anything happens, they can rely on the adult to be there, to help them and make them feel safe.

Why do children need secure relationships?

Children bring their experiences of early relationships with them in life and this can affect their long term behavioural and emotional development, for example, how children react and adapt to new experiences, situations or people from an early age. Being part of a secure relationship enables children to develop a sense of who they are and a sense of being important in the lives of others. The benefits for children who enjoy secure relationships are vast, including self-confidence, motivation, independence, good peer relationships, social skills and an understanding of emotions. Secure relationships also develop a foundation for empathy (being able to understand how someone else is feeling), an openness to two way interactions with peers such as taking turns and enhanced thinking and reasoning skills (see section 10 for more ideas on developing self confidence).

How can I develop and enhance secure relationships?

Build on affection

- Be affectionate with children. Young children need and enjoy a lot of affection, for example, tickling their stomach, stroking their cheek or rubbing their back. As children get older, they may not to want or need quite as much hands on affection. In building secure relationships, be sensitive to what each child is comfortable with.
  - Play games with children which naturally allow and encourage affection, for example, peek-a-boo or clap hands with babies/toddlers.
  - Use baby massage on younger children. For older children, carry out a hand or foot massage.
  - Pre-school children or older children can vary in the amount or type of affection they are comfortable with. They may still want to be hugged, however others may prefer simpler or more subtle methods of showing affection, for example, rubbing the top of their arm or winking at them. Play simple, fun games such as:
    » Adult says ‘When I’m happy, I like to …. smile’.
    » Child’s turn ‘When I’m happy, I like to …. ’
    » Adult says ‘When I’m sad, I like …. a hug’.
    » Child’s turn ‘When I’m sad, I like …. ’

Focus on interactions

- Focus on children’s strengths and positive attributes, for example, draw attention to the things they are good at.
- Listen to children and to what they have to say.
- Use supportive words to let children know you are interested in what they are doing.
- Be physically available. Try to be at the same level as children for example, sitting on the floor with babies who are crawling, put a toddlers’ high chair at the dinner table so they are included with the family, sit near new activities in a childcare setting so the children know you’re there if they need you.
- Avoid completely protecting children with special needs from trying things for themselves. If children are allowed enough challenge, they learn about their own abilities and about how to cope with difficulties.
- Remember mistakes are not really mistakes, rather they should be seen as learning opportunities. Secure relationships are further developed by children knowing
that adults will help them learn from their mistakes.

- Agree limits and rules. Limit setting provides children with a framework for routine and guidance for behaviour to help them understand what is acceptable and unacceptable.

- Use observation to follow the child’s lead. A key element of developing secure relationships with children is in supporting them to make independent choices rather than the adult directing them what to do. Some of the benefits of supporting children in this way is that it follows the child’s individual interests and greatly improves her motivation to learn.

- Read books together which focus on different types of relationships, for example, family relationships, relationships with friends or a special pet.

- Sit and talk with children on a one to one basis. Ask them about what they are doing or how their day was.

- Give children choices where feasible, for example, ask them what they want to do, what they want to eat or where they want to play.

**Provide predictability and routine**

- Be aware of how transitions can have an effect on children, for example, the birth of a new sibling or moving from Pre-school to Primary School. Discuss the upcoming changes in advance as a means of preparation.
Use books and pictures to help illustrate changes or take children to visit a new setting in advance.

- Provide predictable daily routines and physical environments to develop a sense of security. Children can be comforted by knowing where to find things and what to expect within their daily routine. Discuss what’s planned for the day with children, for example, if they are going out or if there is something special happening. Make a wall planner, use pictures to represent what’s happening, encourage the children to stick on the pictures.
- Use a Key Worker System to act as a secure base for children in a childcare setting. This involves adults within a setting having responsibility for a core group of children within a larger group. The adult and children come together at different stages throughout the day, for example, mealtimes or to carry out activities. This type of system allows children to form a stronger relationship with one adult within a group setting and allows for greater information sharing between parents and carers.
- Give children a designated place at home, in a childcare setting or school which is their personal area. If they don’t have time to complete what they are doing, they can use this space to leave their activity and come back to it again at another time (see section 3 for more ideas on self-identity).

**Promote and reflect acceptance**

- Reflect important relationships in a child’s life to give her a sense of security. This will in turn deepen relationships for her as she learns to feel comfortable within each relationship. Display photographs of the important people in her life, for example, her parents, grandparents, siblings and friends (see section 3 for more ideas on self-identity).

**What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?**

- Key Worker policy
- Partnership with Parents
- Positive Interactions

Children need a range of experience - tenderness and kindness, boldness and courage, and even mischief and misbehaviour.

“Children need a range of experience - tenderness and kindness, boldness and courage, and even mischief and misbehaviour.”
What is a language for feelings?
When we use a language for feelings we are naming, acknowledging and dealing with the different feelings we all experience throughout our daily lives. Children, like adults, may feel angry, sad, lonely, guilty or any of a huge range of emotions, depending on the circumstances surrounding them. It is important that adults help children recognise and understand these emotions by providing them with a language to communicate their feelings to others and in turn empowering children to cope with more difficult emotions. Children’s understanding of their emotions contributes, not only to their understanding of themselves, but also an understanding and awareness of the emotions of those around them.

Why help children with feelings?
When children are able to name, recognise and talk about their feelings they are better able to cope in times of stress, react appropriately to difficult situations and interact with their peers. Their behaviour can also be heavily reliant on their ability to communicate their feelings. For example, if a child is feeling angry it is important that the adult recognises this and does not label him as ‘bad tempered’ or as ‘playing up’, but rather acknowledges the feeling ‘I can see that you are angry but it does not make it ok for you to…..’. When naming and defining feelings, it is important for adults to recognise that children develop an understanding of emotions at different stages. Some children are more emotionally literate (able to understand emotions) than others. Children may begin to understand basic emotions like fear, sadness, happiness and anger at quite a young age, however, more difficult emotions such as pride and shame may not come quite as easily. Respecting and understanding children’s basic emotions gives them the space and trust to explore and express more difficult emotions. It is important that adults learn to recognise these emotions, particularly for very young children. For example, a young toddler may feel embarrassed if their nappy is being changed in front of others, and therefore it is important that adults are observant and sensitive to his emotional expressions.

Emotional understanding is a developmental stage like any other in children’s lives. Just like children learn to walk and talk, they also learn to recognise and express their feelings appropriately. As with any other skill, the age at which children develop this skill can vary; some appear to develop this skill quite quickly, while others develop it at a slower rate. Adults have an important role to play in helping children understand their emotions.

How can I provide learning opportunities, play activities and early years practice to help children deal with difficult feelings?

Communicate a language for feelings
• Encourage children to voice their feelings and help them to react in an appropriate manner.
• Support children to name and recognise emotions, such as happy, sad and excited. This can be facilitated through activities such as the ‘feeling spinning wheel’, where children sit in a circle and take turns at spinning the arrow. When it lands on a face they name the emotion and tell the group about a time when they felt that way. The wheel can be accessed by children at all times for them to explain to the adult what they are feeling at any time when they are unable to name the emotion themselves.
• Use magazine pictures and books to discuss faces and expressions to help children identify emotions through these facial expressions. Use books to promote the use of a language for feelings, ask children to identify how a character in the book is feeling and to relate this to their own experience.
• Ask questions such as:
  ‘How did you feel when that happened’?
  ‘How do you think he/she felt when that happened’?
• Avoid telling children how they should feel. When adults do this it can be very difficult for children to recognise what they actually feel. Statements such as ‘don’t be sad’ should be avoided and replaced with an acknowledgement of the child’s feeling and some explanation of it, for example, ‘I see you are sad, do you want to tell me what happened’?

Empower children to deal with their feelings
• Introduce the ‘turtle technique’ to encourage children
to self-talk and problem solve. Ask children to imagine they have a shell like a turtle that they can retreat to when they are feeling angry. The children are encouraged to take a deep breath and think about why they are angry. They are encouraged to stay in their shells until they feel calm enough to come out and try again.

- Talk with children about non-verbal behaviour you notice when carrying out day to day observations for example, ‘I noticed you frowning, are you feeling worried?’ This provides children the opportunity to discuss feelings they may not yet understand.
- Encourage children to express both positive and negative emotions using statements such as ‘It’s ok to be angry, I understand how you feel’.
- Use games and activities to provide children with examples of how to recognise difficult emotions and initiate discussions around these emotions, for example, tell a story about a child ruining another child’s painting, encourage the children to discuss the picture or scenario with an open-ended questions like ‘How do you think John felt about what happened?’, or prompt a tag line like, ‘I felt guilty when…’ and encourage children to complete the sentence.
- Never discourage children from expressing their feelings, children can appear angry/sad to an adult unexpectedly. This can happen particularly with children who have communication difficulties when the adult cannot identify immediately the cause of the child’s upset. Provide the child the time and space to express their feelings and encourage them to label what they are feeling and why (see section 10 for more ideas on promoting self-esteem).

**Act as a ‘feelings role model’ for children**

Use the language of feelings in your communications with children and other adults. By observing this behaviour, children can learn how to recognise and express certain feelings they may not yet fully understand. Learning to talk about emotions also helps children to cope with difficult feelings rather than keeping them to themselves or bottling them up. When talking with children about emotions it can be useful if the adult demonstrates empathy with the child and tells them of a similar experience that made them feel the same way (see section 5 for more ideas on relationships).

**Promote the language for feelings in the learning environment**

- Use books that convey messages about different emotions and make them accessible to the children.
- Display pictures/posters that visually represent different emotions so children can use these to identify feelings they may not be able to describe.
- Encourage children to participate in creative activities to express different emotions, for example, make emotions face masks.
- Use resources such as emotions cards, persona dolls and puppets to encourage children to explore different emotions.
- Using different types of music/sound, encourage children to match the music to an emotion, for example, loud, fast music could represent anger and fear, slow soft music could represent feeling tired, comedy/cartoon music could represent feeling silly or funny. This can be particularly beneficial to children with additional needs who may not be able to articulate their emotions verbally.
- Provide a variety of colours of paint/crayons to enable children to express feelings visually through colour. Talk with children about their choice of colours.

**What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?**

- Key Worker
- Promoting Positive Behaviour
- Curriculum and Learning Through Play
- Planning Observation and Assessment

*If you would like to find out more about quality experiences for young children in this area, refer to Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, Standard 5: Interactions, Standard 12: Communications*
Children need help to develop self-mastery, to transform themselves and bring forth their highest capacities.

The Colour Of My Dreams: Supporting Children’s Right to Well-being
What is the relationship between physical well being and learning?

Physical well-being encompasses a variety of factors from healthy eating and physical activities to ensuring children receive appropriate immunisation. While not all children are born perfectly healthy or able to live life without injury or illness, with good care and nurturing, adults can have an impact on children’s ability to live a happy and productive life. A child’s active lifestyle is reliant on having a healthy body, a healthy mind and a nutritious diet. Social skills and the development of gross and fine motor skills are all improved by physical activities. Movement helps children to understand the concept of space and size and also helps to activate the brain, making it ready for new learning experiences. Children learn through doing, and physical movement enables children to demonstrate newly acquired skills, for example, how many times have we heard a child shouting “look at me!” when she first reaches the top of the climbing frame.

Why is it important to develop physical well-being?

The promotion of a healthy attitude towards nutrition and physical activity is essential right from birth. From breast feeding to providing healthy balanced meals, adults are having a positive impact on children’s physical well-being. Eating regular and balanced meals and instilling a positive attitude towards food impacts on children’s energy levels, concentration, self-esteem and overall physical health. From children’s early experiences of grasping for toys and exploring objects, to balancing on one foot and riding a tricycle, children are continually learning and developing new skills. Children tend to develop core skills such as walking, grasping and running in their own time, but adults play a key role in promoting the development of children’s spatial awareness (where they are in relation to other objects) and balance. Some children may be reluctant to explore environments which challenge these abilities. Through regular observation and assessment practice, adults can get to know each child’s stage of development and plan a range of activities that challenge not only the most adventurous children, but also those who appear less confident, to gradually progress at their own pace.

How can I promote children’s physical well-being?

Promote healthy eating
- Support children to understand the relationship between eating a healthy diet and having a healthy body.
- Encourage children to experiment with food by providing opportunities for them to cook, taste and feel different types of food. Even very young children can help by washing fruit and mixing ingredients.
- Provide food and utensils from other cultures for children to explore, for example, eating Chinese food with chop sticks.
- Encourage children to choose their own food while out shopping. Fresh fruit and vegetables are more appealing when children choose them themselves.
- Avoid banning certain foods. If adults make a big deal about sweet, sugary foods and drinks they will become more appealing to children. A little in moderation is acceptable provided they are balanced with nutritious snacks at other times.
- Invite health professionals into the setting, for example, Public Health Nurse, Dental Hygienist or Nutritionist, to provide information sessions to parents and children.

Provide children with space to explore
- Children need time and space to physically explore their surrounding environment, especially areas where they can be physically active. It is important that children’s movements are not restricted for prolonged periods of time, for example, buggies and highchairs should be used only when necessary. By providing safe, open areas, children are enabled to develop movement skills, build on their natural curiosity, use their imagination, initiate new activities and enhance their large muscle development.
- Provide babies with supervised ‘tummy time’ each day to encourage them to stretch and explore.
- Place toys/equipment slightly out of babies reach so that they can be challenged to stretch and reach.
- Play outdoors! By playing outdoors a child can enhance their sense of awe and wonder of the world
around them and discover their place in it.

- Provide opportunities for children to climb trees, explore under rocks and splash in puddles and streams.
- Create uneven ground outside, with steps, mounds and different types of surfaces, like bark and sand, to help children master their skills of going up and down and develop balancing skills to negotiate steps, ramps and hills. Be mindful that a child with a disability may not be able to master some of these obstacles, therefore make appropriate amendments, depending on her individual capabilities (see section 9 for more ideas on spiritual growth).

Encourage the development of fine and gross motor skills

- Use home-made treasure baskets from interesting and natural sensory objects for babies to explore with their hands and mouth.
- Encourage the use of building blocks, Lego, stacking rings, stickle bricks, jigsaws, peg boards, sorting shapes and fitting lids onto boxes.
- Encourage children to pour their own drinks and make simple sandwiches.
- Provide opportunities for cutting, sticking, drawing and painting.
- Present a variety of activities to children, which will
empower them to develop push and pull techniques.

- Initiate ball games, encourage children to use climbing frames and skipping ropes to enhance their coordination skills. These types of activities can be particularly beneficial to children with coordination difficulties.

Children need a lot of practice not only to coordinate movements but also to learn if their body is moving with the required effort. For example, how much pressure do I need to apply to lift this cup? How hard do I need to push this toy before it will move? Wheeled push toys are excellent for developing this sense. Marking out paths and roads with paint or chalk allows children to practice steering by weaving through lines and obstacles and requires the use of hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness and imagination, taking the child on whatever journey she pleases.

Provide opportunities for children to develop their sense of balance

- Organise activities such as Musical statues, ‘Row, row, row your boat’ and ‘Ring a Ring a Rosy’.
- Pretend to be different animals, like hopping rabbits and slithery snakes.
- Arrange stepping stones, both indoors and outdoors, to enable children to make giant steps or jump between them. Raised stepping stones can provide space for children to use their imagination as well as develop their sense of balance, running between them and jumping from one to the other. Upturned bread crates can also be used for children to make their own pathways.
- Use outdoor games which encourage children to spin, twist, roll and skip, provide opportunities for children to fall over on purpose and grassy slopes that they can roll down.
- Provide children with obstacles, like planks of wood, to practice balancing, and objects like tunnels or barrels to crawl through.
- Encourage children to come down a slide on their tummy (with adult supervision). This increases children’s control over their bodies.

What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?

- Physical Play
- Curriculum and learning through play
- Healthy Eating
- Special Educational Needs

If you would like to find out more about quality experiences for young children in this area, refer to Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, Standard 2: Environments, Standard 6: Play.
“Children have the right to dream, and they need time to grow at their own pace. They have the right to make mistakes and the right to be forgiven.”
What is inner strength and resilience?
Inner strength and resilience refers to a child’s ability to cope with the changes, challenges and adversities she comes across in life. These can range in severity and frequency for a child. For example, it could include a subtle adaptation such as an unexpected change in her daily routine to something bigger such as moving house or a change in family structure. Essentially, developing children’s inner strength provides them with skills to be able to cope and deal with the unpredictable. It enables children to adapt and move forward in life.

Why support inner strength and resilience?
The main reason for supporting inner strength and resilience is that it creates opportunities for positive cycles in life for children. It enables children to cope with the challenges they face in life, deal with such challenges and come through them with a positive outlook to their future. Children who develop resilience and inner strength are more inclined to have a positive self-image. They are more open to being aware of what they are good at and in turn creating positive cycles for themselves. Children who lack inner strength can often fall into a negative cycle of thinking. Children with emerging inner strength and resilience are more likely to experiment and find a skill they are good at which can help them form a positive cycle of thought for themselves. This can then further promote and support resilience. For example, in the case of a child who struggles academically in school, if he lacks inner strength, he may be inclined to think he is not going to achieve in general. However, a child who is resilient may be more open to experimenting with a variety of challenges and may discover he is good at music, sport or art. By trying to develop and succeed with new skills, children can feel better about themselves which can promote a positive cycle and further support their inner strength.

How can I build children’s inner strength and resilience?
There are a wide variety of factors which can support the development of resilience and inner strength in children. These factors, if put in place, can create significant positive outcomes in each child’s life and future.
playing an instrument or painting a picture.

- Avoid meaningless or stereotypical praise. For example, praising a girl because of the dress she is wearing or the brand of clothing worn by a child.
- Listen to children, show an interest in what they say and consider their point of view. Avoid telling children what to think or do, for example, telling them they won’t like swimming without letting them try first.
- Avoid comparing children to each other. All children develop at different rates and thrive in different areas. For example, some children may show a strong interest and ability in painting while others may be more physically agile. In building inner strength, adults can use such inclinations to start positive cycles for children (see section 4 for more ideas on learning holistically through play).
- Provide children with the freedom to make ‘learning mistakes’. Offer support and encourage children to try new experiences even if they are hesitant.
- If a child is struggling with something, encourage him to persevere and remind him that not everybody is good at everything. He may simply need to keep trying new things to find what he is good at.
- Never label children, for example, telling a child that she is ‘naughty’ ‘bold’ or ‘bad’. If an incident occurs with a child, explain to her that what she did wasn’t a good idea or an acceptable form of behaviour. This will give her an opportunity to correct the specific behaviour. If a child is labelled as ‘naughty’ they may not fully understand what is causing them to be labelled with such a term.
- Use positive praise as a behaviour management strategy. For example, if a child is unwilling to share, remind her of a time when she did and the effect this had on her peers. This will make the child feel better about herself and draw attention to positive aspects of her behaviour.

**Build up external supports for children**

- Parents can encourage children to be involved in family life including regular interaction with the extended family.
- Encourage children to join clubs and societies based
on their own interests and what they're good at. For example, there may be a strong family background in gaelic games but a child may not enjoy this and may prefer to learn to play a musical instrument.

**Develop communication, social and emotional skills**
- Discuss feelings with children to help them identify what they are feeling and how this can impact on their actions.
- Encourage children to express their needs or emotions.
- Support social development in all children from a young age and assist them in their interactions by talking them through situations they encounter. For example, if a child is trying to take a toy from another child, explain to him about waiting his turn (*see section 6 for more ideas on developing a language for feelings.*)

**What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?**
- The Rights of the Child.
- Curriculum and learning through play.

*If you would like to find out more about quality experiences for young children in this area, refer to Siolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, Standard 4: Consultation, Standard 5: Interactions, Standard 16: Community Involvement.*
“Childhood is a time for learning about the essentials - about the heavenly world and the earthly, about goodness, beauty and truth. Children need a relationship to the earth - to animals and to nature, and they need to unfold as human beings within the community.”
What is spirituality?
From birth, children are curious about who and what surrounds them in their world. For example, babies playing with their food, children asking why they have different coloured skin to their friend or what clouds are made of. It is through curiosity that children learn about life, nature and society. Simply put, spirituality includes the nurturing and encouragement of children’s curiosity, wonder and awe of all that they encounter in their daily lives. It heightens their awareness of the importance of valuing themselves, others and the natural world around them. Children are not born materialistic or with a negative attitude. They pick up habits and as time progresses, if not maintained, they tend to lose their unique curiosity and wonder. Spirituality is frequently connected to religion however, the spiritual growth of each child can be developed without involving any one specific faith, for example, encouraging children to respect themselves and others, a common factor of many religions but not specific to anyone.

Why is it important to nurture children’s spiritual growth?
Encouraging spiritual growth is a natural process for children as it follows their natural instincts and curiosities. Developing spirituality answers children’s questions so that they can form a better understanding of what happens within their environment, for example, explaining leaves fall off an autumn tree as part of nature’s cycle rather than saying it’s because of the wind. Encouraging children to question things, situations and people, helps develop an open-minded perspective. This can be carried through to their understanding of other cultures, traditions or beliefs that differ from their own.

Spirituality can enable children to enjoy each stage of childhood for what it is. Formal learning or pre academic learning (reading, writing) can push children through various stages of development as a means of getting to the next stage and can prevent children from enjoying the experience of learning. In today’s society, computers, televisions and the media offer a constant stimulation to children which can result in children continuously trying to reach a definite end goal. Encouraging spiritual growth enables children to enjoy experiences rather than the end product, for example, encouraging children to enjoy the creative experience of painting rather than practising colouring inside the lines of a template.

How can I nurture and develop spirituality?

Use nature and the outdoors
• Ensure children have regular access to nature and outdoor environments as it encourages the development of a child’s appreciation of the natural world and why it needs to be cared for.
• Provide regular access to outdoors to develop children’s observational skills. Place a damp log outside to allow children to observe how insects are attracted to such environments.
• Keep as many natural features in outdoor spaces as possible, for example, grass, trees, flowers, mud, stones.
• Plant seeds with children to help them visualise the life cycle of a seed to a flower.
• Use photographs to demonstrate cycles as naturally as possible, for example, to demonstrate the life cycle of the butterfly.

Promote the value of all people including themselves and others
• Provide connections between the various stages of life for children, for example, telling them stories of what they did when they were babies. Make a ‘Story of Me’ scrapbook using stories, pictures and photos to illustrate the life of each child.
• Share memories with children and explain about the value attached to memories.
• Show children a variety of pictures they can relate to in order to initiate discussion and help children understand the difference in materialistic and emotional value, for example, pictures of mother, father, a garden, a chocolate bar, a pet or a new toy. Encourage children to think about the impact or place these items have in their lives.
• Be aware of various beliefs and discuss them openly with children. Help children to recognise that others may think or feel different to them.
• Answer children’s questions as truthfully as possible.
• Encourage children to appreciate themselves. (See section 3 for more ideas on self-identity, section 10 for more ideas on self-esteem and section 8 for more ideas on inner strength and resilience).

Use art/ dancing/ role play to appreciate and explore individuality
• Use freedom within art / dancing / role play with children as an inclusive method of exploring their own abilities and thoughts as well as those of others.

What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?
• Outdoor play
• Promoting children’s well-being

Chapter 10
Supporting Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

“Childhood is a time to be loved and to love - to express fear and to learn trust, to be allowed to be serious and calm and to celebrate with laughter and joy.”
What is self-esteem?
Self-esteem is the value we place on ourselves. It is a personal perception of ourselves and how this makes us feel. It is the knowledge that we are lovable, capable and unique.

Good self-esteem in children means:
• They have established a sense of identity
• They have a sense of self-worth
• They feel they are accepted and valued by adults and peers around them
• They feel confident and have self-knowledge.

The foundations of self-esteem are laid early in life when babies develop attachments with the adults who care for them. When adults readily respond to their cries and smiles, babies learn to feel loved, valued and accepted by the people they look up to. Parents have the greatest influence in shaping their child’s sense of self-worth, as they are her first and most important teachers. The child’s self-esteem is further influenced as she develops relationships with other family members, childcare practitioners, teachers, peers and other adults.

Why is self-esteem central to children’s well-being?
Healthy self-esteem is imperative to children’s well-being. It is a prominent factor in building and supporting social, emotional and mental well-being. These factors also play a major role in children’s academic achievements and physical health. Self-esteem in babies and young children will influence and develop a child so that they can become ready to learn, conquer challenges, take risks, cope with mistakes, set realistic expectations and develop positive relationships with others.

How can I enhance children’s self-esteem?
Children’s self-esteem can be strengthened and enhanced, both in the home and in the childcare setting, in a number of ways.

Demonstrate love and acceptance
Show children that they are loved and accepted simply because of who they are. Children need to believe that they are worthy of love (even if their behaviour is sometimes challenging) from the most important adults in their life. When children feel accepted, they feel comfortable, safe and secure, and are open to communication. If children feel respected and secure within a family or childcare setting, they will develop a healthy sense of self-worth (see section 1 for more ideas on the importance of adult well-being and section 3 for more ideas on promoting self-identity).

• Spend time together - play, talk and relax together.
• Show children that you value them, ‘I like what you did/said’ and ‘I love you’.
• Show love and acceptance through daily expressions of affection, care and concern, for example, provide books, dolls, puzzles and posters that reflect children and adults expressing love and affection.

Promote a sense of security and safety
A sense of security and safety allows children to try new things, explore their curiosity and learn about themselves. When children feel safe, they have the confidence to explore, meet challenges and take risks.

• Provide a safe environment that has access to a range of activities that will encourage children to face challenges and take risks, to develop their own capabilities.
• Support children’s curiosity about the world around them, by answering children’s questions sincerely (see section 9 for more ideas on nurturing spiritual growth).
• Set clear boundaries and consistently use positive behaviour strategies.
• Be realistic in expectations, for example, through your regular observation and assessment practice, plan activities and opportunities that are age appropriate and support children developmentally to enable them to achieve, regardless of their abilities.
Nurture trust
A stable environment provides children with a sense of security. When children know that an adult can be relied upon to be consistent and to give help when necessary it helps children to think, ‘I can trust you’, and ‘I can trust myself’.

- Ensure that your verbal and non-verbal messages agree.
- Be honest about your feelings to yourself and to children.
- Be consistent so children know what to expect, for example, provide a Key Worker System to help children settle into a new environment and provide continuity of care between the home and a childcare setting.

Show respect
Children will develop respect for themselves and for others if they learn that what they think, feel and do is important. If children experience criticism, they will feel unworthy. Criticism or punishment which is too harsh will prevent children from developing self-confidence. Accepting children’s right to have feelings helps them learn to respect the feelings of others. If you show children healthy ways to express their feelings, they will develop positive relationships (see section 6 for more ideas on developing feelings).

Value individuality
All children are special. It is important for adults to help children
discover their own special talents and qualities. Once they identify what makes them special, they need to learn to value their own strengths.

- Help children to understand that feeling special does not mean feeling better than others; rather, it is a positive understanding of their own uniqueness.
- Provide opportunities for children to try things their own way.
- Help children understand that trying their best is more important than winning.
- Value children’s uniqueness, for example, encourage children to draw pictures about themselves and their family to develop a book about themselves. This will help children to understand that they are unique and special.

Inspire confidence
It is extremely important to give children support and approval. Children who have faith and confidence in themselves and their abilities will be more likely to lead happy and productive adult lives. Provide opportunities so that children learn from their mistakes, work towards a goal, and have pride in their successes (see section 8 for more ideas on supporting inner strength and resilience).

- Empower children to make decisions and to set goals.
- Express faith and confidence in children and their capabilities.
- Help children recognise that there are things they must accept and things they can choose to change.
- Encourage children to face challenges and take risks, for example, provide opportunities and activities that will challenge children during their play.

What policies and procedures should I have in place to support and provide guidance to staff in this area?
- Promoting Children’s Well-being
- Positive Behaviour
- Positive Interactions
- Planning, Observation and Assessment
- Key Worker

*If you would like to find out more about quality experiences for young children in this area, refer to Síolta the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, Standard 2: Environments, Standard 5: Interactions, Standard 9: Health and Welfare.*
The Colour Of My Dreams: Supporting Children’s Right to Well-being
**APPENDIX 1**

**Children’s Right to Well-being in Ireland**

Everyone is entitled to human rights – those things that allow us to live in dignity as human beings. But children cannot assure their own welfare. They depend on adults for their survival. They need adults to provide for them, to protect them from harm and to guide them. They need adults to love and care for them, and to respect and listen to them. Policy documents concerning early childhood care and education in Ireland are underpinned by similar philosophies and have many common principles.

The National Children’s Strategy, ‘Our Children: Their Lives’ (Government of Ireland, 2000) establishes a ‘whole child perspective,’ which aims to provide a more complete understanding of children’s lives. It recognises that children have the capacity to shape their own lives while also being affected by the world around them. The ‘whole child perspective’ identifies nine different dimensions on the lives of children, including family relationships, self care, physical and mental well-being, emotional and behavioural well-being, social and peer relationships, social presentation, intellectual capacity, spiritual and moral well-being, and identity.

Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006) is a quality assurance programme outlining a national set of quality standards for early childhood education which places the child at the centre of early childhood practice. Síolta is an Irish word meaning ‘seeds’. It has been adopted as the name of the National Framework for Quality in Early Childhood Education as it conceptualizes the potential for growth and development contained within the framework.

The Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations 2006 require that a person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that each child’s learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the service, through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child and the child’s cultural context.

Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 legislation is highly significant for those working in childcare and education services as it provides the definition of a child as a person 0-18 years. Amongst other areas, this legislation highlights children’s right to an assessment by professionals where they may have a learning difficulty and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that will set out the child’s educational needs and supports to be provided.

The Framework for Early Learning (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009) is an early childhood curriculum framework that puts forward an interconnecting set of themes and learning goals. The Framework for Early Learning views the child as an active, capable and competent learner able to think for themselves, express their views, interact with others and participate actively in family and community life.
Statement of Intent
At ........................................ we recognise the importance of developing and nurturing children’s holistic well-being. Our Child Well-being Policy promotes emotional and physical development, health and positive mental well-being. Staff at ........................................ will provide an environment in which children feel emotionally safe, secure and happy. All children and their families attending our service will be respected and valued. Through our curriculum, children will have opportunities to enjoy learning, play, grow and develop as an individual. We understand that children are all unique and we will provide children with appropriate challenges and opportunities to support the different areas of their learning and development.

Procedures
Nurture children’s mental health
• Children will be encouraged to value and respect themselves and others through everyday play and learning opportunities.
• Play opportunities will be used as a vehicle for helping children explore, name and understand emotions.
• Staff will follow positive behaviour management strategies and regularly seize opportunities to give children genuine praise as a means of enhancing self-esteem.
• Staff will engage with children in a positive manner, respecting the voice of the child in decision making, problem solving and in shaping his/her own learning experiences.
• Staff will observe, appreciate and respect children’s individual learning styles and preferences.
• We operate a Key Worker System that helps children settle into the setting and provides continuity of care between the home and the childcare setting.
• Staff will work in partnership with parents, professionals and outside agencies to support and develop children’s mental health.
• We recognise the link between adult and child well-being by following a staff care plan.

Promote a culture of participation
• Staff will listen to children’s opinions, encourage children to make choices and empower them to take the lead on their own learning experiences.
• Staff will respect and value children’s individual efforts and achievements.
• Staff will provide children with learning opportunities, play activities and an environment that promotes the rights of all children.
• Staff will consult with children regarding activities, themes and curriculum plans.
• Staff will ensure that the curriculum offered is inclusive of all children including children with special educational needs.
• Staff will provide a balance between child initiated and adult initiated activities.
• Staff will participate in daily observations and assessments to be aware of children’s individual learning styles and preferred learning strategies.
Promote healthy eating habits in children

- Mealtimes and cooking activities will be used to provide opportunities to inform and educate children about nutrition and healthy eating.
- Children’s meals will be balanced with a variety of healthy foods and new tastes will be actively encouraged.
- Children will have access to fresh drinking water throughout the day.
- Key Workers will sit with children during mealtimes to encourage positive interactions and promote social skills.
- Children will be encouraged to make choices and decisions during mealtimes and cooking activities, for example, ‘what drink would you like, milk or water’? ‘What shall we cook tomorrow gingerbread or pizza’?
- Staff will provide positive modelling and supportive attitudes to encourage healthy eating.
- Parents will be involved in encouraging and promoting healthy eating by providing healthy snacks for children.
- A range of methods and resources will be used to promote healthy eating, for example visits from a Dental Hygienist, Nutritionist or Public Health Nurse.

Provide physical play

- Children will have daily opportunities for physical play indoors and outdoors, regardless of the weather.
- Weather proof clothing is readily available in the service, for example, sunhats and rain jackets, to allow for outdoor activities all year round.
- The indoor and outdoor environment will be used daily to offer babies and children a wide range of learning opportunities to develop both fine and gross motor skills and muscle control.
- Provisions are in place to enable all children to participate in physical play regardless of abilities.
- Equipment and resources used for physical play are age appropriate and support children developmentally.
- Children will have regular opportunities to play in a natural environment where they can explore and investigate the world around them.
- Parents will be encouraged to work in partnership with the service to promote and support physical play.

Signed: 

Reviewed: 

‘Staff’ refers to all Childcare Practitioners/Childminders.
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