

Health Promotion and Improvement Department of the HSE

The development and delivery of the programme is supported by the Health Promotion and Improvement Department of the HSE which was recently established by the Government arising from new governance arrangements for health services in Ireland. The work of this section of the HSE is focused on helping people to stay healthy and well, reduce health inequalities and protect people from threats to their health and well-being beginning in their earliest years.

National Childhood Network (NCN) (formerly Border Counties Childhood Network, BCCN)

NCN is a National Voluntary Childcare Organisation, funded by the Department Children and Youth Affairs that works to advance the achievement of national quality standards in both Early Childhood and After School services. NCN provides a broad range of supports to Pre-school services in particular to meet the requirements of Siolta and Aistear through: Information provision; QQI training; Continuing Professional Development (CPD); On-site mentoring; Risk assessment; Collaborative working with other agencies on the island of Ireland.

The programme supports Pre-school services to achieve many of the Siolta standards and requirements of Aistear. Evidence collated to meet the requirements of becoming a Healthy Ireland Pre-school service may also be used to achieve validation of your service in line with the Siolta Standards.

For further information contact:

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Healthy Ireland Smart Start

Health Promotion
Training Programme
for Pre-school Services

Become a Healthy Ireland Pre-school Service

Health Promotion

Oral Health

Nutrition

Health & Safety

Physical Activity

Emotional Well-being/Literacy

Healthy Ireland Framework

Through the Healthy Ireland Framework the Government envisages that 'people and organisations will be brought together from the length and breadth of the country into a national movement with one aim: supporting us all to enjoy the best possible health and well-being.'

'The well-being and health of the people living in our country is the most valuable resource that we have. Health is a major asset for our society, and improving the health and well-being of the nation is a national priority for the Government' (HSE, 2014). Through the Healthy Ireland Framework it is envisaged that sustainable co-operative action for health and well-being will be established that will engage a broad range of stakeholders. It is designed to include Government Departments, local authorities, public bodies businesses and employers, sports and voluntary groups, communities and families.' Healthy Ireland 2013 - 2025.

Role of the Pre-school sector






Within this context, the pre-school sector has a vital role to play in promoting young children's health and well-being. In recognition of the importance of this role, the HSE has subsidised the development and delivery of the Healthy Ireland Smart Start programme nationwide.

Healthy Ireland Smart Start Programme

The programme provides:

- Information and resources for pre-school staff
- 21 hours of training for pre-school staff
- Information and resources for children /parents/carers
- External assessment of health promoting practices within participating services
- Opportunity for pre-school services involved to become publically recognised as Healthy Ireland Pre-school services
- Ongoing email and telephone support from NCN staff

Why is the pre-school a good setting for health promotion?

-  Pre-school staff can have a significant impact on children's behaviour at an early age
-  Pre-school settings provide children with many different opportunities to develop healthy lifestyle habits
-  Positive health behaviours encouraged by pre-school staff at this young age tend to persist into later life
-  Pre-school activities encourage children to take personal responsibility
-  Settings provide opportunities to promote better health for the whole pre-school community – children, parents/carers/families and staff

The programme includes a focus on:

Health Promotion

Developing a Healthy Ireland pre-school service, implementing health promoting practices into the daily curriculum to benefit children, parents/carers, families and staff.

Health and Safety (Accident Prevention)

Ensuring that the indoor and outdoor environments within the pre-school setting are safe, hygienic and free from risks to health. Pre-school staff will learn about health and safety practices through the training programme in order to better care for the welfare of all stakeholders in the pre-school be it staff, children, parents/carers or visitors.

Oral Health

Learning how to support children to look after their teeth and gums through the daily routine/curriculum. Together staff and children carry out important learning about tooth care which they will share with parents/carers.

Nutrition/Healthy Eating

Research worldwide shows that influencing children to develop healthy eating habits at a young age can help prevent childhood obesity and avoid chronic health problems in later life. Well informed Pre-school staff will help children understand the importance of healthy food to their development. Staff capacity will be enhanced to encourage children to acquire healthy eating behaviours in a number of ways. These will include: Small group activities and discussions; provision of resources in different interest/play areas; fruit and vegetable tasting; information leaflets for parents/carers. These and other activities within the service's curriculum will help raise children's and parents/carers awareness of the importance of good nutrition.

Physical Activity

Pre-school staff will be made more aware of the importance of active play, both indoors and outdoors for children of all abilities. Active play for pre-school children helps develop motor skills, encourages social interaction between children, is fun and has numerous health benefits, such as heart health, bone health, muscle health and healthier body fat composition, preventing overweight and obesity. Active play also helps to build children's confidence and enhance their mental and emotional well-being.

Emotional Well-being/Literacy

Pre-school staff will receive valuable information, learning and practical ideas through the training on promoting children's emotional well-being. Children's story books that help to enhance children's emotional well-being/literacy, music CD, puppets and other resources will also be made available. NCN staff will provide additional telephone and email support to practitioners especially to enhance partnership working with parents/carers in promoting children's well-being/literacy, both within the setting and the home. Promoting children's emotional well-being/literacy in their early years is vitally important for the promotion of all aspects of children's holistic development.