

# Early Childhood Education

Friday, 31 August 2007

Early Childhood Care and Education in the Cook Islands covers the years from birth to school age. The early years, of a child's life is a very significant time for growth, development and learning. Early childhood draws and builds upon the language and cultural experiences of the child, and reflects the nature, values and aspirations of the family and community, as it prepares the child for lifetime learning. Download: Early Childhood Education Curriculum Document  
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{mospagebreak title=Parents Information& heading=ECE Overview} Parents Information

The new Early Childhood Curriculum is designed to help children to know 'who they are', as individuals and as members of a family, community, and country. During the early years, children become involved in developing their own self confidence and building positive relationships with other people, and they become aware of their environment through inquiry, exploration and play based learning.

The Curriculum recognizes the importance of Cook Islands Maori language and culture, fosters co-operation, respect and caring, and promotes programmes with close linkages with the home and the community. How can parents help?

- Spend some time in the Early Childhood center with your child
- Help the children by answering their questions honestly and simply
- Read to your child, talk about the pictures, and let your child 'read' the story to you in their own words... the children will 'read' from the pictures and use their imagination to tell you a story.
- Let them help you with baking, cooking, shopping. Talk about what is happening and why.
- Ask questions the right way... 'tell me about your painting'? This will get the child talking, because if you ask them 'what's that?' you will probably get a one word answer.
- Talk to your child about whatever is happening around them
- Love, praise and encourage your child at all times!
- Enjoy your child, laugh with them often and have fun with them!

{mospagebreak title=Tips for Parents} Tips for Parents

As parents of young children, you are entitled to choose which ECE center you want your child to attend. When choosing the 'right' one for your child, visit a few, and then make your choice.

At present, a child can attend ECE from the age of 3 ½ , but... watch this space, as the enrolment age may lower in the future. You can attend and stay with your child under this age.

Take time to settle your child into ECE, stay a while with them, enjoy being with the teachers and children! As your child is only this age for a very short time, and this is the age they learn so much! Be part of that learning.

During the time your child is at the ECE center, the teachers will be compiling a portfolio for each child on their Learning Journey, so ask to see it regularly, and add your comments to it, and when your child turns 5, this portfolio comes to the family. It is a wonderful treasure to have as it should be full of samples of your child's artwork, with learning stories about your child's learning and development during these important years.

The learning environment for children should be a bright, happy, fun place for them to grow and learn within a group of similar aged children. Children learn through responsive relationships with people, places and things around them, and through working together with adults and peers, and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection.

Play is the way that children learn! So the important things to remember, about a child's early years is: Work is play, and play is their work.

{mospagebreak title=Teachers and Principals} Teachers

Most of the teachers in ECE are Primary trained, but the Ministry of Education has recognized the importance of these early years and the necessity to have trained qualified ECE teachers for our children, so some of the teachers are studying for their specific ECE qualifications.

The teachers recognize the need to treat each child as an individual, and look at each child 'holistically'. That is, as a whole child, providing, not only for their mind, but their body, their

emotions, their social needs and their spirit.

Each teacher is preparing and documenting a portfolio of your child's Learning Journey, of their time in the ECE center. These portfolios contain artwork, assessment and stories about your child's learning and development.

Our ECE teachers are all dedicated, and enthusiastic, and are all adopting the "play based" learning environment for children, as a valuable way for children to learn and develop all the necessary skills for transition to their school life.

#### Principals

Principals have a vital role in early childhood education as, each Primary school has had a pre-school class attached to and within their schools, for many years, and the teaching methods, up till now has been "semi-formal".

Now, the Ministry of Education has changed the title from pre school to Early Childhood Centers, and each one of the centers has adopted the "play based" learning philosophy, as the best way to assist children's learning and development. The Ministry of Education also shows its commitment by employing advisors for ECE who offer support, advice and guidance to parents, Principals and teachers.

Earlier this year, each ECE center was given a complete set of furniture to assist with this transition to "play based" learning. We now see children choosing their area of play, and having fun while they learn!

The development of the "new look" ECE centers and philosophy is in development, and there are changes not only to the "environment" of each center, but also the planning and assessment procedures for the teachers, in order to provide the best possible quality early childhood education for the young children of the Cook Islands.

The principals are seeing many great changes to the way that early childhood is being presented in their schools.