

More About Síolta

Standard 2: Environments

Enriching environments, both indoor and outdoor (including materials and equipment) are well maintained, safe, available, accessible, adaptable, developmentally appropriate, and offer a variety of challenging and stimulating experiences.

This standard has eight components as follows:

(Try to keep in mind how you can meet these components in relation to the three different age ranges: 0 to 18 months, 12 to 36 months and 2½ to 6 years)

Component 2.1

The indoor and outdoor environment is well planned and laid out to accommodate the needs of all children and adults in the setting.

This component is concerned by the layout of the environment and how it meets the needs of the children and adults. Think about things like safety, privacy, personal care needs, sleep and rest facilities, heating, lighting and décor, organisation of the learning space, facilities for free movement. Is space provided for the child's belongings? What facilities are provided for nappy changing and feeding?

Can the Childminding business co-exist with your family, with minimum lifting, folding, stacking and storing and un-storing each day!

However large or small your garden, is it child-friendly? Children love to be outdoors and they have the opportunity for a higher level of physical activity. Research tells us that they need to move about, to learn to move and manipulate heavy objects safely. Family home childcare is about doing real things in the environment. Cement is more fun than play-dough and it is satisfying for children to see and use a path they have laid or a wall to surround a planting patch or a sand pit which they have built.

Component 2.2

The environment (including equipment and materials) is adaptable for, an accessible to, all children and adults within the setting.

Can children move freely from one area to another? How do you maintain privacy for your family's rooms and possessions? Think about accessibility for children or adults with special needs? Are toilet and changing facilities accessible for all? How does the environment meet the needs of children of different abilities and cultural backgrounds? Can children use equipment and materials by themselves?

Have as much of your home useable by the children as is practicable. There is nothing so limiting to a child (or to you!) than a day spent in a perfect playroom, full of perfect plastic toys!

Get with recycling and use your imagination! See the play or construction potential of anything (clean) going out of the supermarket for recycling. Keep the boot of the car empty for bringing home unexpected treasures.

Component 2.3

The indoor and outdoor environment is well maintained and ensures comfortable and pleasant surroundings for children and adults.

How do you make the environment comfortable and pleasant? Think about heating, lighting, seating and regular reviewing. How is cleaning organised? Think about personal hygiene routines for the children, pest control, laundry, cleaning of play equipment and materials e.g. dress-up clothes, etc.

Comfortable is the word that jumps out of this component. There is a push in the USA to use screens to break down the large nurseries into sitting rooms and living rooms which have comfortable chairs and couches and are quieter, therefore encouraging reading and conversations. You have this already in your home. You can use throws to respect the soft coverings.

Component 2.4

The environment promotes the safety, both indoors and outdoors, of all children and adults.

What regular checks are in place to ensure that the outdoor area is clean and free from hazards? How is the outdoor area secured and maintained to ensure children's safety and protection from harm? How do you keep your home free from health hazards such as medication, waste materials, cleaning agents/chemicals? How have you designed the indoor environment/equipment to reduce risk of injury? Are all exits accessible and fully functioning? Is the water source safe? Consider storage areas to ensure safety. Do you have a full equipped First Aid box which is easily accessible? Ensure smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and fire blankets are provided and are serviced. How do you ensure that there are safe areas for babies and toddlers outdoors?

Keep your eyes open, Risk Assessment is not a once-off event, it's going on all the time. If it's torn or worn – remove and replace.

Component 2.5

The outdoor environment provides a range of developmentally appropriate, challenging, diverse, creative and enriching experiences for all children.

How do you provide and promote opportunities for the children to experience the outdoor environment? How does the range of equipment meet the needs and abilities of the developing child? What sort of experiences does the outdoor equipment promote for all age groups? Can children access toilet facilities from the outdoor area? How do you ensure that the child has sufficient space outdoors to foster curiosity and exploration and to allow the flexibility of individual or group play?

An environment which promotes exploration and provides challenges will pose some risk but your job is to remove unnecessary risk and show children how to manage the necessary risks.

Component 2.6

The indoor environment provides a range of developmentally appropriate, challenging, diverse, creative and enriching experiences for all children.

Is a space provided for children to display their work at their own height? Can children's work be stored until it is completed and brought home? How does the environment facilitate and support the development of social activities and interaction? What different indoor experiences are offered to the children in the various age ranges?

Again, the challenge is to engage children in the household activities as far as possible. It may take you longer to make a casserole with many small helping hands, but the opportunity for real learning with a real outcome, for language and social development is worthwhile – and the job does get done! Watch a TV cook programme with the children on a rainy afternoon and then try it out together, shopping for the ingredients and becoming the celebrity chefs.

Component 2.7

There is an appropriate amount of equipment and materials within the setting (both indoors and outdoors) for use by individual children and groups of children.

What range of developmentally appropriate equipment and materials is available for all children within your home to support the child's learning and development? How do the equipment and materials ensure that the changing learning needs of each child are met? How do the equipment and materials appeal to multiple senses and consist of both natural and manufactured products?

While children grow into and grow out of toys, books and activities, the younger ones come along and use them, there is a difference between the comfort of the 'beloved and familiar' and just plain 'old and boring.' Variety is the spice of life so rotation of toys and books works – if you have the storage space.

Component 2.8

The environment provides for the safe management of food consumption.

How do you ensure good hygiene practice in all places where food is stored, prepared and consumed? How do you safely store food?

Childminded children have dramatically lower rates of infection than centre-care children, so Childminders are doing the hygiene practice well. Plenty of anti-bac handwashing and surface cleaning, a good big fridge for separating cooked and raw and thorough cooking and re-heating.