

Supporting quality interactions during care-giving routines

Connections to *Aistear* and *Síolta*

Aistear

Themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking

Guidelines for good practice: Learning and developing through interactions (pp.27-51)

Síolta Standards

1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3

5: Interactions, C5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5

Research Digests linked to the above Standards

This tip sheet looks at interactions during care-giving routines and provides some ideas on how to make them positive learning experiences for babies and toddlers.



Adult-child interactions

Adult-child interactions are one of the most important aspects of quality early childhood education. When you spend time caring for, playing with and talking to babies and toddlers in your group, you are supporting them to build strong attachments. A warm and caring approach is fundamental to creating a secure environment where babies and toddlers feel confident and competent.

Importance of communicating

Babies and toddlers notice and respond to your tone of voice, your smile, your touch and your facial expression, so smiling and having fun together is important. Babies and toddlers communicate non-verbally through movement, gestures, facial expressions and verbally using sounds and words. Being aware of these cues and responding to them, helps children to learn that they are important and that you are available and ready to interact with them. Care-giving routines are key times for these positive interactions and are important for all children but are especially important for children from birth to 3 years. Every moment during these routines is an opportunity for learning and development.



What are care-giving routines?

Care-giving routines are repeated, predictable moments in a child's life around bodily functions such as nappy-changing, sleep-times and meal-times. You can create a predictable routine for babies and toddlers to match their individual need for sleeping, eating and nappy-changing. Routine gives babies and toddlers a sense of security by knowing, *I will get something to eat when I am hungry* and *My nappy will be changed when it needs to be*. A predictable routine means that the child knows in advance what to expect giving them a feeling of safety and trust. Develop care-giving routines that allow plenty of time for babies and toddlers to connect and co-operate. Babies who are rushed can become frustrated, find it difficult to co-operate and may not build the social skills necessary to manage within a group.

Care-giving routines provide valuable opportunities for some one-to-one interactions. They are positive experiences for babies and toddlers when they are respectful and carried out in a spirit of care and partnership and at a pace that suits the child. Let's look at an example of a care-giving routine, nappy-changing. The tips below can also be used at meal-times and sleep-times.

Care-giving routine: nappy-changing

Nappy-changing times are intimate times and babies and toddlers need you to support them through the process.

- **Try to wait for a time when there is a lull** to do a nappy change, so the child is happy to go with you as they haven't been disturbed in their play!
- **Slow down what you do and set the scene** for the child by naming what you are going to do, using a soft tone of voice. Put words on your actions to make everything predictable, for example, *Emma, it is time to change your nappy so we are going to the changing mat*. Wait and see if you get a response. Give the child your undivided attention. If there is a strong relationship between you and the child, he/she will smile and raise hands. Toddlers can walk with you and can climb up steps independently. This is a connection moment, time away from the group and an opportunity to strengthen relationships.
- **Come in close for younger babies**, about 20-30cm from their face, as babies like to look at faces. When the baby focuses on your face, it is important that he/she sees positive facial expressions (smile) and hears nice tones (gentle talking). This creates a good atmosphere and the baby learns that you enjoy being with her, supporting the child's self-confidence.
- **Talk to the child**, keeping the words that you use connected to the task in hand. Come in close to the baby (this helps concentration) naming what you are doing, for example, *We are ready to begin changing your nappy*.
- **Pause and wait for a reaction**. If the child makes sounds or words, repeat them. This encourages her to make more sounds, supporting language development.

- **Name each step** as you change the nappy, pausing and waiting for a reaction. Naming what is happening and smiling puts the child at ease and builds trust and confidence. It also supports language development and builds self-esteem.
- An older child can participate by holding the wipes, the cream or the nappy. **Being independent and developing self-help skills** is important.
- When the nappy change is complete, **name this for the child**, for example, *We're all done now, you have a nice clean nappy.*
- Take an extra moment to look for a reaction and smile. Maybe give a tickle or say a nursery rhyme, for example, *Round and round the garden.* When the child looks at something, for example, the mirror, put words on this such as, *Mary, you are looking at the mirror.* When this moment has passed and the child is ready to move on take time to tell the child that you are now ready to bring her back into the playroom.

Care-giving routine: sleep-times

At sleep-times, follow a similar routine, giving time for the child to relax, perhaps read a story and know that sleep or rest is coming soon. When a baby or toddler wakes up, remember he/she may need a little time to adjust before coming back to the group. When you go to the cot or bed to take up a just-awake baby, smile, say hello and ask, *Are you ready to come back and play?* Then when the child is ready lift her up and give a cuddle. When a child indicates by body language or words that he/she is ready to go back to the room then you can perhaps tell them what is happening in the room, as you walk back.

Care-giving routine: meal-times

At meal-times sit with the group of babies or toddlers and support them to develop self-help skills such as spooning vegetables, taking slices of fruit or pouring drinks. Have lots of conversation about what they are eating, how it tastes and feels and about what they have been doing. Take the time to be with the children and enjoy the meal-time together!

