**The Willow Tree Children’s Service**

**Family Involvement Policy**

**Rationale and Policy Considerations**

Aistear and Síolta highlight the important role parents and families play in children’s lives. The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide uses the term ‘parent’ to refer to the child’s primary caregivers and educators. These include the father and mother and/or guardians. The two frameworks provide ideas and suggestions to help practitioners build good relationships with parents and families and give ideas on how to involve them in the early childhood setting. Strong partnerships support all families but are especially helpful for parents in situations that may make it difficult for them to participate in their children’s learning and development as much as they would like.

Parents are the most important people in children’s lives. The care and education that children receive from their parents and family, especially during their early months and years, greatly influence their overall development. Extended family and community also have important roles to play (Principles and themes, 2009, p.9). Similarly, Síolta’s principle on parents acknowledges that, Parents are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his well-being, learning and development (2006, p.6).

The benefits of parents and practitioners working together:

For Parents: • feel value and respected • are more involved in their children’s learning and development • can share information about their children • feel their family’s values, practices, traditions and beliefs are understood and taken into account • feel comfortable visiting the setting, talking to and planning with practitioners • know more about their children’s experiences outside the home and use this informaiton to support their learning and development more effectively • understand why early childhood care and education is important • have increased confidence in their own parenting skills.

For Practitioners: • understand better the children and families in their settings and use this information to make learning more enjoyable and rewarding for all children • can help children develop a sense of identity and belonging in the setting by actively engaging with and finding out about family values, traditions and beliefs, and building on these where appropriate • benefit from parents’ skills and expertise • can provide a more emotionally secure environment for children.

For Children:• feel more secure and benefit more from the educational opportunities given to them • move from one setting to another with greater confidence • see learning as more enjoyable when their home life is ‘visible’ in the setting • enjoy hearing and seeing their home language in the setting when their home language is neither English nor Irish • experience more connections between the different services that support them.

## **Policy Statement**

Parental participation and community involvement is integral in this plan as it facilitates stability and consistency for the child and provides them with a strong sense of belonging (NCCA, 2009). We believe that children benefit most from early years education and care when parents and settings work together in partnership. Our aim is to support parents as their children’s first and most important educators by involving them in their children’s education. We also aim to support parents in their own continuing education and personal development. In carrying out the following procedures, we will ensure that all parents are included.

Note: When we refer to ‘parents’, we mean both mothers, fathers and guardians; these include both natural or birth parents, as well as step-parents and parents who do not live with their children, but have contact with them and play a part in their lives. ‘Parents’ also includes same sex parents, as well as foster parents.

## **Procedures & Practices**

* Parents are made to feel welcome in our setting; they are greeted appropriately each day by teachers / management. We do our best to ensure all parents feel included. We make every effort to accommodate parents who have a disability or impairment.
* We consult with all parents to find out what works best for them and we have a suggestion box in the lobby. We ensure on-going dialogue with parents to improve our knowledge of the needs of their children and to support their families. We inform all parents about how the setting is run and its policies, through our website, Facebook page, Child Paths portal, WhatsApp, Displays in the Lobby, and through regular informal communication. We check to ensure parents understand the information that is given to them.
* We involve parents in the shared record keeping about their children – either formally or informally – and ensure parents have access to their children’s written developmental records. Information about a child and his or her family is kept confidential within our setting. We provide you with a privacy notice that details how and why we process your personal information. The exception to this is where there is cause to believe that a child may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, or where there are concerns regarding child’s development that need to be shared with another agency. We will seek parental permission unless there are reasons not to in order to protect the safety of the child.
* We seek specific parental consent to administer medication, take a child for emergency treatment, take a child on an outing and take photographs for the purposes of record keeping etc. all included on your application form.
* The expectations that we make on parents are made clear at the point of registration.
* We seek parents’ views regarding changes in the delivery of our service. We are a community-based service and therefore, parents are actively encouraged to participate in decision making processes according to the structure in place within our setting. We encourage parents to become involved in the social and cultural life of the setting and actively contribute to it. As far as possible our service is provided in a flexible way to meet the needs of parents without compromising the needs of children.
* The children’s key workers meet regularly with parents to discuss their child’s progress and to share concerns if they arise. Where applicable, our key persons work with parents to carry out an agreed plan to support special educational needs. Where applicable, our key persons work with parents to carry out any agreed tasks where a Protection Plan is in place for a child.
* We provide opportunities for parents to contribute their own skills, knowledge and interests to the activities of the setting. Also, we support families to be involved in activities that promote their own learning and well-being; informing parents about relevant conferences, workshops and training.
* We inform all parents of the systems for registering queries, complaints or suggestions and we check to ensure these are understood. All parents have access to our complaints policy.
* We provide opportunities for parents to learn about the curriculum offered in the setting and about young children’s learning, in the setting and at home. There are opportunities for parents to take active roles in supporting their child’s learning in the setting: informally through helping out or taking part in activities with their child, or through structured projects engaging parents and staff in learning about children’s learning.
* As part of our settling in policy, we recognise that successful experiences during early transitions can increase a child’s ability to adapt to changes in the future and can provide a more secure base for their learning and development. We work to develop strong relationships between the family and the service through frequent communication and sharing of information and goals.

## Communication Plan [For staff & families]

All parents/guardians are to be informed of the policy and procedures regarding Family Involvement on enrolment. Staff members will check with parents/guardians that they have read and understood the policy and provide any assistance needed.

A summary of this policy will be included in the Parent/Guardian Handbook and the full policy is available on the website www.blennerville.playschool.com

This policy will also be reviewed with staff at induction and annual staff training.

A copy of all policies will be available during all hours of operation to staff members and parents/guardians upon request.

Parents/guardians and the staff team will receive written notification of any updates.

**This policy must be observed by all managers and all staff members.**

This policy was reviewed and adopted by The Willow Tree Children’s Centre on 1st January 2024.

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of Management

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