

# TUSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

## A Tusla short guide: **For parents who are newly arrived in Ireland**



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# Introduction

**This document was written to try and help you with your transition to Ireland. We want to welcome you to Ireland and help you and your family navigate the cultural differences while you stay here. Some of our laws and ways of parenting may be different from your country, so we hope this information will make this time a little bit easier for you.**

Included in this document is some practical guidance that we hope will help you navigate the early years of a child's life while in Ireland, from pre-school childcare and the schooling system, right through to child supervision and family support services. We have also included some other sections in this document that we hope will be helpful to you.

This guide has been developed by The Child and Family Agency (Tusla), with input from families who have recently arrived in Ireland.



# What are Children's Rights in Ireland

**Children's rights include the right to health, education, family life, play and recreation, an adequate standard of living and to be protected from any type of abuse and harm. Children's rights cover the early years from when the child is born, right up until the child becomes an adult in Ireland at 18-years of age – unless legally married.**

## Parents' and Guardians' Responsibilities

In Ireland, parents and guardians have the primary responsibility for the care and protection of their children. In some cases, for a range of reasons, parents may not be able to provide care and protection for their children, and sometimes more intensive assistance may be needed to keep the children safe from harm. In these circumstances the Irish State may intervene with the aim to build on the existing strengths of the family. Various State agencies offer support to help families overcome difficulties and to ensure that the child is safe.

In Ireland, it is important to be aware that physically slapping or hitting a child is not allowed by any adult either in the home or at school. In Ireland, all forms of corporal punishment of children are against the law. This can be treated as a crime and referred to An Garda Síochána (the Irish police).

## Supervision of Children

Most parents or guardians have to spend some time away from their children, whether it's for longer periods when going to work or shorter periods for social activities. Children must never be left alone, so parents should make arrangements for their child to be cared for by trusted friends or with a childcare service or minder.

There is no set age at which it is legal to leave children home alone, as it depends on whether the child is mature enough to be left alone. In Ireland, children under 14 years of age are not seen to be mature enough to be left alone or unsupervised. For older teenagers, it is the decision of the parent or guardian, based on the child, their level of maturity and their living circumstances.

Children mature at different ages, but the following is a rough guide to when children can stay home alone:

**Can I leave my baby home alone?**

No, not even for a few minutes.

**Can I leave my young child home alone?**

Young children should never be left home alone, not even for a short time.

**Can I leave my older child home alone?**

It is recommended that children under the age of 14 years old should not be left home alone for more than a very short time.

**Can I leave my teenager home alone?**

Teenagers over the age of 16 can be left home alone.

**What age does a babysitter need to be?**

If you need to use a babysitter, you should always make sure they are over 16 years old, and you should ask them for two references to check they are responsible enough to be left with your children.

*(Globe All IPIP Information Pack, 2010)*

If a child is left alone and unsupervised, particularly in group settings, and there are any concerns around this, then in these circumstances Tusla Social Workers may intervene to address these concerns and support the family.

**Family Support Services**

Family life is not always easy, especially in hard times of transition and uncertainty. Tusla Family Support Services can help. Simply having someone to talk to about your problem can be the easiest way to begin to deal with it. There are many support groups for adults, teenagers, children, and carers that give people the chance to tell their own stories and give support to each other. Family Support Services are generally provided to families' in their own homes and communities.

Whatever your circumstances, Tusla provides a range of services that offer advice and support to families. This includes family support workers, social workers, youth workers, Family Resource Centres, support groups and counselling services. These services can be accessed through local Family Resource Centres and Child and Family Support Networks. These types of services help families work through difficult issues, ensure children have a stable environment to live in, and provide support for parents who are finding it hard.

**Family Resource Centres** are

at the centre of many communities and are a great source of information, advice, and support. They also provide a wide range of family support and parenting programmes:

<https://www.familyresource.ie/>



## Family Support Contacts

<b>Child and Family Support Networks</b>	<a href="https://www.tusla.ie/familysupport/">https://www.tusla.ie/familysupport/</a>
<b>Parenting Supports</b>	<a href="https://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/">https://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/</a>
<b>Local Social Work Teams</b>	<a href="https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams/">https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams/</a>
<b>Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC)</b>	<a href="https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams/">https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams/</a>
<b>The Irish Government's Parenting Support Webpage</b>	<a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/91ea0-support-and-advice/#local-supports-for-parents">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/91ea0-support-and-advice/#local-supports-for-parents</a>

### Child Protection and Welfare

The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) is responsible in Ireland for the safety and well-being of children. An Garda Síochána (the Irish police) also have responsibilities for the safety and welfare of children under Irish law.

Everyone is responsible in Ireland for reporting if children with whom they are in contact may be suffering from abuse or neglect.

#### What to do if you witness a concern about a child

In Ireland, there is a legal obligation on everyone to report any concerns about a child. Tusla should always be informed if you have reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected. This also includes if you witness something in a group setting or accommodation centre.

If you are worried about the welfare and safety of a child, you must contact Tusla's Duty Social Work Teams/ Dedicated Contact Points without delay:

<https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams/>

#### How do I report a concern about a child?

You can report your concern in person, by telephone or in writing to the local social work duty service in the area where the child lives. Here you can find contact details for the Tusla social work teams:

<https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/contact-a-social-worker3/>

**Child protection or welfare concerns can include:**

- Evidence of an injury or behaviour, that is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to have been caused in any other way
- Any concern about possible sexual abuse
- Consistent signs that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- A child saying or indicating by other means that he or she has been abused
- Admission or indication by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse they committed
- An account from a person who saw the child being abused

If you are a foster carer there is additional information that you will need to know - further details available here:

<https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/mandated-persons/foster-carers/>

Any query or concern in relation to children outside of normal work hours can be reported immediately to

An Garda Síochána:

<https://www.garda.ie/en/contact-us/station-directory/>



# The Childcare System in Ireland

## Pre-school Childcare

In Ireland, generally, children under the age of 6 years old access some form of early childhood education. There are two main schemes to assist families with this:

1. **Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE)**
2. **National Childcare Scheme (NCS)**

## ECCE - The Free Preschool Programme

The ECCE programme is a free pre-school programme available to all children for two years before starting primary school. This runs from September to June for three hours per day for five days a week.

Children are suitable for this programme from the September after they turn 2 years and 8 months. This scheme ends at 5 years and 6 months. For any queries on the ECCE scheme please contact: [eyqueries@dcya.ie](mailto:eyqueries@dcya.ie)

## National Childcare Scheme

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) is an additional scheme which 'wraps around' the ECCE Scheme. It provides additional financial support toward the financial costs of childcare for the hours spent outside of pre-school. There are three types of Referrals that can be made to this scheme:

1. **Universal**, 2. **Income Assessed** and
3. **Sponsor Referrals**.

For Information on 1. Universal and 2. Income Assessed Referrals: Contact: [www.ncs.gov.ie](http://www.ncs.gov.ie) or **+353 1 906 8530**.

**Sponsor Referrals:** If you have been granted **Temporary Protection**, the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) can cover the full cost of childcare under NCS sponsorship arrangements. This Sponsor Referral must be made by a **sponsoring agency**, of which Tusla is one.



## What does a Sponsor Referral mean for me as a parent?

The person working with you from Tusla will fill out a referral form for you for this type of referral. This form will tell you the number of hours of childcare that you can use per week. The maximum hours available per week are 45. You can use these hours with a participating, Tusla registered childcare service. The referral form will also tell you how long the referral will last. In general, this will be for one year.



## Where can I get more information?

The NCS Sponsors Team can be contacted by phone at **+353 1 906 8535** from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday or by email at [sponsors@ncs.gov.ie](mailto:sponsors@ncs.gov.ie)

You can use the [Childcare Search Function](#) to search the full list of NCS childcare service providers on [www.ncs.gov.ie](http://www.ncs.gov.ie)



## City/County Childcare Committees

These also support and assist families with early learning care providers. Information can be found at: [www.myccc.ie](http://www.myccc.ie). Children aged between the ages of 4 and 18 will be supported to access public primary or post-primary education provided by the State as appropriate.



# The Education System in Ireland

## Enrolling in School

In Ireland, children must go to school from the age of 6 years old until they are 16 years old.

The early years of school are called '**Primary School**' years. This education is free, and all children are legally required to attend. The child must be at least 4 years of age at the start of the school year to begin in school. In Ireland, the parent or guardian must ensure that the child goes to school every day. The parent or guardian must also tell the school and give a reason if the child is going to be absent. The school must report to Tusla Education Support Service, if your child has missed twenty days or more in the school year or if it is concerned that your child is missing too much school. Please find school attendance information for children: [https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/english\\_leaflet.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/english_leaflet.pdf)

The next phase of school in Ireland is called '**Secondary or Post Primary School**' and is for students aged 12 to 18 years. Attendance at school is essential for students aged under 16. The majority of secondary schools do not charge fees.

Children aged between 4 and 18 will be supported to access public primary or secondary education provided by the State. To get your child started in education, you can approach your local school and they will provide information on how to enrol.

A list of schools can be found here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/directory/category/495b8a-schools/>

## Regional Education and Language Teams (REALTs)

REALTs have also been established in Ireland in response to the increased number of children requiring school places who are fleeing the war in Ukraine. The REALTs support Ukrainian families to enrol their child in school. Ukrainian families having difficulty getting a school place, can contact their **local REALT Team** here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/48639-information-for-schools-ukraine/>

## Tusla Education Support Service (TESS)

staff are key members of the REALT Teams and will also assist families if they are having difficulties finding a school place: <https://www.tusla.ie/tess/get-in-touch/> or **+353 1 7718636 / +353 1 7718586**



## Other Information that might be helpful

### Age of Consent to Sex

In Ireland, legally you can consent to sex at 17 years of age. This is the same no matter what your sexual orientation or which gender or genders you are sexually active with. More information on this can be found at:

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth\\_family\\_relationships/children\\_s\\_rights\\_and\\_policy/](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/children_s_rights_and_policy/)

### At what age can people get married in Ireland?

The age at which people can marry in Ireland is 18 years of age. If a person is under the age of 18 years of age, they have to go to the Courts to get an 'Exemption Order' for the marriage to be allowed.

### Legal Age for Working

In Ireland, children from 14 to 18 years old will sometimes get a part time job in the summer or outside of school hours. Young people attending college will also sometimes work part time and fit this around their studies.

A young person can work part-time from the age of 14 years old, and full-time from the age of 16 years old. However, while they are under 18 years old, there are limits to the amount of time young people can work and the type of work that can be done.

For more information about working under the age of 18 years of age, information is available at Citizens Information:  
[www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

### Right to Gender Identity

In Ireland you can identify your gender at any age. To have your gender legally recognised you must be over the age of 18 years old. More information on this can be found at:

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth\\_family\\_relationships/changing\\_to\\_your\\_preferred\\_gender.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/changing_to_your_preferred_gender.html)

### Alcohol and the Law

You must be 18 years old or over to buy alcohol in Ireland. It is illegal to serve, buy or give alcohol to a person who is under 18 years old. Drinking alcohol in most public places is not allowed in Ireland.

### Living with a with a host family in Ireland

We hope that living with a host family in Ireland will be a positive experience for most families. However, if any challenges arise and you need any information on this please contact:

- The Irish Red Cross: if your accommodation was organised through this organisation, phone: **1800 753343**
- International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS): If you require government accommodation contact the IPAS Helpdesk for support (available 24 hours) at:  
**[ipasinbox@equality.gov.ie](mailto:ipasinbox@equality.gov.ie)**

### For general information:

- The Irish Refugee Council:  
[www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie](http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie)
- Citizens Information:  
[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving\\_country/asylum\\_seekers\\_and\\_refugees/refugee\\_status\\_and\\_leave\\_to\\_remain/accommodation\\_for\\_refugees.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/asylum_seekers_and_refugees/refugee_status_and_leave_to_remain/accommodation_for_refugees.html)

## Domestic Violence and Gender Based Violence

Domestic Violence is not acceptable and is against the law in Ireland. You can report it if it to the **An Garda Síochána** if it happens to you or your family. Domestic Violence refers to the use of physical force, emotional force or the threat of physical force, including sexual violence in close adult relationships. It includes violence perpetrated by a spouse, partner, son, daughter, or any other person

who has a close relationship or lives with the victim.

Under domestic violence law in Ireland, there are protections available by getting safety orders and barring orders (to stop the person coming near you or your home). More information on this is available from the Legal Aid Board Ireland:

[www.legalaidboard.ie](http://www.legalaidboard.ie)

## Helpline and Crisis Services

<b>Garda Síochána (Irish Police) - 24 hours</b>	999/112 or your local Garda Station <a href="https://www.garda.ie/en/">https://www.garda.ie/en/</a>
<b>Rape Crisis National Helpline - 24 hours</b>	1800 778888 <a href="https://www.drcc.ie/services/">https://www.drcc.ie/services/</a>
<b>Women's Aid Helpline - 24 hours</b>	1800 341900 <a href="https://www.womensaid.ie/">https://www.womensaid.ie/</a>
<b>Men's Development Network</b>	1800 816588 <a href="https://mensnetwork.ie/">https://mensnetwork.ie/</a>
<b>Men's Aid Ireland</b>	01 554 3811 <a href="https://www.mensaid.ie/">https://www.mensaid.ie/</a>



# List of Organisations that work with people new to Ireland

<b>Clare Immigrant Support Centre (CISC)</b>	<a href="http://www.clareimmigrantsupportcentre.com">www.clareimmigrantsupportcentre.com</a>
<b>Crosscare</b> <i>(Information and Advocacy Refugee Service)</i>	<a href="http://www.crosscare.ie">www.crosscare.ie</a> <a href="http://www.livinginireland.ie">www.livinginireland.ie</a> Email: <a href="mailto:refugeeservice@crosscare.ie">refugeeservice@crosscare.ie</a>
<b>Doras Luimní</b> <i>(Supporting the rights of all migrants living in Limerick and the wider Mid-West region)</i>	<a href="http://www.dorasluimni.org">www.dorasluimni.org</a>
<b>Focus Ireland</b> <i>(Helping families, young people and children at risk or affected by homelessness)</i>	<a href="http://www.focusireland.ie">www.focusireland.ie</a>
<b>Immigrant Council of Ireland</b>	<a href="http://www.immigrantcouncil.ie">www.immigrantcouncil.ie</a>
<b>Immigrant Support Clinic in County Kilkenny</b>	<a href="http://www.frncgrathcentre.ie/immigrant-support-clinic/">www.frncgrathcentre.ie/immigrant-support-clinic/</a>
<b>International Organisation for Migration (IOM)</b> <i>(Irish branch of the organisation)</i>	<a href="https://ireland.iom.int/">https://ireland.iom.int/</a>
<b>Irish Refugee Council</b>	<a href="http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie">www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie</a>
<b>Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)</b> <i>(Provide several direct support services to refugees)</i>	<a href="http://www.jrs.ie">www.jrs.ie</a>
<b>Mayo Intercultural Action</b>	<a href="https://www.mayo.ie/en-ie/living-in-mayo/living-services/mayo-intercultural-action">https://www.mayo.ie/en-ie/living-in-mayo/living-services/mayo-intercultural-action</a>
<b>Nasc</b> <i>(Organisation that works for human rights, social justice and equality)</i>	<a href="http://www.nascireland.org">www.nascireland.org</a>
<b>New Communities Partnership (NCP)</b> <i>(An independent national network of 175 immigrant led groups comprising of 65 nationalities with offices in County Dublin and County Cork with outreach to other cities)</i>	<a href="http://www.newcommunities.ie">www.newcommunities.ie</a> Email: <a href="mailto:info@newcommunities.ie">info@newcommunities.ie</a>

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<b>Ruhama</b> <i>(An organisation which works with women affected by prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation)</i>	<a href="http://www.ruhama.ie">www.ruhama.ie</a>
<b>SPIRASI</b> <i>(Works with asylum seekers, refugees, and other disadvantaged migrant groups)</i>	<a href="http://www.spirasi.ie">www.spirasi.ie</a>
<b>Tralee International Resource Centre (TIRC)</b>	<a href="http://www.tirc.ie">www.tirc.ie</a>
<b>UNHCR</b> <i>(The United Nations Refugee Agency)</i>	<a href="http://www.unhcr.org/en-ie">www.unhcr.org/en-ie</a>

## Other Useful Contacts

<b>An Garda Síochána (Irish Police)</b> <i>(The national police service in Ireland)</i>	<a href="https://www.garda.ie/en/contact-us/station-directory/">https://www.garda.ie/en/contact-us/station-directory/</a>
<b>Barnardos</b> <i>(Organisation that works with children and families)</i>	<a href="http://www.barnardos.ie">www.barnardos.ie</a>
<b>Childrens Rights Alliance</b> <i>(Information on children's rights and the Law in Ireland)</i>	<a href="http://www.childrensrights.ie">www.childrensrights.ie</a>
<b>Children and Young People's Services Committees</b> <i>(Information and services for young people)</i>	<a href="http://www.cypsc.ie">www.cypsc.ie</a>
<b>Citizens Information</b> <i>(Information on Rights and Laws in Ireland)</i>	<a href="http://www.citizensinformation.ie">www.citizensinformation.ie</a>
<b>City and County Childcare Committees</b> <i>(Assists with pre-school childcare places)</i>	<a href="http://www.myccc.ie">www.myccc.ie</a>
<b>Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth</b> <i>(Ireland's government department with responsibility for children)</i>	<a href="http://www.gov.ie/dcediy">www.gov.ie/dcediy</a> Phone: +353 1 6473000 Email: <a href="mailto:contact@equality.gov.ie">contact@equality.gov.ie</a>
<b>Department of Social Protection</b> <i>(Ireland's government department with responsibility for all social welfare payments and entitlements for adults and children)</i>	<a href="http://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments/departments-of-social-protection">www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-social-protection</a>

<p><b>Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)</b> <i>(Information on education and school places)</i></p>	<p><a href="http://www.etbi.ie">www.etbi.ie</a></p>
<p><b>Health Service Executive (HSE)</b> <b>Child Safety Checklist for First Aid</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/child/childsafety/checklist-first-aid.pdf">https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/child/childsafety/checklist-first-aid.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>Health Service Executive (HSE)</b> <b>Child Safety Checklist for Parents including Child Proofing</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www2.hse.ie/babies-children/child-safety/at-home/child-proof-your-home/">https://www2.hse.ie/babies-children/child-safety/at-home/child-proof-your-home/</a></p>
<p><b>Health Service Executive (HSE)</b> <b>Support for carers of children with a disability – Benefits and Entitlements (Ireland’s Health Service)</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www2.hse.ie/services/disability-support-and-services/support-for-carers-of-children-with-a-disability/benefits-and-entitlements-for-carers-of-children-with-a-disability.html">https://www2.hse.ie/services/disability-support-and-services/support-for-carers-of-children-with-a-disability/benefits-and-entitlements-for-carers-of-children-with-a-disability.html</a></p>
<p><b>Health Service Executive (HSE)</b> <b>Childrens Disability Services (Ireland’s Health Service)</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www2.hse.ie/services/disability-support-and-services/childrens-disability-services/find-a-childrens-disability-service.html">https://www2.hse.ie/services/disability-support-and-services/childrens-disability-services/find-a-childrens-disability-service.html</a></p>
<p><b>Health Service Executive (HSE)</b> <b>Disability Supports and Services (Ireland’s Health Service)</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/">https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/</a></p>
<p><b>Health Service Executive (HSE)</b> <b>Drugs and Alcohol helpline (Ireland’s Health Service)</b></p>	<p>Freephone: 1800 459 459</p>
<p><b>Health Service Executive (HSE)</b> <b>Mental Health Supports and Services (Ireland’s Health Service)</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www2.hse.ie/services/mental-health/services-search/">https://www2.hse.ie/services/mental-health/services-search/</a> Phone: 1800 111 888</p>
<p><b>Irish Government and Departments</b></p>	<p><a href="http://www.gov.ie">www.gov.ie</a></p>
<p><b>ISPCC</b> <i>(Provides a range of services directly to children and families)</i></p>	<p><a href="http://www.ispcc.ie">www.ispcc.ie</a></p>
<p><b>Legal Aid Board</b> <i>(An independent, publicly funded organisation providing civil legal aid and advice)</i></p>	<p><a href="http://www.legalaidboard.ie">www.legalaidboard.ie</a></p>
<p><b>National Childcare Scheme</b> <i>(Information on pre-school childcare)</i></p>	<p><a href="https://www.ncs.gov.ie/en/">https://www.ncs.gov.ie/en/</a> +353 1 906 8530 – Universal/Income Assessed Applications +353 1 906 8535 – Sponsor Referrals</p>

<p><b>National Childhood Network</b> <i>(Provides support for the early childhood sector)</i></p>	<p><a href="https://www.ncn.ie/index.php/for-parents">https://www.ncn.ie/index.php/for-parents</a></p>
<p><b>National Parents Council</b> <i>(Helpline and Training services for supporting parents in all aspects of their child's education)</i></p>	<p><a href="http://www.npc.ie">www.npc.ie</a></p>
<p><b>Parentline</b> <i>(Support for Parents)</i></p>	<p><a href="http://www.parentline.ie">www.parentline.ie</a> Phone: +353 1 8733500</p>
<p><b>Regional Education and Language Teams (REALTs)</b> <i>(To assist with school places)</i></p>	<p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/48639-information-for-schools-ukraine/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/48639-information-for-schools-ukraine/</a></p>
<p><b>Samaritans Ireland</b> <i>(A charity in Ireland offering emotional support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year)</i></p>	<p><a href="https://www.samaritans.org/ireland/samaritans-ireland/">https://www.samaritans.org/ireland/samaritans-ireland/</a></p>
<p><b>Tusla, Child and Family Agency Headquarters</b> <i>(The State agency responsible for children and young people)</i></p>	<p>Tusla, Child and Family Agency, The Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Saint John's Road West, Dublin 8. D08 X01F Phone: +353 1 7718500 <a href="mailto:info@tusla.ie">info@tusla.ie</a> <a href="http://www.tusla.ie">www.tusla.ie</a></p>
<p><b>Tusla, Child and Family Agency Duty Social Work Teams/Dedicated Contact Points</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams/">https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams/</a></p>



