

Creating a Welcoming Moment in Children's Centres June 2007

How to make your children's centre welcoming for visitors

Good customer service includes creating the right impression when people first walk into a building, where they are looking to buy something or get a service.

Perhaps you can remember a time when you walked into a restaurant and was asked to sit at a dirty table with plates piled high, to be told it will be cleared in a minute?

It is the same for customers walking into your children's centre or childcare setting. Both the physical environment and staff behaviour is important when a customer (parent or child) walks through the door.

Suffolk County Council's Children's Centre Programme provides equipment, toys and furniture to most centres but it is up to you to make this work for your centre.

In most cases your reception area is where every person who visits you will come to first before taking up any activities or meeting other staff. It is the place where people will form their first impression of your children's centre.

It is very important to greet people properly, make them feel comfortable and deal with them in a professional and friendly manner.

The reception staff must be able to help people and refer them to other services. This includes being ready with a range of appropriate information including children's centre information packs (leaflets, brochures, programme of activities).

If people are going to have to wait in the reception area, offer them tea or coffee if you can afford it or water if you can't.

Which of the following do you provide in your children's centre?

Breastfeeding facilities chairs in drop in and/or in a separate area.

Displays at both child and adult height to include:

- Jobcentre Plus board;
- fixed displays and pictures;
- interactive displays for example sensory and mood mirrors at child height;
- boards for support organisations to use;
- defined area for father focused support;
- cork boards or display area for local childminding groups or childcare settings to use; and
- a public board for general use such as advertising sales.

Information Kiosks with help for customers to use it (from reception staff and 'how to' instructions displayed nearby).

Leaflet racks to support general signposting to other services.

Library shelves with books to support general parenting both adult and child focused and books to support local training and courses.

One to one room close by the reception for confidential conversations.

Play area with the following:

- a suitable area with floor space for parents to supervise and join in informal play;
- baby 'seating' ;
- colourful rugs;
- toys and resources suitable for a wide range of ages;
- soft play seating; and
- a range of children's books.

Public computer with software to include children's educational programs, parent advice packages, Internet access and word processing. Reception staff on hand to help customers use it.

Suggestion box with comment cards to encourage suggestions about all children's service and a display to show feedback from previous suggestions.

Toy Library area for toys to be displayed or even borrowed and information on how to join.

Top Tips on providing information, advice and assistance to parents

- ✓ Many parents will be nervous about asking for information so be as open and friendly as possible.
- ✓ Help parents to use computers and kiosks.
- ✓ People don't know what they don't know so always offer additional services and information that may be of interest or relevance to parents.
- ✓ Think about having someone in your centre to be the key person for information issues so all your staff are giving up to date information on the latest services and following best practice.
- ✓ Make good use of your leaflet racks, choosing really appropriate up to date information.
- ✓ Make sure displays are clear and well organised.
- ✓ Think about how different people for example, fathers and young parents typically like to get information and adapt your approach to appeal to them.