

A group of children are gathered around a large, textured tree trunk. Several children are wearing bright orange safety vests with the word "Helsinki" printed on the back. One child in a red jacket is reaching up to touch the bark. Another child in a blue jacket is pointing at the tree. The scene is outdoors with green foliage in the background. A light blue abstract shape overlaps the bottom left of the image, containing text.

Helsinki

# **Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education 2024**



Photographs  
Cover: Jussi Hellsten  
p. 6 Jussi Hellsten  
p. 10 Raisa Ranta  
p. 16 Konsta Linkola  
p. 25 Raisa Ranta  
p. 26 Konsta Linkola  
p. 30 Maija Astikainen  
p. 35 Raisa Ranta  
p. 56 Jefunne Gimpel

Illustrations  
Riku Ounaslehto

Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education as of 1 August 2024.

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## National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care and Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education

The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care is a national regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education on the basis of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. It is used as the basis for drawing up the local curricula for early childhood education and children’s individual early childhood education plans and for implementing early childhood education. The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care is governed in particular by the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, which provides for the child’s right to early childhood education and the goals of early childhood education. Pre-primary education, which is regulated by the Basic Education Act, is part of early childhood education. Pre-primary education is guided by the National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education, a regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

Early childhood education is a part of the Finnish education system and an important stage in the child’s growth and learning path. The goal of early childhood education is to support the child’s learning abilities and to promote lifelong learning and the implementation of ed-

ucational equality in accordance with the inclusive principles. The principles include equal rights for all children, equality, non-discrimination, respect for diversity, social inclusion and sense of community. Inclusivity is a broad concept and must be seen as a principle, value and holistic way of thinking that applies to all children and is related to the organisation of early childhood education. The principles of inclusion are examined in particular in Chapter 2 on the underpinning values, Chapter 3 on the operating culture and Chapter 5 on support for the child.

The primary responsibility for the upbringing and education of children rests with their guardians. Early childhood education supports and complements the educational responsibilities of homes and is, for its part, responsible for the children’s well-being.

The curriculum for early childhood education has three tiers. It consists of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education and children’s individual early childhood education plans.

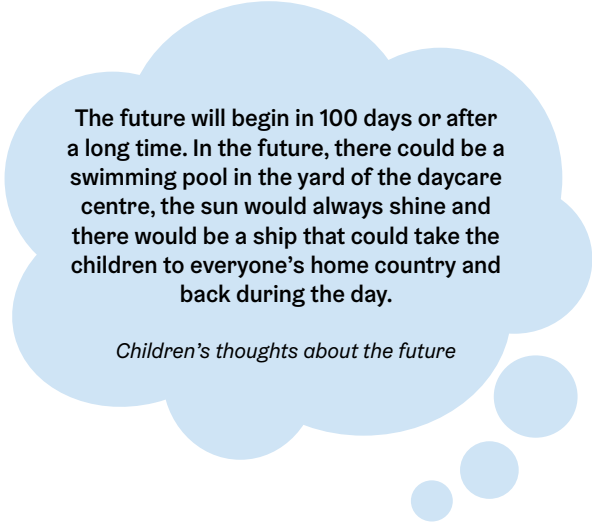


Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education consists of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2022 and Helsinki’s local priorities.

Helsinki’s priorities are indicated by this symbol: ➤

# 1.1 National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care and its binding nature

The purpose of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care is to support and guide the organisation, implementation and development of early childhood education and to promote high-quality and equal early childhood education throughout the country. Early childhood education means all goal-oriented and systematic guidance, education and care for the child, with special emphasis on pedagogy. The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care provides for the main objectives and content of the implementation of early childhood education, cooperation between the early childhood education organiser and the guardians of children, multi-professional cooperation and the content of the child’s individual early childhood education plan.



# 1.2 Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education

Early childhood education is part of Helsinki’s education system and constitutes an important stage in the child’s growth, development and learning path. High-quality early childhood education promotes equality and prevents social exclusion. Helsinki is a diverse learning and education environment where children are allowed to be seen and heard. All of the city’s operators provide education and affect how children’s rights as citizens are implemented. In Helsinki, children are allowed to play and influence through play. Children’s inclusion is boosted in everyday activities. The focus is on the experience of inclusion and children’s trust in their own abilities. Children can gain experiences of inclusion in their own child group, in their home neighbourhood and as residents of Helsinki.

Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education is based on the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2022. It is a document that binds early childhood education operators in Helsinki, covers all forms of early childhood education and also binds private service providers. Helsinki’s curriculum

for early childhood education consists of content from the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (marked separately) and the characteristics and practices of early childhood education in Helsinki.

The curriculum for early childhood education sets principles and goals for pedagogical activities and evaluation. Early childhood education in Helsinki follows the principles of the evaluation model developed by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre. Evaluation is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Early childhood education units draw up an annual action plan based on Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education. The action plan describes the early childhood education unit’s operating culture, the pedagogical principles of its operations and its common development goals. The unit’s action plan also includes an equality and non-discrimination plan. Children and their guardians are involved in planning the activities. Family daycare and open early childhood education in playgrounds are subject to their own action plans.



The curriculum for early childhood education takes into account other plans guiding activities in Helsinki, such as:

- ▶ Plans concerning early childhood education, children and families in the Helsinki City Strategy and Sustainable Helsinki programme
- ▶ curriculum for pre-primary education
- ▶ curriculum for basic education
- ▶ curriculum for preparatory education
- ▶ Helsinki’s welfare plan for children and youth
- ▶ equality and non-discrimination plans for Helsinki’s staff and services
- ▶ Helsinki’s integration plan

Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education has been prepared by a group of early childhood education experts, who have worked on the content with the staff at various events. The draft plan was distributed to all early childhood education staff members for comments. Guardians and Helsinki residents have also had the opportunity to comment on the draft. In addition, children’s thoughts about the future have been collected for this publication.

Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education is approved by the Finnish sub-committee of the Education Committee, and the Swedish curriculum for early childhood education is approved by the Swedish sub-committee.

Helsinki provides children with a rich and diverse learning environment as well as active opportunities for experience-based activities and learning. Together with children, we are building a city that is open and community-centred, a city where the diversity of people is valued and respected.

Helsinki is an international city that promotes parity and equality. Children are part of a community that is both linguistically and culturally diverse. We are providing all children with better opportunities to participate and influence and increasing the sense of community.

Together with cultural, library, sports and environmental services as well as other operators, we are building a Helsinki that broadens children’s horizons, values childhood and encourages encounters between different generations.



1.3 Child’s individual early childhood education plan

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, every child in early childhood education has the right to receive education and care that is systematic and goal-oriented. In order to achieve this, an individual early childhood education plan is drawn up for every child in a daycare centre or family daycare. The individual early childhood education plan must be based on the child’s best interests and needs. The child’s opinion and wishes must also be determined and taken into account in the early childhood education plan process. It is the responsibility of the staff to find suitable means to determine the child’s perspectives. It is important to take into account the observations and views of both the guardians and the staff on the stages of the child’s development and learning and on working in a group.

When drawing up the child’s individual early childhood education plan, it is important to know the child’s skills, strengths, interests and individual needs. In addition, the child’s linguistic, cultural and religious background is taken into account. When drawing up or updating the plan, the child’s possible previous early childhood education plan and pedagogical documentation are utilised (Chapter 4.2). The goals recorded in the child’s individual early childhood education plan are set for the staff’s pedagogical activities. They describe how the pedagogical activities and learning environments support the child’s development, learning and well-being. The views of the guardians and any other experts on the child’s well-being, development, learning and need for support are also taken into account when setting the goals.

The child’s individual early childhood education plan is a tool for planning and evaluating the activities. The goals, interests and strengths emerging from children’s individual early childhood education plans are taken into account in planning and carrying out the child group’s activities and in developing the learning environments and operating culture. The child’s individual early childhood education plan is drawn up when the child has started in a daycare centre or family daycare. The plan is then updated according to the child’s needs, at least once a year.

The individual early childhood education plan process includes various stages. All staff members working with the child take part in the process, and the creation, observations, documentation and evaluation are conducted multi-professionally. In daycare centres, a person qualified as an early childhood education teacher is responsible for drawing up and evaluating the child’s individual early childhood education plan. The competence of a Bachelor of Social Services in early childhood education can be utilised, particularly in terms of knowledge of the ser-

vice system for children and families. An early childhood education special-needs teacher participates in evaluating the child’s need for support, the support measures or their implementation as necessary. An early childhood education teacher or an early childhood education special-needs teacher can participate in the early childhood education plan process for a child in family daycare.

The child’s individual early childhood education plan records the child’s possible support for development, learning and well-being, its implementation, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the support and the implementation of the support measures (Chapter 5).

When evaluating the child’s individual early childhood education plan, the evaluation particularly focuses on the organisation of the activities, the implementation of pedagogy and the effectiveness of the support measures.

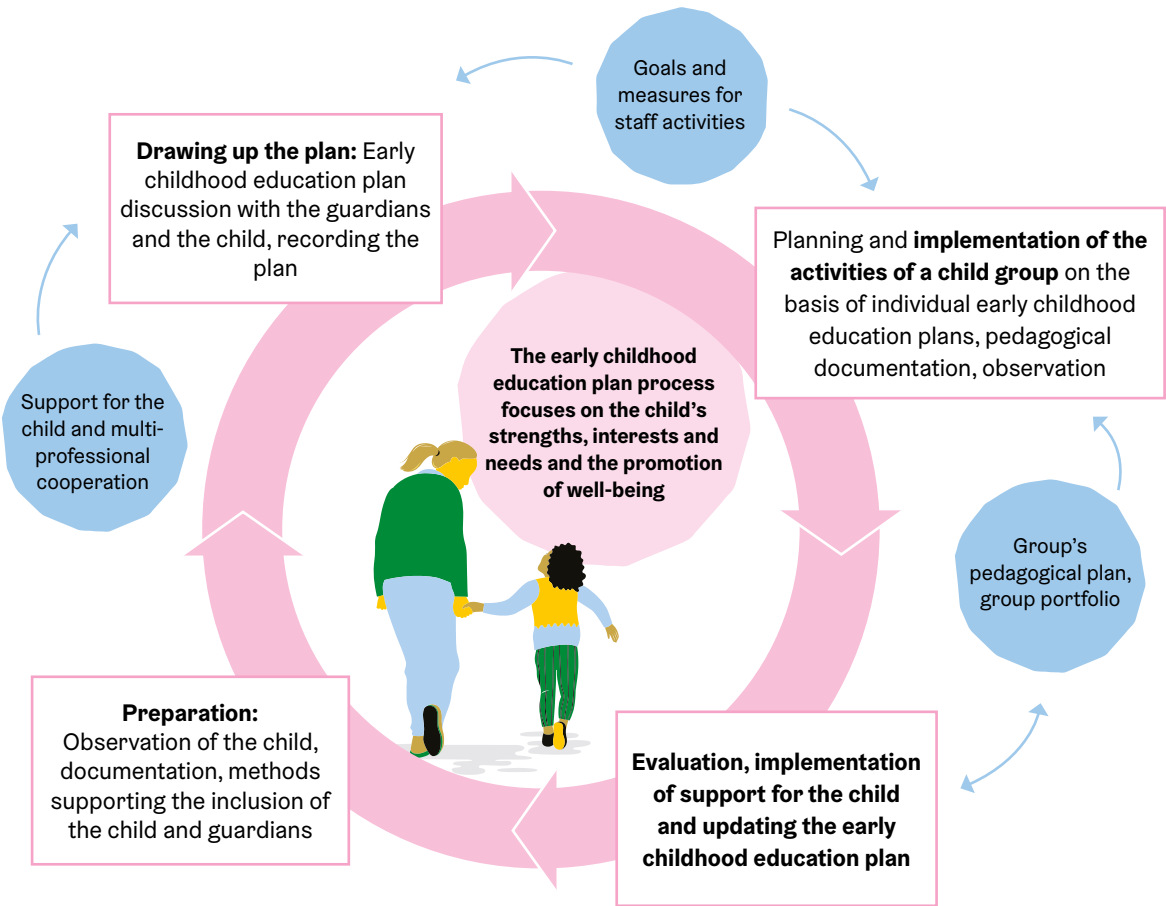
The child’s individual early childhood education plan must include the following:

- ▶ the child’s development and learning strengths and the child’s interests
- ▶ the goals supporting the child’s development, learning and well-being, as well as measures to achieve the goals and evaluation of their achievement
- ▶ any support the child may need (Chapter 5)
- ▶ any medical treatment plan
- ▶ matters mutually agreed between the child, the staff and the guardians
- ▶ any other experts who participated in drawing up the plan
- ▶ an indication of when the plan was drawn up and revised and when it will be revised for the next time.

In Helsinki, the well-being section of the individual early childhood education plan records the goals and measures related to nutrition, rest, physical activity, outdoor activities or friendships, depending on the child’s needs. An indication is made in the individual early childhood education plan if a separate medical treatment plan has been prepared for the child (5.3).

For children who speak a foreign language or are multilingual, their linguistic and cultural background and linguistic skills and abilities are factored in when creating their individual early childhood education plans. The plan records how the child’s learning of the Finnish language is systematically promoted in

Drawing up a child’s early childhood education plan is a continuous process



all areas of language development and how linguistic identity is supported according to the child’s abilities and needs. The plan takes into account the child’s cultural and religious background. If necessary, a professional interpreter is used with the guardians in order to ensure mutual understanding.

In family daycare, the plan is drawn up by the family daycare providers under the guidance of their supervisor or an early childhood education teacher authorised by the supervisor.

Children’s individual early childhood education plans are confidential. According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, people responsible for a child’s early childhood education, and those taking part in evaluating a child’s support needs, support measures or their implementation, have the right, regardless of the obligation of

secrecy, to receive from and disclose to one another and an early childhood education organiser and provider information that is vital for arranging and providing early childhood education and evaluating support needs. The aim of the information exchange is to guarantee that children receive early childhood education that best serves their interests. The provision concerning the reception and disclosure of information also applies to situations where a child moves from early childhood education organised by a municipality or a private service provider to early childhood education organised by another municipality or service provider, or from early childhood education to pre-primary education or basic education. A child’s customer relationship in early childhood education is public information. However, the organisation of the child’s early childhood education may involve information that is confidential.





## 2 Purpose and general objectives of early childhood education

Early childhood education is a societal service with many tasks. The purpose of early childhood education is to promote children’s comprehensive growth, development and learning in cooperation with the guardians. Early childhood education promotes the equality and parity of children and prevents social exclusion. ➤ The starting point of early childhood education is to strengthen children’s experience of inclusion. The knowledge and skills learned strengthen the children’s agency and faith in their own opportunities to influence.

In addition, early childhood education supports guardians in their upbringing efforts and enables them to work or study.

The future could be a beautiful swan or cat that moves by bouncing. There would be a lot of plants, amusement park rides and quiet places in the daycare centre yard. There would also be a world of delicacies, a giant trampoline and a talking pine.

*Children’s thoughts about the future*

### 2.1 Obligations governing the organisation of early childhood education

The obligations governing the organisation of early childhood education are based on the Constitution of Finland, the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the Government Decree on Early Childhood Education and Care and the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care. Early childhood education is also subject to the Administrative Procedure Act and the Act on the Openness of Government Activities. According to the Constitution of Finland, without acceptable grounds, nobody can be placed in a different position based on their gender, age, origin, language, religion, beliefs, opinions, health, disability or other personal reason. The organisation of early childhood education must also take into account obligations arising from other legislation and international agreements by which Finland is bound. These include the Non-Discrimination Act, the Equality Act, the European Convention on Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

A child participating in early childhood education is entitled to receive support, regardless of the organiser of early childhood education. Early childhood education is organised and developed in accordance with the principle of inclusion, whereby all children have the right to participate in early childhood education together, regardless of, for example, their needs of support, disability or cultural background.

When children need support for their development, learning and well-being (hereinafter “support for the child”) and receive social welfare and health care support measures and services, the following acts apply: Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, Social Welfare Act, Act on Services and Assistance for the Disabled, Act on Special Care for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, Health Care Act, and what is provided for social welfare and health care services elsewhere in legislation.

The national objectives for early childhood education are laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. The objectives guide the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the criteria, local curricula for early childhood education and children’s individual early childhood education plans.

#### Requests collected from guardians:

- When a child enters early childhood education or moves from one group or form of early childhood education to another, the child’s needs must be taken into account.
- Sufficient time must be allowed for making the introductions. Early childhood education staff should be sensitive to the needs of those involved and ensure smooth communication with both the children and their guardians.
- Families are informed well in advance about the upcoming change, the group’s activities and the practical aspects of the entry phase.
- When a child moves from one group to another, the staff ensure that the child’s needs are met and all necessary information is transferred to the new group.
- Friendships and participation are taken care of.
- A safe continuum is created for the child when transferring from early childhood education to pre-primary education and from pre-primary education to school.



**According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the aim of early childhood education is:**

1. to promote the overall growth, development, health and well-being of every child, based on each individual’s age and development level;
2. to support the child’s learning abilities and to promote lifelong learning and the implementation of educational equality in accordance with the inclusive principles;
3. to conduct diverse pedagogical activities that are based on play, exercise, arts and cultural heritage and to facilitate positive learning experiences;
4. to guarantee an early childhood education environment that is stimulating, promotes learning and is healthy and safe;
5. to guarantee methods that respect the children and ensure as stable an interaction between the children and the early childhood education staff as possible;
6. to provide all children with equal access to early childhood education, to promote parity and gender equality and to enhance the ability to understand and respect shared cultural traditions, as well as everyone’s linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds and beliefs;
7. to identify individual children’s early childhood education support needs and to arrange appropriate, multi-professional aid when such needs arise;
8. to improve children’s cooperation and interactive skills and skills for working in a peer group, and to guide them towards acting ethically and sustainably, showing respect for others and being members of society;
9. to ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate and have a say in matters that involve them;
10. to work together with children and their parents or other guardians, promoting their balanced development and overall well-being, and to support the children’s parents or other guardians in providing the children with care and education.

The organiser of early childhood education is obliged to inform the guardians of the goals and activities of early childhood education in its various forms. Guardians are given the opportunity to participate in and influence the planning, implementation and evaluation of their children’s early childhood education. In addition, guardians are regularly given the opportunity to participate in the planning and evaluation of local and unit-specific early childhood education. The participation of guardians in the planning and evaluation of any support for the child is described in more detail in Chapter 5.

In early childhood education, the learning environment must be stimulating, promote learning and be healthy and safe, taking into account the child’s age and development. The facilities and equipment must be appropriate and accessible. A child in a daycare centre or family daycare must be offered balanced meals. Meals must be appropriately organised and supervised. Early childhood education is impartial regarding religion, ethics and party politics. Early childhood education must not be used as a channel for commercial influence. More information about early childhood education based on alternative pedagogy or a specific philosophical system is provided in Chapter 6.

Early childhood education follows the regulations on qualification requirements and staffing limits. The municipality must have access to the services of an early childhood education special-needs teacher in accordance with the needs of early childhood education. Transitional provisions on staff qualifications are laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care.

Early childhood education takes into account regulations related to occupational safety and health, regulations on the processing of personal data and data protection, as well as the legislation on checking the criminal background of persons working with children. Children are protected from violence, bullying and other harassment by means of systematic prevention and immediate intervention (Chapter 3.1). The promotion of safety must be systematic and regularly assessed.

When organising early childhood education, the municipality must cooperate with those responsible for teaching, physical activity and culture, social welfare, child welfare, child health clinics and other health care services as well as other necessary parties. Early childhood education staff are also obliged to comply with the provisions concerning referral to social welfare services and submitting a child welfare notification.

## 2.2 Forms of early childhood education

The various forms of early childhood education include daycare centre activities, family daycare and open early childhood education activities. The objectives of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care guide all forms of early childhood education activities. The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care defines which sections of the act apply to open early childhood education. There are differences between the various forms of early childhood education. For example, the learning environments, resources, staff training and qualification requirements, staff structure, child group size and ratio between children and staff vary. The possibilities of providing support also vary.

It is important that guardians are adequately informed of the content and characteristics of all forms of activities. The municipality must provide guardians with guidance and counselling on the early childhood education services available. If necessary, it will be discussed with the guardian which form and extent of early childhood education meets the needs and interests of the child. Guidance and counselling are available when applying for early childhood education services and when the child is already using the services. ➤ [Helsinki has a centralised service guidance unit. Service guidance, counselling and diverse communications ensure that guardians receive information on all forms of early childhood education and their characteristics. Communications are also carried out multilingually.](#)



The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care emphasises the importance of pedagogy and, at the same time, the pedagogical responsibility of early childhood education teachers and special-needs teachers. Early childhood education teachers have the overall responsibility for planning the activities of child groups, ensuring that the activities are carried out in a systematic and goal-oriented manner and evaluating and developing the activities. The activities are planned and carried out as a joint effort between the early childhood education teachers, special-needs teachers, Bachelors of Social Services in early childhood education, childminders and other early childhood education staff.

➤ In Helsinki, early childhood education is provided at daycare centres and family daycare. Open early childhood education is provided in playgrounds and clubs. Round-the-clock care is provided centrally in separately specified daycare centres. Round-the-clock care is arranged to the extent necessary for children who need it due to their guardians' work or studies. In round-the-clock care, children's participation in early childhood education is often irregular. This must be taken into account in planning and carrying out the pedagogical activities and the support given to the child.

➤ In Helsinki, early childhood education is provided in Finnish and Swedish. It is also possible to participate in bilingual Finnish-Sámi early childhood education in Helsinki.

The municipal services are complemented by private early childhood education services. They also provide an added range of services with various pedagogical and language options. The options in private early childhood education include daycare centres and family daycare. The city guides and monitors the operations of private service providers in Helsinki. Each service provider is responsible for ensuring that their operations comply with the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care and Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education. Private daycare centres describe their operating methods in more detail in their annual action plans.

## Daycare centres

Activities in daycare centres take place in groups. Child groups may be formed in different ways, taking into account, for example, the children's age, sibling relationships or any support needs. The groups must be pedagogically appropriate, and they are formed in accordance with the regulations pertaining to staff numbers, maximum group size and support. Each daycare centre must have a director responsible for the operations.

➤ In Helsinki, group formation and activity plans enable the children to be active participants in their peer groups and act and learn in a way that is natural to them. Early childhood education teachers, special-needs teachers, Bachelors of Social Services in early childhood education, childminders and other early childhood education staff plan, implement and evaluate their activities together, each within their professional responsibilities.

## Family daycare

Family daycare is a form of early childhood education that takes place in small groups. It is organised in a private home or other home-like environment. Family daycare may be provided jointly by one or two or, in special cases, three service providers. The number of staff in family daycare and the formation of child groups must take into account disabled children and children who otherwise need support. Family daycare providers are responsible for the activities of their own group. Family daycare providers' goal-oriented planning and implementation of activities are supported by pedagogical management and operational guidance.

➤ Family daycare in Helsinki facilitates children's individual growth and development in small groups and a home-like environment. In family daycare, children learn various everyday skills through play under the instruction of their care provider. The entire city is a learning environment. Children will first get to know their own neighbourhood and then gradually become familiar with areas further afield. Daily routines can be flexibly adjusted based on the children's input and any special skills that their care provider has. Collaboration with a local daycare centre is coordinated and smooth. The supervisor of family daycare providers is the director of the early childhood education unit.



## Open early childhood education

➤ Playgrounds and family houses in Helsinki organise planned, goal-oriented and open early childhood education as part of the growth and learning paths of children in Helsinki. Playgrounds organise club activities intended for 2–4-year-old children being cared for at home, and they operate for 2.5–3 hours on pre-arranged days. At the clubs, children can feel part of a group and have a chance to participate in a variety of pedagogical activities through outdoor recreation, exercise, playing and art. Being in a club provides the family with contacts to other local families with children.

The playground units draw up annual action plans together with their customers. Ideas and needs regarding the daily activities are identified through

everyday interaction and time spent together as well as annual customer surveys. Playgrounds have an active role in collaborating with their area's stakeholders and wide range of cooperation partners. Together, they create and implement various activities and events for children and families.

At playgrounds, people of all ages can play and meet others. Instructed activities for families with young children strengthen the interaction and joy of spending time together as a family. For families with babies, playgrounds organise specific activities that continue from where the maternity and child health clinic's family coaching left off.

The supervisor of open early childhood education is the leading instructor of the playground unit.



## 2.3 Early childhood education as part of the child's growth and learning path

Early childhood education is an important part of the child's growth and learning path. Early childhood education creates a foundation for lifelong learning. The task of the staff is to establish a trustful relationship with the child. Cooperation between the guardians and the staff brings continuity and safety to the child's life. When agreeing on the goals of the child's early childhood education, open, appreciative and equal interaction is important. Regular cooperation is essential to ensure that the shared educational responsibilities of the family and staff forms a meaningful whole for the child.

Understanding the significance of childhood as well as knowledge about children's growth, development and learning are the basis of pedagogical activities. It is equally important to know every child and to take into account the child's individual development. Knowing each child requires as stable an interaction between the staff and the children as possible.

Early childhood education and the included pre-primary education form a whole that progresses consistently in terms of the child's development and learning, laying a foundation for lifelong learning. The starting point for a high-quality whole is that the staff in early childhood education, pre-primary education and basic education are familiar with the key objectives, characteristics and practices of the education system and its different stages. To ensure the well-being, smooth development and learning of children, the transition phases are also planned and evaluated.

The organiser of early childhood education creates cooperation structures and information transfer practices that make the transition from home to early childhood education, during early childhood education, from ear-

ly childhood education to pre-primary education and from there to basic education as smooth as possible. The transition phases involve cooperation with the guardian in the best interest of the child. The information transfer can make use of the documents compiled during early childhood education, describing the development and learning of the child and the individual early childhood education plan drawn up for the child. The transfer of information is carried out according to the regulations in force.

In Helsinki, every child is guaranteed a good start in early childhood education and an integrated learning path from early childhood education to pre-primary education and from pre-primary education to school. The transitions are carried out in cooperation with the staff in the child's current and future group and the guardians. The aim is to establish cooperation and information transfer practices that enable children to move from home to early childhood education, from one group or daycare centre to another, and from early childhood education to pre-primary education in the most flexible way possible, supporting the children's growth and learning. Practices relating to the child entering early childhood education, moving from one group to another, and the learning path continuum are described in the action plan of the early childhood education unit. Activities in accordance with Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education create a pedagogical continuum from early childhood education to pre-primary education and further to basic education.

## 2.4 Underpinning values

The underpinning values of early childhood education are giving priority to the child's best interests, the child's right to well-being, care and protection, the consideration of the child's opinion, equal and non-discriminating treatment, inclusive policies and the prohibition of discrimination against children in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The City of Helsinki emphasises honesty, fairness, equal treatment and openness in all its activities. In education, the learner is seen as an active agent, and the learning path supports sustainable education. All learners get the support they need. The well-being of learners and staff is the basis of learning and all education.



### The inherent value of childhood

The purpose of early childhood education is to safeguard and promote children's right to a good and safe childhood. Early childhood education is based on an idea that childhood has inherent value. All children are unique and valuable just the way they are. Every child has the right to be heard, seen and listened to as an individual and a member of their community.

### Growing as a human being

Early childhood education is based on respect for life, a sustainable lifestyle and human rights and the inviolability of a person's dignity. The staff members support the children's growth as human beings. The key element is striving for truth, kindness and beauty, fairness and peace. Early childhood education places value in personal growth, which is made evident by people's attitude towards themselves and others, the environment and knowledge, and by their tendency and willingness to do the right thing. Staff members guide the children to act according to the underpinning values and to discuss values and ideals. ➤ Early childhood education prevents and identifies racist and discriminatory activities and makes interventions. No form of bullying, racism or violence is tolerated from anyone.

### Children's rights

All children have the right to express themselves, their opinions and thoughts and to be understood through the means of expression that they have available. All children have the right to receive good teaching, care and encouraging feedback. All children have the right to play, learn through playing, feel joy about the things they have learnt, and form an understanding of themselves, their identity and the world, based on their own background. All children have the right to participate in and be a member of a group. All children have the right to receive adequate and timely support in early childhood education. All children have the right to receive a wide range of information, process their emotions, handle conflicts and experiment with and learn new things.

### Parity, equality and diversity

Early childhood education promotes the democratic values of Finnish society, including parity, equality and diversity. Children must have the opportunity to develop their skills and make choices, regardless of their gender, heritage, cultural background or any other personal factor. The staff must create an atmosphere that respects diversity. Early childhood education is based on a diverse cultural heritage, which is further shaped by the interaction between the children, their guardians and the staff members.





## Diversity among families

Fruitful cooperation in education and care is facilitated by a professional, open and respectful attitude towards the diversity amongst families and their various languages, cultures, beliefs, religions, traditions and views on how to raise children. Children's family identity and family ties are supported in a way that allows all children to feel that their family is valuable.

## A healthy and sustainable lifestyle

The purpose of early childhood education is to guide children towards [lifestyles that promote health and well-being as well as physical activity](#). Children are provided with opportunities for diverse and physically active play and exercise, supporting growth towards an active lifestyle. Children are also offered opportunities to develop their emotional skills and aesthetic thinking. Early childhood education identifies and complies with the principles of a sustainable lifestyle, factoring in the social, cultural, financial and ecological aspects. Early childhood education creates a foundation for eco-social education, so that people can understand that social sustainability and human rights require ecological sustainability.

## 2.5 Concept of learning

Children grow, develop and learn through interaction with other people and their surroundings. The concept of learning is based on the idea of children as active agents. Children are naturally curious and want to learn new things, but also review and repeat things they already know. Learning is a holistic process and happens everywhere. It is a combination of prior knowledge and skills, actions, emotions, sensory input, bodily sensations, language and thinking. Learning takes place when children observe and monitor their environment and mimic what others are doing, for example. Children also learn by playing, moving, observing, completing different tasks, expressing themselves and taking part in activities connected to art.

In early childhood education, learning is based on the children's prior experiences, their interests and skills. It is important that the new things that the children learn have a connection to their developing abilities and other experiences and cultural background. Children learn best when they feel well and safe. Positive emotional experiences and interactions promote learning. The peer group and the feeling of belonging are essential for the child's learning and inclusion. Children must receive guidance and support in their learning from staff. Activities that are interesting, goal-oriented and suitably challenging for children inspire them to learn more. All children must experience success and feel joy about their actions and being a learner.

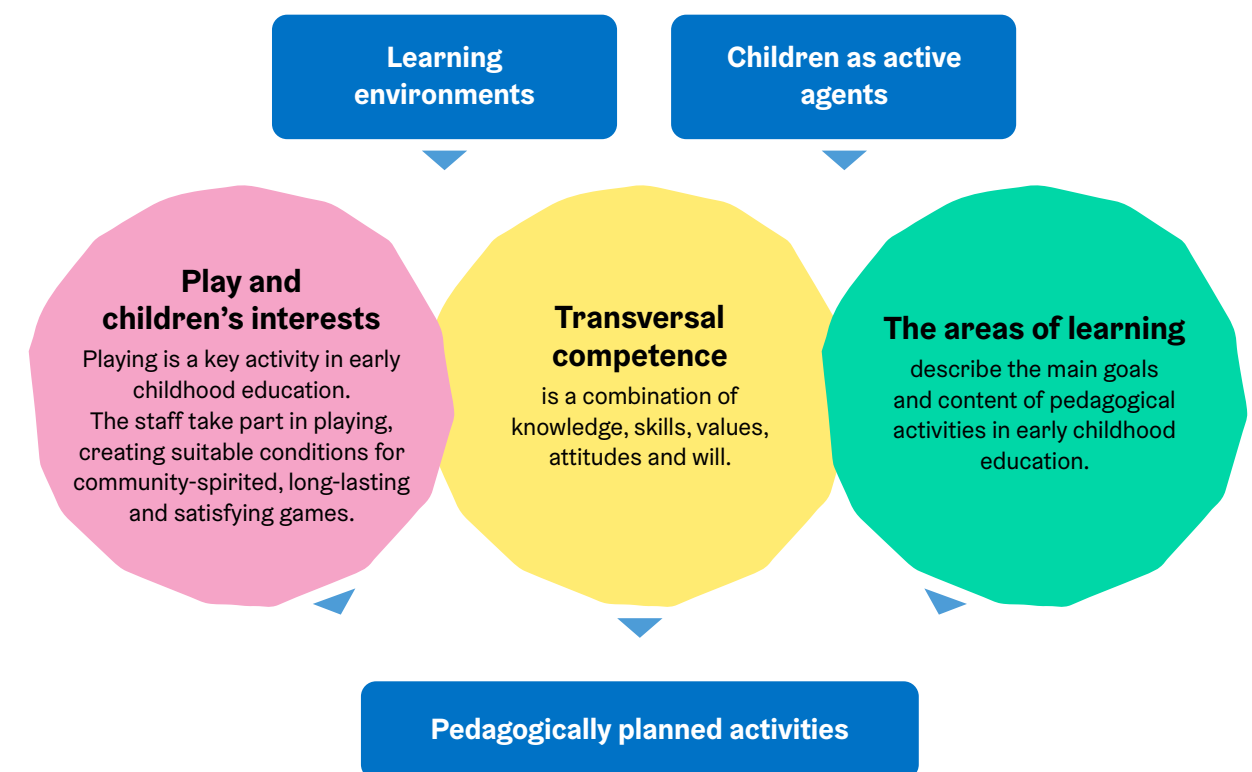
Early childhood education in Helsinki pays special attention to the quality of interaction and sensitive, warm encounters with the children. Ensure that all children can feel that they belong to the group and are supported in building friendships. The child learns together with the other children by exploring and playing.

Playing is the most important activity in early childhood education. Early childhood education recognises the inherent value that playing has to children, as well as its functional pedagogical significance. Playing motivates children and brings them joy, while simultaneously allowing them to learn and acquire new information. Playing promotes the overall development and well-being of children. Transversal competence and learning contents gain new meanings when children

are provided with opportunities for artistic experiences and when activities natural to children – such as physical activity, exploration, playing and self-expression – are utilised by pedagogical means.

The staff must promote pedagogically supported playing by getting involved, making observations and responding to initiatives from the children. The quality of play is kept high, and the children's own game ideas are given room. Diverse play and the opportunity to influence the content and course of play are made possible for all children, taking into account each child's individual characteristics. The learning environment is modified together with the children based on their play-related needs. Observing and documenting play support the development and evaluation of the idea of the game together with the children.

## Learning is a holistic process





## 2.6 Education, teaching and care as a pedagogically-oriented whole

The pedagogy of early childhood education is based on the underpinning values, an understanding of the child, childhood and learning. Pedagogy refers to professionally managed, planned and goal-oriented activities carried out by professionals based on multidisciplinary information and, in particular, on educational and early childhood educational information in order to ensure children's well-being and learning. It is visible in the early childhood education operating culture, learning environments and education, teaching and care as a whole. Emphasising pedagogy in early childhood education requires pedagogical expertise and the staff's common understanding of how best to promote the learning and well-being of children.

Early childhood education takes place through interaction between staff, children and the environment, where education, teaching and care form a harmonious whole. The three dimensions can be considered as separate concepts, but in practice they go hand in hand. This enables a holistic approach to promoting the child's growth, development and learning. Education, teaching and care are emphasised differently for children of different ages and for different forms of early childhood education.

Education consists of activities that convey, shape and reform cultural values, customs and norms. In part, education aims to transfer cultural heritage and values and traditions that are considered important to the next generation. With the help of education, children are guided to form their own opinions, to critically evaluate the prevailing ways of thinking and action and to act in an ethically sustainable manner. Education aims to consciously direct the formation of children's individual identity so that the children learn to perceive the effects of their own activities on other people and their surroundings. Children's development is supported so that they also learn to act and use their knowledge for the benefit of others.

The starting point of teaching is the concept of learning defined in the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care. The purpose of teaching is to promote children's learning and help them create meanings about themselves, other people and the world around them. In early childhood education, children are inspired and motivated to learn new things and are guided to use various learning methods. Teaching supports and utilises children's natural curiosity and desire to explore. Teaching takes into account children's evolving skills, interests, strengths and individual needs for support. In addition, teaching is based on the goals set for learning environments (Chapter 3.2), transversal competence (Chapter 2.7), pedagogical activities (Chapter 4) and support for the child (Chapter 5).

Care means taking care of basic physical needs and emotional caring. The goal is to make the child feel appreciated, understood and connected to other people. Reciprocal and respectful interaction, a positive touch and closeness form the basis for good care and comfort. Daily situations, such as eating, dressing and undressing, resting and taking care of hygiene, are a key part of the child's day and part of pedagogical activities. Care situations in early childhood education are always also educational and teaching situations in which children learn, for example, interactive skills, self-care skills, time management and good habits.

**In the future, children could breathe underwater and fly. Children could eat a lot of sweets. Children would not be cold even if they got wet playing in puddles on a rainy day.**

*Children's thoughts about the future*

## 2.7 Transversal competence

Early childhood education forms the foundation for children's transversal competence. Transversal competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will. The need for transversal competence arises from the changes in the surrounding world. Growing as a human being, studying, working and being a citizen now and in the future require competence that spans across and combines different fields of knowledge and skills. The development of transversal competence promotes children's growth as individuals and as members of their community. Skills begin to develop during early childhood, and they continue to do so throughout our lives.

The goals of transversal competence are taken into account in the development of the operating culture and learning environments as well as in education, teaching and care. The areas of learning described in Chapter 4.5 are intended to promote children's transversal competence.

In early childhood education in Helsinki, strengthening transversal competence and innovative skills in a community-oriented manner are important goals. Perspectives on a sustainable future are emphasised in all areas of transversal competence, and children are guided in a positive way to be aware of their opportunities to contribute to the construction of a sustainable future.

The goals of transversal competence form a continuum from the curriculum for early childhood education to the curricula for pre-primary and basic education.

### Thinking and learning

Thinking and learning skills develop through interaction with other people and the environment and form a basis for the development of other skills and lifelong learning. Acquiring and analysing information and discovering new things require creative and critical thinking, and the foundation for this is formed during early childhood education. The purpose of early childhood education is to support children's skills in thinking and learning.

Children's thinking and learning develop through a diverse range of meaningful experiences. There must be ample space for wonderment, discovery and the feeling of joy from learning. While playing, children can use their imagination and creativity, try out new ideas together and explore the world. Children's abilities to analyse, name and



describe their surroundings and associated phenomena are supported in a manner appropriate for their age and development stage. Children are encouraged to ask questions and question things. Adults rejoice with them over their successes and help them learn to encourage others. Children are encouraged to persevere, not to give up if they fail and find solutions to problems. They are instructed to direct and maintain their attentiveness. Sufficient daily physical activity supports children's thinking and learning. Documenting the activities pedagogically (Chapter 4.2) and discussing them together helps children become more aware of their learning and identify their strengths. This boosts their trust in their abilities.

Helsinki's early childhood education creates an active culture of dialogue and inspires children towards community-spirited creative learning and problem-solving. The starting point for learning processes and exploratory observation is children's own questions and wonderment. Phenomenon-based learning and the processes of exploring together are part of the pedagogy of early childhood education. Children are encouraged to express their thoughts out loud, and time is reserved for thinking together. Future reading skills, exploration and discovery are practised together with children using the Kettu ("Fox") material for sustainable future in early childhood education.

Cultural competence, interaction and expression

Children grow up in a world of different cultures, languages and belief systems. Abilities related to self-expression, interaction and understanding others are important to a person’s identity, functioning and well-being. The purpose of early childhood education is to promote the children’s cultural skills as well as their skills in interaction and self-expression.

The children are encouraged to learn about other people, languages and cultures. The children are guided towards kindness and good manners. The children learn about stepping into other people’s shoes, viewing things from various angles and resolving conflicts constructively. This enhances their social skills. The children receive support in building their cultural identities. Experiences, knowledge and skills gained during early childhood education regarding cultural heritage help the children adopt, use and change their culture. For example, games, meals and celebrations offer opportunities to share experiences of different traditions and customs.

In early childhood education in Helsinki, the staff function as role models for the children when it comes to encountering different people, languages, cultures and beliefs positively. The staff promote a safe and open atmosphere and treat the children and their families with respect. Helsinki provides plenty of opportunities for cooperation and increased knowledge of different cultures. International collaboration can also be done through digital means. The learning environment is made safe, equal and non-discriminating for all. Teachers of Finnish as a second language in early childhood education provide support to staff in the implementation of this area.

Taking care of yourself and the skills needed in everyday life

Skills relating to taking care of yourself, health and safety are important for everyone. The purpose of early childhood education is to enhance the children’s skills concerning well-being and safety and to guide them towards making choices in accordance with a sustainable lifestyle. Early childhood education boosts the children’s positive attitudes towards the future.

It also supports the gradual increase of their independence. The children are assisted and encouraged to ask for help when they need it. Together with adults, the children learn various skills, such as dressing themselves, having meals and looking after personal hygiene and belongings. The children are instructed to act responsibly and safely in the early childhood education learning environments, nearby natural environments and traffic. Together with adults, the children talk about factors that promote their overall well-being, such as rest, nutrition, exercise and mental well-being. The children are helped to express and self-regulate their emotions. The children’s emotional skills will improve when they are helped to identify, name and be aware of their emotions. Furthermore, they are instructed to respect and protect their own body and the bodies of others.

In early childhood education, all children’s healthy body image is supported through an accepting and safe attitude, so that they are able to value their body. In addition, the children learn to respect the privacy of their own body and the bodies of others. Each child group uses commonly agreed methods to promote friendship and emotional skills.

Helsinki’s diverse learning and operating environment is used for various activities for children indoors, outdoors and in nature. Exercise equipment is freely available to children indoors and outdoors, allowing for diverse exercise during the early childhood education day. Physical activity is promoted on a daily basis as part of pedagogical activities, taking into account the needs and interests of the children. Physical activities are carried out in various situations during the day by, for example, jumping and balancing in transition situations. Outdoor activities and excursions to the surrounding area support the fulfilment of the recommendations of physical activity.

Unnecessary restrictions on movement and activity are eliminated by raising staff awareness of the links between physical activity and learning and by developing a culture that favours physical activity. The staff support the development of a physically active lifestyle by showing an example, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to move and encouraging them.



Multiliteracy

Multiliteracy is needed in the everyday life of children and families, in interaction and in participation in society. Multiliteracy promotes children’s educational equality. Early childhood education aims to support the development of these skills.

Multiliteracy is a key basic skill from the point of view of culturally diverse messages, understanding the surrounding world and interaction. Multiliteracy refers to the skills of interpreting and creating various types of messages. Multiliteracy is based on a broad definition of text, according to which different texts can be in written, spoken, audiovisual or digital format, for example. It includes different forms of literacy, such as visual literacy, numerical literacy, media literacy and conventional literacy. Multiliteracy is closely connected to the skills of thinking and learning. Adults help the children name things and objects and learn various concepts. Children are encouraged to analyse, use and create messages within various environments, including digital ones. In order to become multiliterate, children need an adult example and a rich text environment, culture produced by children and cultural services suitable for children.

In Helsinki, pedagogy that promotes multiliteracy is based on children’s own experiences and observations as well as a diverse learning environment. Children’s media experiences and skills are utilised in the planning and implementation of the activities. Various messages are observed both within the daycare centre and when moving in the urban environment. Messages produced in interaction with friends and staff and their interpretation are also an important part of multiliteracy. Children are guided to make observations, and adults help them practise critical interpretation of messages and pictures.

Different texts and contents are dealt with using a wide variety of tools and methods, taking into account the interests of the children. The tools used include digital equipment and services, various other media, newspapers, magazines and literature. Children are encouraged to produce their own media content, and their developing skills for engagement and participation in society are supported. Children are encouraged to express their opinions and listen to the opinions of others. The significance of discussion is discussed with them.



## Digital competence

Digitality is part of the society in which children are growing up. Digital competence is needed for interaction between people, functioning in society and learning. Strengthening digital competence promotes children's educational equality. Early childhood education aims to support children's understanding of digitality in cooperation with homes.

The role of digitality in everyday life is studied and observed with children. Digital tools, applications and environments are utilised in documentation, playing, interaction, games, exploration, movement and artistic experience and production. Opportunities to practise, experiment and produce content themselves and together with other children, with the help of digital tools, promote children's creative thinking, collaboration skills and multiliteracy. The staff instruct the children in the diverse, responsible and safe use of digital environments.

➤ In early childhood education in Helsinki, digital content is produced by photographing, videoing, recording and editing together with children, with an exploratory and enthusiastic approach. Gamification is utilised in different areas of learning by building games or using digital learning environments. Gamification is the application of game-like qualities in activities in a playful and experience-oriented manner. Programming is practised by means of play and is also carried out without digital tools. Together with adults, the children practise searching for information using digital tools. Reliable information and copyright issues are discussed with the children, as well as age limits and gaming safety.

Early childhood education uses digital environments and tools to support children's functional learning, exploration and creative expression. The staff take care of the correct pedagogical use of digital environments and tools in order to activate the children.

## Participation and advocacy

Active and responsible participation and advocacy create a basis for a democratic and sustainable future. This requires that individuals have the skills and willingness to take part in their community's activities and that they believe they can have an influence. Children's rights include being heard and having a say in matters that affect their lives. Early childhood education respects these key principles of democracy. The purpose of early childhood education is to support the children's developing skills of participation and advocacy and to encourage them to take initiative.

➤ In early childhood education in Helsinki, inclusion is built into all interaction and activities throughout the day. The community values the uniqueness, activity and abilities of every child, and the children extensively influence the activities during the early childhood education day and feel that they are full members of the group. The community-spirited operating culture is built through participation and positive encounters. Children's advocacy opportunities are concrete, they are visible in the activities and their realisation is discussed.

Building a sense of community and a community-spirited operating culture among children and between children and adults is also supported by practising friendship and cooperation skills as well as an active culture of dialogue. Resolving conflicts together with children, understanding reciprocity, making joint decisions and strengthening the sense of belonging through positive peer relationships is also important in building a community-spirited operating culture.





# 3

## Early childhood education operating culture

The early childhood education operating culture forms a whole, consisting of:

- ▶ values and principles
- ▶ interpretation of the norms and goals that guide the work
- ▶ learning environments and work methods
- ▶ cooperation in its various forms
- ▶ interaction and atmosphere
- ▶ staff members' skills, professional approach and willingness to develop the operations further
- ▶ management structures and practices
- ▶ the organisation, planning, implementation and evaluation of the operations.

The starting point for developing the operating culture is inclusive early childhood education, where all children can act, develop and learn as the unique individuals they are and as members of the community. An inclusive operating culture promotes the inclusion and learning of children and responds to the needs of all children. Suitable learning challenges are offered to all children, and they are provided with the necessary support. All children have the right to belong to a group, participate in joint activities and reach their potential by growing through their strengths and positive learning experiences, together with their peers. ▶ Child groups are always formed on the basis of pedagogical criteria, and their formation takes into account the children's best interests and needs as well as their right to receive teaching and support primarily in their own group.

The early childhood education staff ensure that all the children feel that they are an important part of the daycare community and their own group. The staff are aware that, through their own actions, they can support or prevent the formation of a sense of belonging and the inclusion of the child. For example, the methods of speech and language used, day-to-day practices, small group structures, guiding children to play, the learning environment and various power relationships influence the formation of a sense of belonging. All working methods used in early childhood education must support the child's development and learning. They must also be pedagogically justified. The staff consciously act as role models for the children, who are prone to adopt the values, attitudes and customs of their early childhood education community.

In inclusive early childhood education, the staff's task is to adapt the environment and activities to the needs of the children. Practical pedagogical activities and learning environments are arranged in such a way that each child has the opportunity to participate in joint activities. To make this possible, various tools can be used, such as different types of assistive devices, methods of communication that replace and support speech, pedagogically designed small group structures, staggering and differentiation of activities, diverse use of different spaces and digital tools.

Early childhood education operates flexibly in groups of different sizes that promote child-oriented activities, interaction and the concentration of children and staff. Small group activities ensure a peaceful environment for children to play, act and learn new things. At the same time, the support and presence of adults are guaranteed. A child group's transitions are staggered in order to guarantee a peaceful environment for all. Peaceful, clearly instructed and staff-modelled transition situations give every child the opportunity to practice important skills such as self-management.

The implementation of inclusive early childhood education requires high-quality pedagogical and special pedagogical competence and activities, caring for the well-being of the children and staff commitment to the principles of inclusion. The implementation of an inclusive operating culture requires the management and development of inclusion and the evaluation of its implementation. Management has a key impact on the early childhood education operating culture, its development and quality. The starting point for management is to promote the well-being and learning of each child. Developing the operating culture and its inclusiveness requires pedagogy management, which is the goal-oriented and systematic management, evaluation and development of the early childhood education system. It includes all the measures that enable the creation of good working conditions for staff, the utilisation and development of professional skills and training as well as pedagogical activities.





### 3.1 Developing the operating culture and the principles guiding it

The community's operating culture is constantly changing and is being evaluated and developed in such a way that it supports the achievement of the objectives of early childhood education. Commitment to common goals promotes the realisation of the underpinning values and the concept of learning. Considering the effects of the operating culture and identifying and correcting its undesirable features are an important part of developing the operating culture. A basic prerequisite for continuous development is that the staff understand the importance of the values, knowledge and beliefs behind their own activities and are able to evaluate them. In the development, it is important to have dialogue that respects others, involves the whole community and builds trust. When planning, organising and developing early childhood education, the best interests of children must be a top priority. The best interests of children must be considered on a case- and situation-specific basis for each individual child, the child group and children in general.

Developing an inclusive operating culture requires building a shared understanding and value base in the work community. All members of the work community are responsible for developing the operating culture and following commonly agreed practices. In the same way, each member of the work community is responsible for ensuring that all children in the daycare centre can act, develop and learn in the way that suits them.

In Helsinki, the implementation and development of inclusive early childhood education are supported by positive pedagogy, in which the strengths of each child are identified and taken into account in the planning and implementation of pedagogical activities. At the heart of positive pedagogy are warm interactions, finding and utilising strengths and the staff's understanding of how positive emotions support learning. All children are supported in identifying and finding their own strengths and interests. It is important that all children have daily experiences of success and positive feedback and encouragement for both successful performance and persistent practice.

The director promotes an inclusive culture by creating structures for professional discussion. The aim is for the common mission and the goals of the activities to be reflected in practice. The director is responsible for ensuring that common working practices are made visible, observed and evaluated on a regular basis. The director supports the development of the community into a learning community where competence is developed and shared. In Helsinki, the early childhood education unit's action plan is an important tool for developing and evaluating the operating culture.

#### A learning community at the heart of the operating culture

In early childhood education, people act as a community in which the children and the staff learn together and from each other. A learning community has room for different opinions and emotions. The children and the staff are encouraged to share their thoughts and try out new approaches boldly. A community that is constantly evaluating and developing its operations is one that challenges itself, identifies its strengths and takes advantage of them.

A learning community appreciates respectful and thoughtful behaviour. The community encourages experimentation, trying and perseverance and also allows mistakes to be made. Working together and experiences of inclusion strengthen the community.

Staff are encouraged to self-assess, share information and know-how and, at the same time, develop professionally. Reflection on commonly agreed goals and tasks, regular evaluation of one's own work and feedback from guardians and other partners contribute to the community's learning. Learning is also promoted by utilising information obtained from development work, evaluations and research.

#### A community that encourages play and interaction

An operating culture that encourages play recognises the importance of play for the child's well-being and learning. The staff identify factors limiting play and develop operating methods and learning environments that promote play. The children and the staff have the opportunity to experience the joy of doing things together and playing. The community encourages everyone to be innovative, use their imagination, express themselves and be creative. Playing is allowed to be seen and heard. Children's play initiatives, experiments and experiences are given space, time and peace. While playing, children learn interactive skills, build peer relationships and develop friendships. The staff support the formation of peer relationships among children and nurture friendships. A safe community addresses conflicts and learns constructive ways to resolve them.

#### Inclusion, parity and equality

An inclusive operating culture promotes involvement, non-discrimination and equality in all activities. The ideas, views and opinions of children, staff members and guardians are appreciated. This requires approaches and structures promoting inclusion to be consciously developed. Children's understanding of their community, rights, responsibilities and the consequences of their choices develop through participation. Children's sense of inclusion is strengthened by sensitive encounters and a positive feeling of being heard and seen.

The early childhood education staff interact with every child on a daily basis with an active and committed approach. Children are encouraged to talk about their feelings and thoughts and to express their opinions boldly. The staff are responsible for ensuring that all children find a suitable way of expressing themselves and thereby being heard on a daily basis. Opinions can be expressed in many different ways: for example, by taking part in a discussion or interview, showing a picture, using sign language, voting or drawing. Observations made by the staff are particularly important in determining the opinions of the smallest children.

Every staff member is an important part of the education community. All of the community's members are treated equally regardless of their personal factors. Being

equal does not mean the same thing as being similar. In order to develop the operating culture, it is important that the attitudes towards parity and equality are discussed in the workplace community. In early childhood education in Helsinki, the non-discrimination plan is part of the unit's action plan. The goals set are regularly evaluated and developed together with the children and guardians.

Early childhood education recognises the way in which attitudes towards language, ethnicity, beliefs, disability, gender and its various forms show in speech, gestures, actions and approaches. Ways of interacting and speaking and behaviour based on stereotypical assumptions are passed on to children. Early childhood education is gender-sensitive. The staff encourage the children to make decisions without any stereotypical roles and expectations tied to a specific gender or other personal circumstances. The staff can identify any elements in the children's interaction that promote disparity and will intervene gently and systematically. Positive and encouraging interaction supports the development of the child's identity and self-esteem. Helsinki is systematically developing operating models to prevent disparity and the social exclusion of children and young people.

#### Cultural diversity and language awareness

In early childhood education, cultural diversity is seen as an asset. The community recognises that retaining your language, culture, religion and beliefs is part of basic human rights. Early childhood education values and utilises the diverse cultural heritage and the national languages as well as the various cultures, languages and beliefs within the community and its surroundings. This requires staff to possess knowledge of other cultures and belief systems and have the skills to view things from different angles and step into other people's shoes. At the same time, they promote culturally sustainable development.

In early childhood education in Helsinki, children are made aware of the city's diversity. Together, a learning environment is created where the attitudes are respectful and considerate of the diversity of the community and the child groups. Early childhood education staff talk openly and constructively about the significance and appreciation of cultural diversity and about what it means to be a resident of Helsinki.

Language-aware early childhood education recognises that languages are present at all times and everywhere. The staff understand that language is key to children’s development and learning, interaction and collaboration, identity construction and participation in society. ➤ Early childhood education staff recognise multilingualism as an asset and make it visible in the learning environments. Diversity is also otherwise reflected in toys and materials.

➤ The staff pay attention to the way they use language, as they act as a linguistic model for the children. The children are encouraged to use language in a diverse way and are allowed to use different languages as part of their interaction. The children are given time and opportunities to use language in different contexts. Early childhood education activities support the development of all children’s linguistic skills and reasoning abilities. Language-aware activities are described in more detail in Chapter 4.5.

Health, safety and a sustainable lifestyle

Early childhood education values healthy, safe and physically active lifestyles. Early childhood education communities take part in a wide range of physical activities, both indoors and outdoors, and avoid staying seated for extended periods of time. Children’s well-being is promoted by offering sufficient physical activity, allowing them to calm down and rest during the day and providing them with a balanced, healthy and sufficient diet. All communities should be able to operate in an environment that avoids rushing and promotes concentration, which is taken into account when developing the operating culture. A clear and goal-oriented but flexible daily structure promotes well-being. ➤ The activities and structure of the day and week are made visible to the children and the staff. Planning the activities in advance creates a safe and peaceful atmosphere.

In early childhood education, the physical, mental and social safety of the whole community is taken care of. Children must be protected from violence, bullying and other harassment. Children have the right to receive comfort when they need it. ➤ Together with adults, the children practise recognising, naming and expressing emotions, regulating them and finding ways to safely express them. Early childhood education does not allow bullying, violence or harassment. Bullying is recognised, intervened in and prevented consciously and systematically as part of the development of the operating culture. Group bonding and a happy atmosphere in a child group prevent bullying effectively. Every day in early childhood education, the staff must make sure that none of the children are left unwillingly on their own and everyone has someone to play with. The staff support the interactions between the children and also enable important shared experiences between the child and a safe adult.

➤ Helsinki implements an anti-bullying programme (ABP13) on all levels of education. The units’ action plan describes how the unit strengthens friendship, interaction, empathy and emotional skills, and how conflict situations are solved together with the children.

➤ The staff respond sensitively to the children’s initiatives and emotions. The staff have a positive attitude and act as role models for functional interaction, which makes the atmosphere in the entire group safer and more accepting of diversity. The promotion of safety also includes the systematic prevention and monitoring of accidents, health and safety training and looking after the facilities and equipment.

Early childhood education requires safety management that is well-functioning and committed, in addition to which the staff must be familiar with safety matters.

The necessity of adopting an ecologically, socially, culturally and financially sustainable lifestyle is accounted for in all operations. Everyday choices and actions reflect a responsible attitude towards nature and the environment. Early childhood education promotes shared use, fixing and reuse of equipment and facilities, as well as their moderate and economical use.



An example of evaluating an inclusive operating culture

How do we know that we have succeeded?

- All children can participate in the activities and influence their contents.
- We identify strengths in each child and guide children to identify strengths in themselves and in others.
- We support children’s friendships and sense of belonging to the group.
- We operate in pedagogically appropriate small groups, ensuring that transitions can also be planned and staggered.



### 3.2 Learning environments in early childhood

The aim of early childhood education is to ensure a learning environment that promotes development and learning while also being inclusive, healthy, safe and accessible. Learning environments refer to facilities, places, communities, practices, instruments and equipment that support children’s development, learning and interaction. In early childhood education, the concept of the learning environment includes things like the physical, mental and social dimensions. Learning environments are developed to achieve the goals set for early childhood education and to support the development of the children’s healthy self-esteem and social and learning skills. Ergonomics, ecology, comfort and accessibility as well as the lighting and acoustics of the premises, indoor air quality and cleanliness are taken into account in the construction and development of learning environments and in the selection of various materials and equipment. When possible, various recycled materials are also used in the construction of learning environments.

Diverse learning environments are designed, built and developed together with children, taking their needs into account. The environments must support children’s natural curiosity and willingness to learn and encourage playing, physical activity, exploration and artistic expression and experiences. Children must have the opportunity to explore the world with all their senses and their whole body. The learning environments provide the children with options for pleasant activities, diverse and energetic physical activities, play and games as well as peaceful time and rest. The children’s ideas, games and things they have created are visible in the learning environments.

Mutually agreed rules and practices help create a learning environment with a safe atmosphere where people respect each other and feel solidarity. In a safe atmosphere, showing emotions is allowed and the staff help the children express and control their emotions. Children are encouraged to ask questions, and their questions are answered.

The learning environments are designed and developed to strengthen parity and gender equality. This makes it possible to break traditional gender stereotypes. The learning environments promote children’s linguistic development and language awareness and make cultural diversity visible.

Nature, yards, playgrounds and other built environments are also learning environments for early childhood education. Early childhood education in Helsinki makes extensive use of different natural environments: forests, parks, rocks and sea shores offer good opportunities for diverse activities and learning. Early childhood education cooperates with the different operators in the region and with the city’s diverse cultural, sports and exercise, environmental education, youth work and elderly care networks. Regional activities are important for creating a sense of community. Children are connected to their local community through festivities, trips and traditions. The diversity of the learning environment and the local cooperation networks are recorded in the unit’s action plan.

Children’s learning environments are enriched by cooperation with other operators and both physical and virtual visits to, for example, the library, museums, cultural heritage sites, concerts, theatre and guardians’ workplaces. The planning of learning environments also provides a natural opportunity for cooperation between staff and guardians.

Children must have access to sufficient diverse, age-appropriate, pedagogical and safe play and other equipment, taking into account their individual needs for support and interests. Digital technology is part of a diverse and inclusive learning environment for children. Early childhood education uses digital tools, applications and environments in an appropriate way. The use of the children’s own digital devices, toys and other equipment is always agreed separately between the staff and the guardians.

The development of the staff’s professional skills, the testing and adoption of new working methods and the systematic evaluation of the pedagogical activities of the group together with the children are an important part of the development of learning environments. By changing and enriching learning environments, children are offered new learning opportunities.



An example of evaluating the quality of the learning environment

#### How do we know that we have succeeded?

- We review, evaluate and shape learning environments together with the children.
- Diversity is reflected in the learning environment, play equipment and materials.
- We utilise natural and outdoor environments in a variety of ways.
- We actively cooperate with the region’s early childhood education, culture, sports and exercise and other operators, promoting the children’s play, learning and attachment to communities.

### 3.3 Cooperation in early childhood education

The goals and high-quality pedagogical activities of early childhood education are promoted through cooperation. This ensures that all children receive education, teaching and care in accordance with their individual development and needs. The organiser of early childhood education is responsible for ensuring that the cooperation is systematic and is carried out multi-professionally.

In early childhood education in Helsinki, the principles of cooperation with guardians and the operating models relating to communication are recorded in the unit’s action plan. Regular customer surveys are conducted in Helsinki and feedback is collected from guardians. The information obtained from these is taken into account in the development of early childhood education.

#### Collaboration with guardians

Collaboration with guardians plays an important role in early childhood education. The aim of the collaboration is for the guardians and staff members to become committed to promoting the healthy and safe growth, development and learning of the children. Educational cooperation is supported by building trust, equal interaction and mutual respect. The values, goals and responsibilities relating to educational work are discussed both among the staff and with the guardians. The cooperation is interactive in nature and requires that the early childhood education staff take an active role and show initiative.

Varying family backgrounds, children’s individual needs and matters related to a guardian’s or parent’s role are taken into account in the collaboration. If necessary, an interpreter is used in the discussions to ensure mutual understanding. Sufficient time is allowed for discussions with the guardians. The linguistic and cultural knowledge and other expertise of the guardians adds value to early childhood education.

Cooperation may take different forms during the child’s early childhood education. The day-to-day events and experiences of the children are shared with the guardians. Encouraging and positive messages describing the development and learning of the child are an important part of day-to-day cooperation. The guardians also have the opportunity to talk about their children’s individual strengths and interests, and these are taken into account in the activities.



Discussions on the children’s day between their guardians and the staff form the basis for guaranteeing the overall well-being of the children. Cooperation can also support the interaction between guardians. When guardians form networks and work together at various events, it provides a boost to the sense of community and supports the work conducted by the staff.

The importance of cooperation is particularly highlighted in transition phases, such as when the child begins early childhood education, in transitions during early childhood education, when changing daycare centres or when starting pre-primary education. Mutual discussion plays a special role in drawing up the child’s individual early childhood education plan (Chapter 1.3). The significance of cooperation with the guardian is highlighted in planning and implementing support for the child (Chapter 5). The trustful atmosphere enables cooperation between the guardian and staff even in challenging situations, for example, when concerns about the child’s well-being arise. ➤ The guardians are always involved in planning, evaluating and decision-making for support for their child.

The guardians receive information about the plans, activities and goals of their child’s group. The staff are responsible for making the activities visible and also take into consideration families who do not understand the Finnish language, for example. The guardians of all children must have the opportunity to participate in planning and developing the activities and goals of early childhood education together with the staff and the children. Information and communications technology is utilised in the cooperation with the guardians. ➤ In early childhood education in Helsinki, the pedagogical activities of the group are documented in the digital group portfolio. The group portfolio describes the goals of the child group’s activities and the significance of the activities for the children’s learning and development. The group portfolio also enables guardians to follow the group’s daily activities and moments of learning, discovery and joy. The group portfolio uses a lot of images that the guardians can view together with the child.

➤ Helsinki uses the “Mitä kuuluu?” (“How are you doing?”) model. Its purpose is to strengthen early support for families with children. The core of the model is that families are asked how they are doing as part of the daily encounters in early childhood education. This gives the guardians the opportunity to tell the staff about their everyday life, both successes and concerns. The staff are responsible for meeting the guardians and listening sensitively if there are, for

example, overstress, fatigue or other concerns in the family. If early childhood education staff see a need for help, they inform the guardians of their opportunities to receive advice and support by, for example, contacting social services guidance for families with children. An employee can also call the support provider together with the guardians.

Cooperation with various parties

The aim of the cooperation is to ensure the provision and development of high-quality early childhood education. According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, when organising early childhood education, the municipality must be involved in multi-professional cooperation and create the necessary cooperation structures. A private service provider must be involved in multi-professional cooperation as necessary. Cooperation and development between municipal and private early childhood education providers and municipalities are important. ➤ Early childhood education in Helsinki carries out multi-professional cooperation with pre-primary education, school, child health clinics, child welfare services and other social services and health care providers. The significance of cooperation is emphasised when one of these parties raises concerns about the child’s development or well-being, or when support for the child is planned and organised.

➤ An extensive health examination for four-year-old children in early childhood education in Helsinki is carried out in cooperation between the family, early childhood education and the child health clinic. This is called the Hyve 4 model. Approximately two months before the child’s fourth birthday, an early childhood education plan discussion is held with the guardians and key information on the child’s development is recorded in the information transfer form. The form is sent from early childhood education to the child health clinic with the guardian’s consent. At the child health clinic, the child undergoes an extensive health examination, based on which the nurse completes the form and sends it back to the daycare centre. The aim is to identify support needs together in good time and to help the child and family find the right support.



As part of the cooperation between early childhood education and child health clinics, the early childhood education teacher fills in a child observation form, which will be sent to the child health clinic before the 3-year health check. The child health clinic nurse will add the necessary observations to the form and send it back to early childhood education.

In Helsinki, the staff have the opportunity to ask for advice and consultation by telephone from social services guidance for families with children.

As agreed, the early childhood education staff will work together with child welfare services if required by a family’s situation or a child’s need. Child welfare services must be contacted in order to evaluate a child’s support needs if problems in the child’s everyday life are identified and the guardian is willing to receive help from child welfare services. If child welfare services cannot be contacted together with the guardians and the early childhood education staff members are concerned about the child’s situation, a child welfare notification must be filed.



An example of evaluating cooperation

How do we know that we have succeeded?

- We regularly inform the guardians of the goals and meaning of the activities.
- We provide the guardians with opportunities to participate and influence the activities of the group in a way that suits them.
- We know the local partners in child and family services.



# 4

## Planning and implementation of pedagogical activities in early childhood education

### 4.1 Framework of pedagogical activities

Pedagogical activities in early childhood education and their implementation are holistic by nature.

The aim is to promote the children's learning and well-being and transversal competence (figure on page 37). The pedagogical activities are carried out in interaction and joint activities between the children and the staff. Activities planned by the children, the staff and both parties together are complementary to each other. Pedagogical activities in early childhood education affect the education, teaching and care as a whole.

Goal-oriented and inclusive activities are built on the underpinning values, the concept of learning, the operating culture based on them as well as diverse learning environments, cooperation, working methods and support for

the child. The starting points for planning the activities include the children's interests and needs, the relevant issues related to their growth environment and the learning areas described in Chapter 4.5. High-quality pedagogical activities require systematic documentation, evaluation and development. The transversal competence goals also influence the planning of the activities.

Children's individual early childhood education plans are the starting points for planning the activities of the child group. The activities are carried out such that all children have the right to learn in such a way that early childhood education and pre-primary education become a meaningful continuum for them.

### 4.2 Pedagogical documentation

Pedagogical documentation is a key method of planning, implementing, evaluating and developing early childhood education. It is a continuous process in which observations, documents and their interactive interpretation form an understanding of pedagogical activities. Pedagogical documentation enables children and guardians to participate in evaluating, planning and developing the activities.

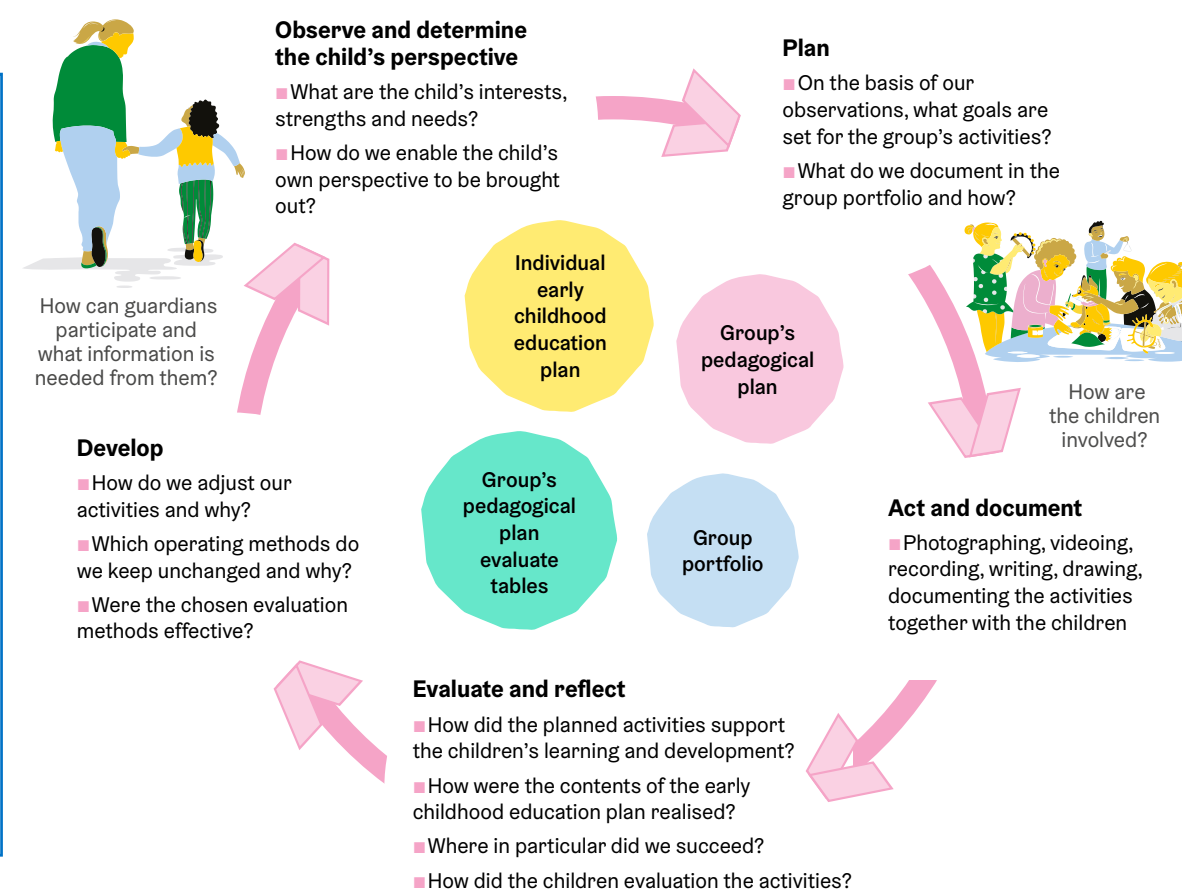
The aim of plan-based documentation is for the staff to get to know individual children and to understand the relationships between the children and the nature of the interaction between the staff and the children in the group. The purpose of pedagogical documentation is to provide early childhood education in a child-centred way. The information and understanding obtained through the documentation is used, for example, in the continuous adaptation of working methods, learning environments, goals, methods and contents according to the children's interests and needs.

Planned pedagogical documentation is carried out in Helsinki. The pedagogical documentation consists of the child's individual early childhood education plan, the unit's action plan, the group's pedagogical plan and group portfolio as well as the evaluation made on the basis of these.

The goals recorded in the group's pedagogical plan are realised in the activities, and the activities are documented in the group portfolio. It is used to return to shared experiences with the children, to discuss, evaluate and plan for the future.

According to the children's age and level of development, material is produced with them about everyday observations, phenomenon-based learning entities and play and exploration projects carried out in the group. Documentation is carried out in various ways and with various tools, also practising digital skills. The material collected in the group portfolio is shared with the guardians to provide them with information about the activities and their pedagogical content. Successful pedagogical documentation reveals discoveries, experiences and the joy of doing things together, which increase the team spirit in the group.

#### Planning, documentation and evaluation



### 4.3 Diverse working methods

The choice of working methods is guided by the tasks and goals set for early childhood education as well as the age, needs, abilities and interests of the children. Working methods that are functional and promote creativity and inclusion are natural ways of learning for children. Examples of these include children's independent and guided play, exploration, physical activities, and artistic experiences and expression. Digital tools, applications and environments are utilised in the activities. The diverse working methods are both a learning instrument and something that the children are learning about. Therefore, it is important that the staff instruct the children to experiment and use different working methods both in groups of different size and independently. During the work, children are encouraged to ask questions, wonder, deduce and solve problems together.

The staff are required to have good professional skills and the sensitivity to identify pedagogical opportunities in different situations. This can be seen, among other things, in the staff's ability to perceive the children's initiatives and emotions and to change and adjust their own actions accordingly. The children's initiatives can be physical and non-verbal, so understanding and responding to them requires the staff to have a sensitive presence and know the child well.

The children participate in the planning and selection of working methods according to their abilities. The children must have the opportunity to explore the world with all their senses and their whole body and to try various working methods. The varied use of working methods brings experiences of success to children of different ages, who learn in different ways.

In Helsinki, the working methods are selected with due consideration to the city's vast pool of diverse opportunities, including nature, public transport, sports and exercise, various partners, cultural and other sites, as well as the city's multifaceted structure and history. The way in which the goals of the learning areas are approached varies depending on the situations, chosen topics and the children's individual development. In Helsinki, phenomenon-based learning and the comprehensive observation and study of different subjects and phenomena together with the children inspires activities where the end result is not planned in advance.



4.4 Play as a source of development, learning and well-being

Playing is a key activity in early childhood education, and its potential is utilised in a variety of ways every day. Playing is seen as every child’s right and an important pedagogical tool.

The staff are responsible for enabling play in accordance with the inclusive principles, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to participate in joint games in accordance with their skills and abilities. The staff must support the development of the children’s play in a systematic and goal-oriented manner and guide it either from outside or by being involved in the play. Children may have various needs for support in terms of play and play skills. The staff observe and identify the needs and take the necessary measures to enable playing. Supporting and enriching play is the responsibility of each staff member.

It is important that children are involved in the development of games and play environments. Children are active agents when playing: they analyse and explore the world around them, create social relationships, create meanings and reflect on their experiences. When playing, children are building a sense of themselves and other people. They imitate and experiment with what they see and learn new skills. At the same time, they model and test their dreams and hopes. When children play, they can also deal with their difficult experiences. It is safe to experiment, try and make mistakes while playing.

Playing combines key elements that promote learning: enthusiasm, doing things together and challenging one’s own skills. Playing develops and takes different forms as the children gain more experiences. Interactions between the staff and the children and among the children form the basis for the development of thinking, language and play skills. Children observe, experiment and learn the community’s rules while playing. When playing in a group, children learn to regulate their emotions and urges and to take into account other people’s points of view. The sense of community grows through play and strengthens the positive emotional climate.

The contents of transversal competence and learning areas are visible in the pedagogy of play. The staff utilise drama, improvisation and fairy tales in developing the play storyline and building play worlds. The staff must be aware of the importance of focused exploration, spontaneous creative expression and fast-paced physical play for the well-being and learning of the children. The staff enrich various situations with

playfulness and take advantage of the opportunities for play and exercise in waiting situations in particular. Nursery rhymes, wordplay, songs and fooling around together strengthen the positive atmosphere, which supports learning and well-being.

The staff must observe and document the children’s play. Observing play increases the staff’s understanding of the children’s thoughts, interests, feelings and experiences. The observations are used in planning and guiding the play and other activities. The staff are required to be sensitive, professional and gender-sensitive to detect and respond appropriately to the children’s play initiatives. Identifying and tackling gender-stereotyped factors that restrict playing requires joint discussion and development of play practices by the staff.

The staff create good conditions for playing and take into account that long-lasting play requires time, peace and space as well as suitable play equipment and materials available to the children. The learning environments must be flexible to allow playing, as the playing does not necessarily stay in the designated spaces.

The staff are aware of and can identify the developmental stages of play and, on the other hand, also understand that every child develops at an individual pace. For very young children, playing is about contact and interaction between an adult and a child. Gradually, children begin to show interest in the surrounding world, and playing is targeted at objects and their purposes. During these early stages of play, playing is usually solitary or parallel. Solitary and parallel play gradually change into collaborative play, allowing children to develop interaction and different roles within a group. Play themes have their sources in the children’s prior experiences. Through role play, the forms of playing develop further towards imaginary play, which is expressive and characterised by storylines, as well as games and collaborative play that require negotiations about the rules. At all developmental stages of play, the physical and mental presence of the staff plays an important role. Among other things, the staff’s presence supports the interaction between the children and helps prevent conflict situations.

Knowledge of children’s culture and media helps the staff to understand the children’s games. Various games, digital tools and applications also offer a wide range of opportunities. In a learning environment that encourages play, adults are also learners. The staff discuss the importance of playing and their observations about the children’s playing with the guardians. This can help the children continue playing at home or in early childhood education.



Everyone playing together





## 4.5 Areas of learning

The areas of learning describe the main goals and content of pedagogical activities in early childhood education. They guide the staff when planning and implementing diverse and pedagogical activities together with the children. Children have the right to gain a wide range of experiences in different areas of learning. These areas are not separate or detached, and instead their themes are combined together and applied in practice according to the children’s interests and abilities. The areas of learning have been divided into five groups, based on the National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education:

- ▶ Rich world of the language
- ▶ Diverse forms of expression
- ▶ Me and our community
- ▶ Exploring and interacting with my environment
- ▶ I grow and develop.

### Rich world of languages

The purpose of early childhood education is to strengthen children’s linguistic skills and abilities and the development of their linguistic identities. Early childhood education boosts the children’s curiosity and interest in languages, texts and cultures. Supporting language development is linked to the development of children’s multiliteracy (Chapter 2.7). In addition, it is linked to transversal competence relating to children’s cultural skills and interaction, among other things. Developing linguistic skills provide children with new ways of influencing, opportunities for inclusion and active agency.

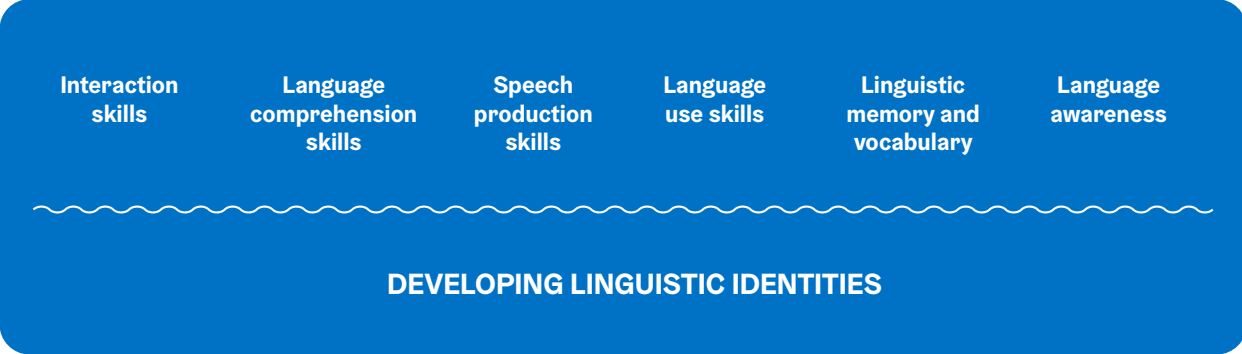
Language is both something that the children are learning about and an instrument. It allows the children to grasp various situations and things, interact with others, express themselves and acquire information. Their linguistic development is supported by a diverse early childhood education language environment and cooperation with the guardians. In early childhood education, the children receive encouraging and systematic feedback on their language and interactive skills.

Pedagogical activities that combine and apply areas of learning facilitate the comprehensive observation and study of different subjects and phenomena. The children’s interests and questions form the basis for the activities. The topics can originate in play, stories, excursions or spontaneous interaction among the children or between them and the staff, for example. The way in which the goals of the learning areas are approached varies depending on the chosen topics, situations and the children’s learning pace. The staff are responsible for ensuring that the pedagogical activities promote the development and learning of children of various ages

Early childhood education supports the development of each child’s skills in the language of instruction. The education and teaching take into account the fact that children grow up in different linguistic environments and can acquire several languages at the same time. The ways of using languages and interacting vary between families, in addition to which some families may speak several languages. Linguistic and cultural diversity is made visible in early childhood education in cooperation with the guardians. This contributes to the development of the children’s linguistic identities. More specific linguistic and cultural aspects in early childhood education are discussed in Chapter 4.6.

When it comes to learning a language, it is important to understand that children of similar ages may be at different stages of language development. **Linguistic identities develop** when children are guided and supported in key areas of linguistic skills and abilities.

In order to develop their **interactive skills**, it is important that children feel they are heard during interaction



and that their initiatives are responded to. The sensitivity and responsiveness of the staff to non-verbal messages from the children is also essential. The development of interactive skills is supported by encouraging the children to communicate with other children and the staff.

Children’s **language comprehension skills** are supported by extensive linguistic models provided by the staff. Systematic verbalisation of activities and discussion support the development of the children’s vocabulary. Descriptive and precise language is used in various early childhood education situations. Images, objects and sign-supported speech are used as necessary.

The development of the children’s **speech production skills** is monitored and guided. The children are encouraged to speak with adults and other children in different situations. This helps the children to use and understand the spoken language. With the children, attention is also gradually paid to tones of voice.

The children’s **language use skills** are guided and language use is considered together with the children in various situations. The aim is to strengthen contextual awareness in language use. Together with adults, the children practise storytelling, giving explanations and taking turns during conversations. In addition, immersion, the use of humour and learning good manners enhance children’s language skills. Becoming familiar with different types of texts supports the development of language skills and helps the children to perceive differences between the spoken and written language.

The children’s linguistic expression diversifies as their **linguistic memory** and vocabulary expand. It is the duty of the staff to consciously support this development. The development of linguistic memory is supported by, for example, nursery rhymes and singing games. Playing with language, naming and using descriptive words promote the development of the children’s linguistic memory and vo-

cabulary. Unhurried discussion, reading and storytelling provide opportunities to reflect on the meanings of words and texts and to learn new concepts in various contexts.

Observing the different languages in the surroundings supports the development of children’s **language awareness**. The staff are responsible for arousing and increasing the children’s interest in the spoken and written language, and gradually also in reading and writing. By observing and studying the language, the children’s attention is directed from the meaning of words to the shapes and structures of language, such as words, syllables and sounds. The children are encouraged to write and read in a playful way.

The staff ensure that all children have the opportunity to be understood, understand what happens in their surroundings and participate in it. The activities are planned in such a way that, in addition to learning contents, linguistic goals are set for the activities. The learning environments are multilingual and use multiple languages in parallel. The environments are safe, and they encourage and inspire the children to learn languages, learn about languages and learn in different languages. Children learn languages by playing, singing, dancing, talking, telling stories, listening and asking questions.

The staff and child groups receive professional support and guidance from teachers of Finnish as a second language in the implementation of language- and culture-aware early childhood education. Early childhood education uses various evaluation and support materials for language-aware activities, such as the Kielipeda tool and the “Ota koppi” (“Grasp it”) material.

In early childhood education in Helsinki, in order to promote an operating culture that strengthens reading, the staff plan targeted literary education for the child group, taking into account the interests of the children. The staff act as role models for reading, support the children to grow into readers and create a permissive and conversational atmosphere in the group. The learning environment is built together with the children to be positive and encourage linguistic expression. Together with adults, the children study, read and produce different types of text, familiarise

themselves with different kinds of literature and utilise diverse art-based methods in book projects. The activities make use of Helsinki's library and cultural services.

Literary education carried out in the group is documented using different methods, and information about the importance of reading to children is distributed to the families. In order to support the evaluation and development, early childhood education staff can use the Reading Wheel material.



### Early childhood education culture path



### Diverse forms of expression

Early childhood education aims to support the development of children's **musical, visual, crafts, verbal and bodily expression** and to familiarise them with various forms of art and cultural heritage. Children express themselves in a holistic manner and creatively combine different means of expression. Artistic experiences and expression promote children's learning abilities, social skills, positive self-image and ability to understand and analyse the surrounding world. The skills of thinking and learning will develop as children study, interpret and create meanings by practising different forms of expression. The ability to imagine and create mental images is also key to the development of a child's ethical thinking. Learning about cultural heritage, art and various forms of expression also strengthen the children's skills in multiliteracy, participation and advocacy.

Culture is an important part of a child's identity. Early childhood education provides children with opportunities to see and experience art and other culture in a variety of ways. Art and culture experiences strengthen the children's ability to adopt, use and produce culture. At the same time, the children learn to understand the importance and value of art and cultural heritage.

The various forms of expression provide the children with the means to experience and perceive the world in a way that speaks to and inspires them. Artistic expression offers the children motivational ways to make observations, emotions and creative thinking visible. The various forms of expression are introduced in a multisensory way, utilising different working methods, learning environments

and the cultural offerings of the surrounding area. It is important for the learning environments to be aesthetic and inspiring, with a wide range of equipment, materials and instruction available, when learning about different forms of expression.

Art education includes both spontaneous and planned activities. The processes of self-expression and learning are characterised by experimentation, exploration, practising different stages of creating things and documenting the stages. Every child's individual expression is supported, and sufficient time and space is given to the children's shared creative processes. Utilising the special skills of the staff, children and partners adds value to art education.

In Helsinki, children are provided with extensive and diverse education in expression and culture together with the Culture and Leisure division's operators and artistic organisations. In Helsinki, early childhood education works in close cooperation with Culture Kids activities, where various cultural operators offer artistic and cultural experiences for each age group. The various forms of expression are also introduced and practised using the contents of the culture path. The culture path of early childhood education and pre-primary education in Helsinki, together with the culture path of basic education, forms a whole that enables children to experience and create art and culture on an equal footing.



The aim of **musical expression** is to provide the children with musical experiences and enhance their interest in and relationship with music. The children are guided towards gaining experiences by listening and making observations about the surrounding soundscape. The children's ability to perceive music and the duration, level, timbre and power of sound develop through playful musical activities. Together with adults, they sing, rhyme, try different instruments, listen to music and move along with music. The children get experiences of a basic beat, word rhythms and body instruments. The children are encouraged to use their imagination and express the thoughts and feelings evoked by music by, for example, explaining, expressing with images or dancing.

▶ In early childhood education in Helsinki, musical activities are approached through playfulness and providing experiences of success. The children are also offered experiences in combining music and movement. Various musical instruments and equipment are available for the children to use in a variety of ways, and they are instructed in how to use them. Musical performances can be arranged within groups or for a larger audience, for example, at joint parties.

The aim of **visual expression** is to develop the children's relationship with visual arts, other visual culture and cultural heritage. The children get to enjoy creating images and gain aesthetic experiences from art. They practise their visual thinking, perception and interpretation of images through diverse visual expression. Image creation skills are developed in a multisensory way and by building connections with other forms of expression. Children experiment with various methods, equipment and materials for creating images by, for example, painting, drawing, building and making media presentations. Together with adults, the children make observations about their own drawings, works of art, media content, objects and parts of the built and natural environment. The children are guided to interpret and communicate their thoughts about visual messages. When looking at images, attention is paid to, for example, colours, shapes, materials, the creator, the context in which the images are presented and the emotions they arouse.

Planning skills, creative problem-solving and knowledge about structures, materials and techniques are practised by doing crafts, using technical work and textile work methods suitable for children. These methods may include, for example, sculpting, cutting, nailing, sawing and sewing.



▶ In early childhood education in Helsinki, children are offered a wide range of opportunities to present and share their creations and give encouraging peer feedback. The work and creations are documented by, for example, photographing, videoing and recording. The creations are displayed at the early childhood education units, and images and videos are shared in the group portfolios, for example.

Exhibitions and performances can also be organised in cooperation with the city's art and cultural operators. Children's expression is made visible at parties and shared events.

The aim of **crafts expression** is to give children the joy of experimenting, exploring, collaborating, experiencing and discovering as well as the pleasure of work that shows their own creativity and personal touch. The children are offered the opportunity to experiment, explore and combine various materials and to learn crafts techniques needed for the work. The children get to come up with ideas and create various works and objects. Craft traditions related to both the children's backgrounds and local traditions can be examined and utilised with the children.

The children are encouraged to express themselves **verbally and bodily**, for example through theatre, dance and play. The aim is for the exercises and games to provide them with a range of opportunities to gain experiences, express themselves and communicate both verbally and bodily. Things that the children have imagined, experienced or seen are worked on together. The children get experiences of both spontaneous expression and a jointly planned, implemented and evaluated creative process. For example, children's literature, literary art, various forms of theatre, dance and circus are utilised in a number of ways.

## Me and our community

Children's world expands when they start attending early childhood education outside of their home. In addition to the traditions, customs, values and beliefs at home, the children come into contact with other ways of thinking and behaving. The purpose of early childhood education is to help the children learn to understand the diversity of their local community and practise being one of its members. This is done by focusing on the themes of ethical thinking, beliefs, the local community's past, present and future as well as media. Stories, music, visual art, play, theatre, various types of media content, visitors, visits and local events can be used as part of the activities. The "Me and our community" learning area particularly supports the children's transversal competence in connection to culture, interaction, self-expression, thinking and learning (Chapter 2.7).

The development of ethical thinking is supported by discussing ethical questions that the children have or that occur in different situations. Themes can be related to things such as friendship, telling right from wrong, justice, or topics linked with fear, sadness and joy. Ethical questions are addressed with the children such that they can feel safe and accepted. The rules of the group and their reasons are also discussed with the children.

In worldview education in early childhood education, the children learn about the religions and other beliefs present in their own group. Religions and beliefs can also be examined with the children in a broader context. Not being religious is also discussed. The aim is to promote mutual respect and understanding when it comes to different belief systems, and to support the development of the children's identities in terms of their culture and beliefs. The children are introduced to different belief systems and their traditions. Examples of natural ways of looking at belief systems include seasonal festivities and events as well as everyday situations, such as getting dressed and mealtimes. Children are given space to wonder, and life questions that concern them are discussed with them.

Worldview education is carried out in cooperation with the guardians, consulting and respecting the background, beliefs and values of each family. Worldview education supports, among other things, the children's transversal competence in connection to culture, interaction, self-expression, thinking and learning (see Chapter 2.7).

By discussing the past, present and future of the local community, the children's interests are guided towards history and building a positive future. In addition, the diversity of children's growth environments is examined.

The children are provided with opportunities to immerse themselves in past events and scenes. Important information sources include the children and their personal histories, the members of the local community, objects and environments. Furthermore, the knowledge of the children's guardians about their own cultural heritage can be utilised. The children can learn about the past through games and music from their grandparents' times, for example.

▶ Helsinki has a long and varied history, which can be explored with the children by visiting historical sites in the surrounding area and in various parts of the city or by exploring old photographs, for example. The Kindergarten Museum, Helsinki City Museum, National Museum and libraries act as important pedagogical partners.

The present is examined by addressing current issues with the children that are of concern or interest to them. The diversity of the local community is also examined with the children with due respect. Among other things, the diversity of people, genders and families is reviewed. The aim is to raise children to understand that people are different but of equal value.

In addition to the past and present, it is also important to think about the future and how we can make it positive. Thinking about the future may be related to, for example, planning games for the coming season or designing the children's own learning environment. The children and staff can build imaginary future worlds or think about the future through professions that the children are interested in.

Exploring and interacting with my environment

Early childhood education in Helsinki provides children with diverse support in developing their mathematical thinking and relationship with technology, nature and the environment. The children’s skills in analysing, thinking and applying technology are enhanced through exploration and experimentation. The children are encouraged to ask questions, find answers to these questions and draw conclusions together. Early childhood education utilises the mathematical, natural, scientific, environmental and technological learning environments of various operators. Early childhood education supports the children’s understanding that ecological sustainability is the foundation of all sustainability. Play, games and adventures are used to explore and act in the surroundings.

Mathematical thinking

In early childhood education, mathematical thinking supports the children’s developing abilities to observe, analyse and understand their surroundings and causal relationships. The children are encouraged to pay attention to shapes, numbers and changes occurring in daily life. They are also encouraged to observe, consider and describe their findings in different ways, including verbally, visually, bodily or by using some equipment.

The children are given opportunities to classify, compare and arrange things and objects and to discover patterns and changes. Children of all ages are helped to understand the concept of numbers. They are guided towards noticing numbers while playing. As the children grow, the concept is expanded to include the relationships between numbers by measuring things, for example. Spatial thinking and the concepts of mutual relations and locations are practised with games involving movement, by drawing pictures and by using various pieces of equipment. Play, toys and games introduce the children to causal relationships and the principles of programming. The children are encouraged to study objects and their geometric shapes by building, crafting and sculpting things. The concept of time is studied by observing daily and seasonal changes.



Technology education

The children’s relationship with technology is developed when they learn how common technological devices and systems, such as home appliances, ICT and vehicles, work. In order to improve their skills in applying technology to practice, children are encouraged to come up with creative solutions and implement their ideas by using different materials and equipment to build, craft or sculpt objects or to use other means of self-expression. Programmable equipment provides opportunities for children to develop their mathematical thinking and practise their technological skills.

Environmental education

The development of the children’s relationship with nature and the environment is supported from three angles: learning in the environment, learning about it and taking action for the environment. Nearby natural areas and the city’s built environment are actively used as objects of learning and as learning and playing environments. Through positive experiences, the children learn to enjoy nature and the surrounding environment, and their relationship with the environment is strengthened. Children are encouraged to use different senses to make observations about natural phenomena and the changing seasons and also learn to take responsibility for the environment and its well-being.

Environmental education promotes growing into a sustainable lifestyle and practising the skills required. These practical skills include, for example, going out in nature without littering, learning about moderation and economy, responsible eating, saving energy and reducing waste by recycling, repairing and reusing goods. It is important to ensure that the children feel that they can influence a sustainable lifestyle through their own actions, but without having to bear too much responsibility as children for maintaining a sustainable lifestyle.



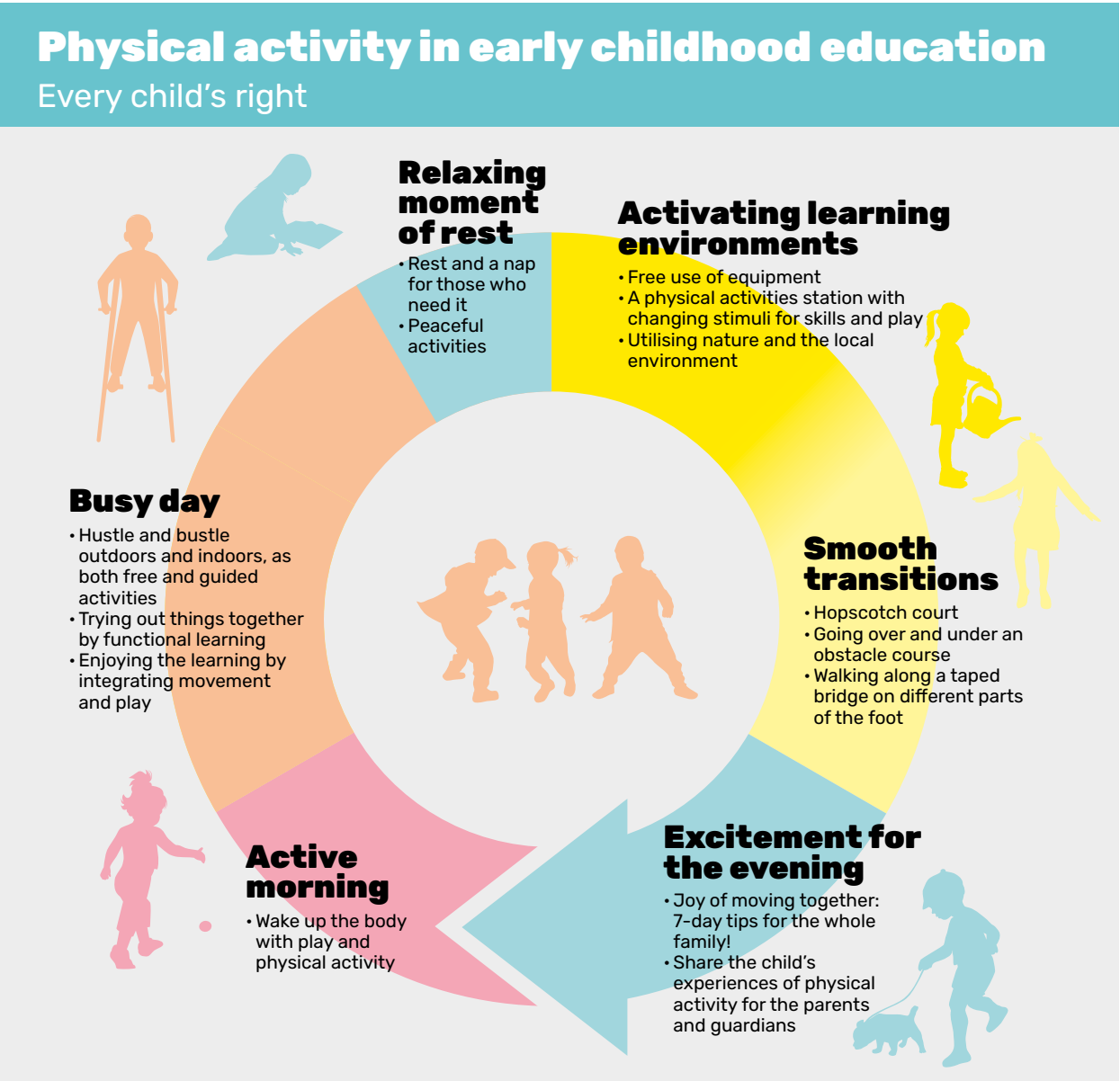
Early childhood education in Helsinki promotes the development of the children’s relationship with nature and the environment and introduces a sustainable lifestyle with the help of the Kettu (“The Fox”) material.

The Kettu material for sustainable future in early childhood education combines environmental and climate education, futures literacy and creative competence. The diverse contents of the Kettu material inspire play, the exploration of a sustainable future and the development of thinking skills.

The children get to know about sustainable lifestyles and the concrete implementation of sustainable development, strengthening a positive attitude towards the future.

A sustainable future is explored from the viewpoints of well-being, joy, creativity, compassion and curiosity in particular. Early childhood education lays the foundations for eco-social education by studying the well-being of nature and examining ecological sustainability in particular.





Physical activity is a natural part of a child's early childhood education day. Iloa, leikkiä ja yhdessä tekemistä, varhaisvuosien fyysisen aktiivisuuden suositukset ("Joy, play and togetherness – recommendations for physical activity in early years", Ministry of Education and Culture 2016:21).

I grow and develop

The “I grow and develop” learning area includes goals related to physical activity, nutrition education, health and safety. The purpose of early childhood education is to form a foundation for a lifestyle that values children’s health and well-being and promotes physical activity together with the guardians. This area of learning supports the transversal competence that relates to self-care and everyday skills in particular.

The goal of early childhood education is to inspire children to be physically active in many different ways and experience the joy of exercise. Children are encouraged to spend time outdoors and play active games in all seasons. In addition to guided physical activities, it will be en-

sured that children have sufficient opportunities for daily independent exercise both indoors and outdoors. Physical education must be regular, child-oriented, diverse and goal-oriented. Adequate physical activity is important for children’s healthy growth, development, learning and well-being. Physical activity refers to various types of physical activities with different intensity levels, such as playing indoors and outdoors, being out in nature and guided physical activities. Physical group activities develop the children’s social skills, such as interaction and self-control. Physical activity must be a natural part of the children’s day.

▶ Together with the guardians, early childhood education staff support the children’s physically active growth and also encourage the children’s physical activity in various conditions and environments during their free time.

The purpose of early childhood education is to improve the children’s body awareness, body control and basic motor skills, such as balance, movement and equipment handling skills. The development of the children’s motor skills is observed in a mutually agreed manner and the information is utilised in planning the activities. Different senses and equipment made of different materials are used in the physical activities. Children’s physical activities must vary naturally in duration, intensity and speed. Children must gain experiences being physically active by themselves, with a partner and in a group. In early childhood education, children gain experience from various games involving movement, such as traditional yard games, story-time or music exercise. Outdoor activities must be carried out during different seasons in order to give the children opportunities to learn activities that are typical for each season.

Regular and guided exercise plays an important role in children’s overall development and motor learning. For this reason, it is important to observe the children’s motor skills systematically. The staff must plan the daily programme and activities taking place indoors and outdoors such that the children can enjoy being physically active in a variety of ways and situations. The sports equipment must be available to the children during independent exercise and playing as well. The safety of sports equipment is taken into account in early childhood education.

▶ In Helsinki, early childhood education follows the recommendations of the national programme for physical activities in early childhood education (Liikkuva varhaiskasvatus), developing a physically active operating culture that is implemented on a daily basis. Physical activities are part of the pedagogical activities, showing playfulness and the joy of exercise. The staff encourage the children to find their own ways of moving, and children who are less active by nature are supported and encouraged to move more. The staff set an example of a positive attitude towards physical activity and pay particular attention to avoiding prolonged, unnecessary immobility. Sports equipment is available in group spaces, providing the opportunity for independent play and movement. The overall picture of physical activity is regularly evaluated using national evaluation tools, such as Likes and Valssi.



The aim of nutrition education is to promote a positive attitude towards food and eating and to support diverse and healthy eating habits. The children are taught to eat independently, diversely and sufficiently. The daily mealtimes take place without a rush, and the children learn about good table manners and the custom of eating together in peace. By using different senses and experimenting, the children learn about foods and their origins, appearances, ingredients and flavours. Talking about food and food-related experiences, stories and songs promote the development of the children’s food vocabulary.

In early childhood education, health and safety issues are pondered together with the children. The children’s ability to take care of their health and personal hygiene is supported. The significance of exercise, rest and good relationships for well-being and health is discussed with the children. Together with adults, the children learn about safety issues in everyday situations. These may include dressing, mealtimes, play and outdoor activities, for example. The children’s age-appropriate curiosity about sexuality and their bodies is guided in a respectful way. In early childhood education, the children practise using local transport and adopting the rules and practices of staying safe in traffic. The aim is to provide them with a better sense of safety, the ability to ask for and find help and behave safely in various situations and environments.



## 4.6 More specific linguistic and cultural aspects

According to the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, linguistic and cultural aspects are considered to apply to every child in early childhood education. The children’s varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds and abilities are seen as enriching the community in a positive way. In language- and culture-aware early childhood education, languages, cultures and belief systems are integrated into the whole of early childhood education.

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, municipalities shall ensure that a child can get early childhood education and care in Finnish, Swedish or Sámi, depending on which of these is the child’s mother tongue. A child using sign language can be given early childhood education in a national sign language of Finland. Early childhood education can also be provided in the Romani language. Other languages may also be used in early childhood education, provided that this does not jeopardise the achievement of the objectives set out in the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care. In this case, care must also be taken to support the development of the children’s Finnish/Swedish as a mother tongue skills. Cooperation between the staff, guardians and different cultural communities promotes the continuation of the cultural heritage of the children and families and supports the children’s ability to express their own cultural backgrounds. In bilingual and multilingual environments, children are encouraged to interact.

Early childhood education involves children who speak both Swedish and Finnish as their mother tongue. For the linguistic development of these bilingual children and for the development of their identities, it is important that both languages are supported and the children are encouraged to use them.

A specific goal of early childhood education for Sámi children is to strengthen the children’s Sámi identity and awareness of their own culture and to enable them to learn Sámi traditional knowledge and skills. The Sámi are an indigenous people whose rights to their own language and culture are prescribed in the Constitution of Finland. The activities utilise the local environment and cooperation with the guardians and the Sámi community. ➤ Bilingual Finnish-Sámi early childhood education is organised centrally in Helsinki.

A specific goal of early childhood education for **Romani children** is to strengthen the positive development of the children’s identity and awareness of their own history and culture and to increase their inclusion in society. In addition, the linguistic development of the children is supported in cooperation with their guardians and the

Romani community. Where possible, opportunities are provided for the children to use and acquire the Romani language. The staff strengthen the preservation of the Romani linguistic and cultural heritage in cooperation with the guardians.

Early childhood education of children using **a sign language of Finland** can be provided either in a sign-language group or in a group consisting of children who use sign language and children who use a spoken language. ➤ According to the principle of inclusion, early childhood education for children using a sign language of Finland in Helsinki is carried out in the child’s local daycare centre.

The aim of early childhood education is to support and strengthen the linguistic and cultural identity of children using sign language by giving them the opportunity to use and acquire Finnish or Finnish-Swedish sign language in cooperation with their guardians.

Early childhood education supports the development of foreign-language and multilingual children’s language skills, linguistic and cultural identities and self-esteem in a variety of ways. The development of the children’s Finnish/Swedish language skills is promoted in a goal-oriented and pedagogical manner in the areas of linguistic skills and capabilities in accordance with the children’s needs and abilities. With the help of diverse interaction situations and learning environments, the children are offered opportunities to use and acquire Finnish/Swedish as a second language in various educational and teaching situations. The starting point for acquiring the Finnish/Swedish language is the concrete language of everyday life and its expressions. Language comprehension and production skills are intertwined in their development. The children learn to make observations and express their thoughts, emotions and opinions in a way that suits the situation and themselves. Some children do not become acquainted with Finnish culture and the Finnish/Swedish language until they come to early childhood education. Getting acquainted with and learning the Finnish/Swedish language as part of the child’s linguistic development must not be equated with support for the child provided in early childhood education (Chapter 5). The guardians are informed of the goals, contents and methods of Finnish early childhood education activities. The family’s linguistic environment, language choices, the formation of multilingual and multicultural identities as well as the stages and significance of the development of the mother tongue(s) are discussed with the guardians. Early childhood education supports the child’s integration into Finnish society.

Where possible, opportunities are provided for the children to use and acquire their own mother tongue(s). The

children’s own mother tongue and learning Finnish/Swedish as a second language build the foundation for the children’s functional bilingualism and multilingualism. Responsibility for preserving and developing children’s mother tongue(s) and culture rests primarily with the family. If necessary, an interpreter is used in discussions with the guardians to ensure mutual understanding.

### Bilingual early childhood education

The organisation of bilingual early childhood education is based on a decision by the municipality or a private operator. The aim of bilingual early childhood education is to utilise the children’s receptiveness during the early language development stage by providing them with more diverse language instruction than usual. Children are offered opportunities to acquire languages and use them functionally and playfully. This also forms a foundation for the lifelong learning of languages. The aim is for a multilingual environment to arouse the children’s linguistic curiosity and eagerness to experiment. It is also a natural way for different cultures to come together in this kind of early childhood education.

Bilingual early childhood education is divided into extensive and less extensive early childhood education. The aim of less extensive bilingual early childhood education is to arouse the children’s interest and make them feel positive about languages. Extensive bilingual early childhood education aims to build capacity for children to act in a bilingual or multilingual environment.

➤ Private early childhood education provides extensive and less extensive bilingual early childhood education in many different languages.

### Extensive bilingual early childhood education

#### Early full language immersion in Finnish and Swedish in early childhood education

➤ Helsinki offers continuous Swedish-language immersion from early childhood education to the end of basic education. The programme’s aim is for the children to acquire strong language skills in both Finnish and Swedish. In Helsinki, language immersion begins at age 3–6, and every child who has undergone

it is given a place in a pre-primary and basic education language immersion group.

At the start of the language immersion programme, the children get plenty of exposure to Swedish and early childhood education is provided entirely in Swedish. Acquiring and learning Swedish is supported according to the principles of language immersion pedagogics, and the staff speak Swedish to the children. The children are encouraged to use Swedish, and plenty of opportunities to practise its use are provided. However, the children may use Finnish whenever they want.

Working together with the guardians is important in language immersion to get the children to commit to the programme. The guardians are instructed to use Finnish at home as often and as diversely as possible so that the children’s Finnish-language skills will also continue to develop. The staff also explain to the guardians that the language immersion will continue from early childhood education to pre-primary education and all the way until the end of the 9th grade.

#### Other extensive bilingual early childhood education

➤ In extensive bilingual early childhood education, at least one quarter of the activities are conducted in a language other than Finnish. In Helsinki, extensive bilingual early childhood education is provided in private early childhood education. In municipal activities, it is provided starting from pre-primary education.

### Less extensive bilingual early childhood education

#### Language-enriched early childhood education

➤ Language-enriched early childhood education refers to early childhood education in which no more than one quarter of the activities are planned to take place and regularly occur in a language other than Finnish. The aim of language-enriched early childhood education is to pique the children’s interest and make them feel positive about languages and learning them. In Helsinki, language-enriched early childhood education is provided in private early childhood education. In municipal activities, it is provided starting from pre-primary education.



5

Support for the child

The starting points for organising the support are the child’s strengths and needs related to learning, development and well-being. In early childhood education, support is built on responding to the child’s individual needs and on solutions related to community and learning environments. ➤ The early childhood education teacher or special-needs teacher is responsible for recording the support and measures needed by a child in a daycare centre or family daycare in the child’s individual early childhood education plan. Children participating in early childhood education are entitled to receive support necessary for their individual development, learning or well-being as soon as the need for support becomes apparent.

5.1

Principles and responsibilities guiding the organisation of support

In early childhood education, support is provided in the form of general, intensified and special-needs support according to the inclusive principles.

Responsibilities for organising and providing support

Evaluating the need for support, providing the support and developing the operating culture and practices are the responsibility of all staff members according to their training, job descriptions and responsibilities.

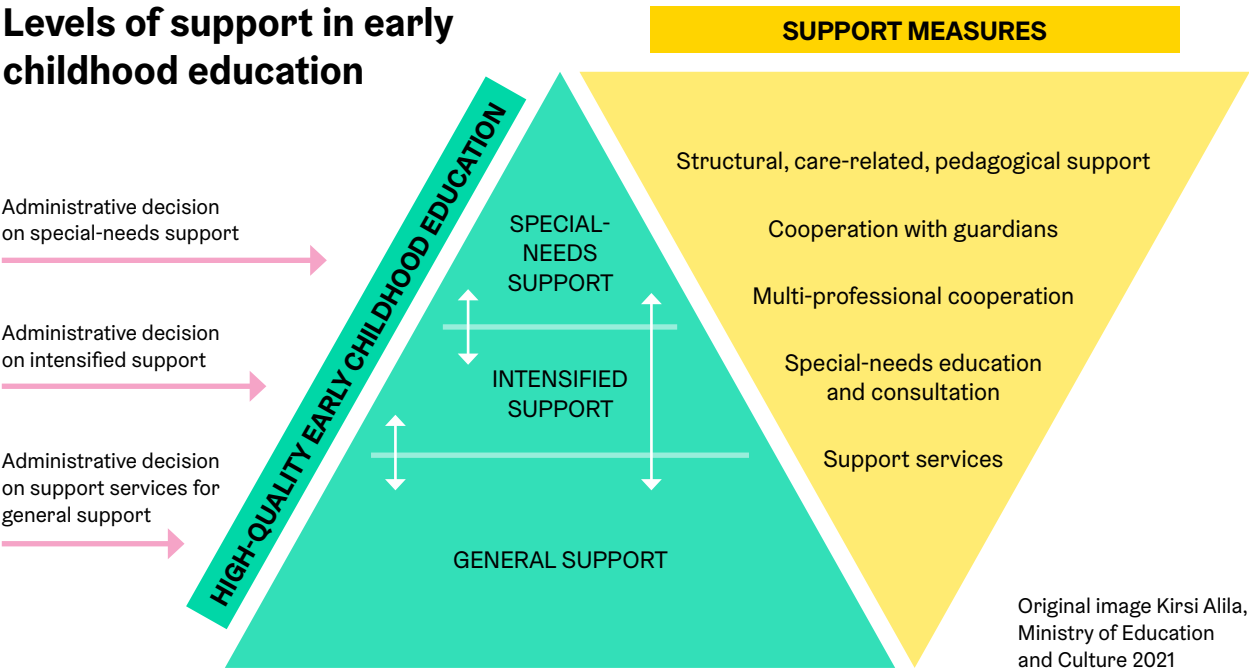
The daycare centre director is responsible for the quality of the support provided in early childhood education, its implementation and the up-to-date skills of the staff in a manner that meets the children’s support needs. The director ensures that the staff plan the support for the child as part of the child’s individual early childhood education plan. The planned support is evaluated according to the child’s needs, at least once a year.

An early childhood education special-needs teacher participates in planning and evaluating the child’s need for support, the support measures and their implementation as necessary. Support provided by the early childhood education special-needs teacher can be child-specific and/or group-based teaching. The support may be regular, part-time or full-time. It can take the form of co-teaching or team teaching with the teacher of the child’s group. The expertise of the peripatetic early childhood education special-needs teacher is also utilised in consulting the staff and guardians.

The early childhood education teacher is responsible for supporting the individual learning of the children in the group.

Early childhood education includes child- or group-specific assistants, who support the child or children in the group and enable their participation in the activities.

Levels of support in early childhood education



The early childhood education teacher and special assistant together plan the implementation of the support for growth and learning based on the needs of the individual child and the group. The task of the early childhood education teacher is to plan, support and guide learning and to evaluate the learning and work of the child and the group as a whole. The assistant assists the child or group in carrying out individual tasks related to early childhood education and rehabilitation in accordance with the instructions of the early childhood education teacher or therapists.

The peripatetic early childhood education special-needs teacher supports the early childhood education teacher and other staff working with the child in the pedagogical observation, planning and guidance of the child’s need for support. In

addition, the peripatetic teacher participates in coordinating and preparing the child’s support in a multi-professional manner, as well as in planning the learning path for children in need of support in cooperation with the early childhood education staff, supervisors, guardians and investigative bodies.

The family daycare provider is responsible for the implementation of support for the children in the family daycare group. The support is planned and evaluated in cooperation with the peripatetic early childhood education special-needs teacher. If the best interests of the child so require, it can be discussed in cooperation with the guardian that the child moves to a daycare centre in order to receive the necessary support.

## 5.2 Cooperation during support

### Collaboration with the child and guardians

The guardian's and early childhood education staff's shared knowledge of the child and the child's needs is the starting point for providing early and adequate support. The child's right to support, the key principles for organising the support, and the support given to the child and the forms in which it is implemented are discussed with the guardian. The child is heard and the child's opinion is taken into account.

The guardian is provided with information on the handling of matters concerning the child, access to and disclosure of information as well as confidentiality. If necessary, an interpreter is used in the discussions.

The staff discuss with the guardians on a daily basis and share experiences about the events, successes and challenges of the child's day. If there are concerns about a child's growth and learning, the early childhood education teacher always first discusses the observations with the child's guardians. An early childhood education special-needs teacher participates in the discussions as necessary. The guardians are informed and always have the opportunity to be present when the child's affairs are handled in a multi-professional manner. They will also have the opportunity to participate in an information transfer meeting, which will take place, if necessary, when the child moves from early childhood education to pre-primary education.

The process of evaluating the child's need for support can start based on the observations made by the early childhood education staff. The initiative to strengthen the support for the child may also come from the guardian or other experts.

### Multi-professional cooperation

Cooperation with the family centre and social welfare and health care services in specialised health care is primarily carried out with the consent of the guardian.

The cooperation guidelines for early childhood education and pre-primary education and the family centre contain a description of cooperation, division of labour and established cooperation models between the family centre and early childhood education and pre-primary education. The regulations on confidentiality and exchange of information must be observed during the cooperation.

Multi-professional cooperation in identifying the child's need for support and organising the forms of support is carried out with early childhood education special-needs teachers, health care professionals and other necessary experts and investigative bodies.

Both the child health clinic and early childhood education aim to identify the needs of families with children as early as possible and to provide appropriate support and assistance for the child and the family. The child health clinic team operating model provides early childhood education professionals with the opportunity for joint reflection on the concerns raised about the child and consultation of social welfare and health care professionals.

## 5.3 Implementation of support in early childhood education

Difficulties are prevented in advance by educational arrangements and different ways of working. These include, for example, the systematic differentiation of activities, flexible modulation of groups and adaptation of learning environments. All children are supported by a clear daily schedule and rhythm of daily activities. The forms of support in early childhood education refer to the pedagogical, structural and care-related support measures required by the child.

The child does not need a medical diagnosis or other health care statement in order to receive support. [Any statements, patient records and visit records of the treatment provider can be utilised in planning the support.](#)

Regardless of the level of support, the child is entitled to support services and assistive devices. These include, for example:

- ▶ arrangements for mobility and other physical activities, such as wheelchair ramps and handrails
- ▶ assistive devices for the child's communication, vision, hearing, mobility or other physical needs, such as toys supporting communication, digital applications, games or audio books.

The support levels used in early childhood education are general support, intensified support and special-needs support. Eligibility for intensified or special-needs support does not depend on the child having first received support at another level.

A handbook on supporting children in early childhood education (Lapsen tuen käsikirja varhaiskasvatuksesta) has been drawn up to help organise support in practice.

### General support

General support consists of individual forms of support, such as individual pedagogical solutions and support measures that affect the situation as early as possible. Support for the child is short-term and/or of lower intensity than intensified and special-needs support. The child's individual support needs are met by, for example, using suitable materials, tools, curricula or part-time support provided by an early childhood education special-needs teacher. General support does not require an administrative decision.

[The early childhood education teacher is responsible for general support in early childhood education, which](#)

is carried out by the whole team together. General support takes place in the child's own group by pedagogical means, such as anticipation, acting in a small group and using communication that supports and replaces speech. The support given to the child is recorded in the child's individual early childhood education plan. The adequacy and implementation of the support measures are evaluated regularly. An administrative decision is made about any support services, such as interpretation and assistance services and assistive devices.

### Intensified support

This type of support is of higher intensity and more individual than general support. The support is provided on a short-term or longer-term basis in accordance with the child's individual needs.

The support consists of several forms of support that are carried out regularly and at the same time.

The initiative for intensified support can come from the staff in the child's group or the child's guardian. The child's possible subsequent diagnosis or start of rehabilitation cannot be used as a prerequisite for receiving support. The provision of intensified support requires an administrative decision. The decision must indicate the forms of support, the location of the early childhood education unit and the support services, and it must be taken into account in the number of children or care and education staff, unless there is an assistant for the child. [The early childhood education teacher is responsible for drawing up the child's individual early childhood education plan and evaluating the need for support and, if necessary, inviting social welfare and health care experts to participate in the discussion.](#) An early childhood education special-needs teacher participates in the organisation of intensified support as necessary, guides other staff in the provision of intensified support and participates in discussions with the guardians as necessary. The support measures are recorded in the child's individual early childhood education plan.

Intensified support consists of pedagogical forms of support that are carried out regularly and at the same time. Starting intensified support does not require an expert opinion on the need for support. The child receiving intensified support must be taken into account in the daycare centre and family daycare staff numbers, unless there is an assistant for the child.





## Special-needs support

Special-needs support may be provided due to a disability, illness, delay in development or any other reason regarding the child's learning and development support needs that significantly impairs the child's ability to function. If required by the child's need for support, the support can be started directly at the level of special-needs support as soon as the need for support arises.

Special-needs support consists of several forms of support and support services and is of a continuous and full-time nature. The provision of special-needs support requires an administrative decision. The decision must indicate the forms of support, the location of the early childhood education unit and the support services, and it must be taken into account in the number of children or care and education staff, unless there is an assistant for the child. Special-needs support may be provided in the local daycare centre group, an integrated special group or a special group.

The early childhood education teacher is responsible for drawing up the child's individual early childhood education plan and evaluating the need for support and, if necessary, inviting social welfare and health care experts to participate in the discussion. An early childhood education special-needs teacher participates in the organisation of special-needs support as necessary, guides other staff in the provision of special-needs support and participates in discussions with the guardians as necessary. The support measures are recorded in the child's individual early childhood education plan.

The child does not need a medical diagnosis or other health care or social welfare statement in order to receive support. Special-needs support does not require an expert opinion on the need for support, a diagnosis or a need for rehabilitation.

If early childhood education is primarily arranged to ensure the special individual care of a child with

intellectual disabilities and the aim is to promote the child's performance in daily activities, this is regarded as special care in accordance with the Act on Services for People with Disabilities. In this case, early childhood education is primarily related to the child's rehabilitation needs. It is regarded as special care in accordance with the Act on Services for People with Disabilities, which is a free-of-charge social service in accordance with the Act on Client Charges.

## Forms of support

Various forms of support are used on all levels according to the child's needs. The working methods and learning environments of early childhood education are modified according to the individual needs of each child. The support measures are planned pedagogically such that the child's inclusion, right to learn and act as part of the peer group are implemented in the best interest of the child. Support for the child may include pedagogical, structural and care-related forms of support.

**Pedagogical forms of support** include the creation of repetitive activities and a clear and predictable daily rhythm for the child. [Staggered and differentiated group activities are an important part of meeting the individual needs of children, and so is the systematic consideration of functionality in the daily structures.](#) Support for the child also includes sensitive and accessible methods of interaction and communication. These may include communication methods that replace speech, such as the use of sign language, images or various technological solutions. Responding to the child's needs requires that early childhood education staff use common and consistent pedagogical and special pedagogical working methods and practices.

**Structural forms of support** include increasing the competence and special pedagogical competence of staff involved in identifying the child's need for support and its implementation. Structural forms of support also include reducing the number of children in the group and solutions relating to the size and/or structure of the staff,

as well as changing them according to the child's need for support. The group's staff structure can be strengthened, for example, with an early childhood education special-needs teacher. Reducing the number of children changes the ratio of staff to children so that support for the child can be implemented as planned and the goals set for early childhood education can be achieved in the group. If necessary, early childhood education for the child may be provided in an [integrated special group or special group](#). In addition, structural forms of support include the interpretation and assistance services required for participation in early childhood education, the use of assistive devices and taking accessibility into account.

In Helsinki, structural forms of support include reducing the group size, a group or child-specific assistant, part-time or full-time support from an early childhood education special-needs teacher, an increased number of staff, an integrated special group and a special group. The assistance needed by the child or group is provided by assistants located in the area. The early childhood education district managers decide on the allocation of their region's assistants and early childhood education special-needs teachers to the region's early childhood education units. Children's need for support can be met by reducing the number of children in the group or increasing the number of staff assigned to the group. Support from an early childhood teacher can be consultative, part-

time or full-time. The assistants are either group-specific or child-specific. Children belonging to special groups of children with multiple disabilities and children who receive support from special assistants, who must have the qualifications of a practical nurse, are selected centrally. In Helsinki, early childhood education can be organised in an integrated special group or a special group if necessary.

**Care-related forms of support** refer to methods and practices that respond to the child's need for care, nursing and assistance. The child's health care needs are taken into account as part of the care-related forms of support, which may include assistance needs and assistive devices relating to, for example, treatment of the child's long-term illnesses, medication, diet and mobility. Cooperation is carried out with social welfare and health care experts in, for example, guidance and consultation of early childhood education staff.

In the early childhood education units, it is always evaluated on a case-by-case basis whether medication or medical care can be carried out as part of the child group's basic activities. [When a child in a daycare centre or family daycare develops a medical condition that requires medication, or when a child in need of regular medication is coming to the daycare centre, the unit supervisor is responsible for drawing up the pharmacotherapy plan and ensuring that the child's pharmacotherapy plan is mentioned in the child's individual early childhood education plan.](#)

## 5.4 Evaluating the child's need for support

The process of evaluating the child's need for support starts based on observations made by the early childhood education staff. The initiative to evaluate the child's need for support can also come from observations made by the guardian, child health clinic or social welfare and health care personnel.

The early childhood education teacher and/or the early childhood education special-needs teacher is responsible for evaluating the child's need for support. The other staff members are also involved in evaluating the need for support. Social and health authorities can participate in the evaluation at the request of the early childhood education organiser if the evaluation also requires pedagogical expertise other than that of the early childhood education staff to evaluate the need for support and to justify the support solutions.

In early childhood education, evaluation of the need for support is carried out on all levels of support. The child's need for support and the adequacy and implementation of support will be evaluated as needed, but [at least twice during the operating period](#) and also when the need for support or the learning environment changes. The child's opinion and wishes are taken into account, and cooperation is carried out with the guardian in the evaluation of the need for and implementation of support. [The staff make observations about the child's strengths and needs for support in the daily activities, updating the support measures and goals of activities recorded in the child's individual early childhood education plan based on the observations.](#)



## 5.5 Child’s individual early childhood education plan during support

The support required by the child, i.e. the level, forms and implementation of the support as well as the related responsibilities and division of labour, are recorded in the child’s individual early childhood education plan. It is drawn up and evaluated by the early childhood education teacher and/or the early childhood education special-needs teacher in cooperation with other staff and the child’s guardian. The goal is to work in mutual understanding with the child and the guardian. The child’s opinion is determined and taken into account when drawing up and evaluating the plan.

Before starting intensified or special-needs support, an evaluation of previous support measures and their effectiveness is recorded in the child’s individual early childhood plan. The evaluation includes a description of the support measures, an evaluation of their effectiveness and development, as well as a justification of the support measures that the child benefits from and that best serve the child’s interests individually.

The child’s individual early childhood education plan is used to make an administrative decision on intensified and special-needs support. If the child’s need for support has been evaluated in the child’s individual early childhood education plan, this evaluation must be taken into account when issuing an administrative decision on intensified or special-needs support or decision on support services.

The child’s individual early childhood education plan is updated in accordance with the content of the administrative decision. The plan must indicate if the need for support and the measures have ended.

The need for support is always evaluated when the child begins pre-primary education.

When the child receives support in early childhood education, the child’s individual early childhood education plan also records possible social and health services, such as any rehabilitation received by the child, if this is essential in terms of organising the child’s early childhood education.

In addition, the following are recorded in the child’s individual early childhood education plan:

### Pedagogical forms of support

- ▶ solutions relating to the structure and daily rhythm of the early childhood education day
- ▶ solutions relating to learning environments
- ▶ special pedagogical methods required
- ▶ methods of interaction and communication, such as the use of sign language and images
- ▶ practices on how the child can participate in peer group activities, such as taking accessibility into account.

### Structural forms of support

- ▶ strengthening competence and special pedagogical competence in the implementation of support
- ▶ solutions relating to the size and structure of the staff
- ▶ solutions relating to the size and structure of the child group
- ▶ interpretation and assistance services and the use of assistive devices
- ▶ integrated special group or special group
- ▶ part- or full-time teaching or consultation by an early childhood education special-needs teacher.

### Care-related forms of support

- ▶ basic care, nursing and assistance methods
- ▶ health care needs, such as assistance and assistive devices relating to, for example, the treatment of the child’s long-term illnesses, medication, diet and mobility.

### Cooperation and services required by the support

- ▶ cooperation with the child and the guardian
- ▶ responsibilities for implementing the support for the child
- ▶ use of specialist services
- ▶ guidance and consultation by social welfare and health care services and other experts
- ▶ any transport arrangements and responsibilities.

### Evaluating the effectiveness of the support

- ▶ monitoring the need for, adequacy of and implementation of support
- ▶ arviointiajankohdat.

## 5.6 Decision on intensified and special-needs support and support services

Intensified or special-needs support for the child requires an administrative decision without delay based on an evaluation of the need for support. ▶ The daycare centre director organises a hearing with the child’s guardians and the child before the decision on intensified or special-needs support is taken, sending a written invitation to the hearing approximately two weeks in advance. At the hearing, the guardians and the child have the opportunity to express their opinion on the organisation of intensified or special-needs support, which is recorded in a separate hearing form.

The administrative decision is made by the early childhood education district manager. The decision is valid until further notice. The decision is accompanied by instructions for appeal, because the guardian can appeal the decision on support for the child and support services to the Regional State Administrative Agency. The decision must always be justified. The decision on intensified and special-needs support mentions and decides on the following issues: the forms of support, the early childhood education unit and the support services. A child who has received an intensified and special-needs support decision must be taken into account in the number of children or care and education staff, unless the daycare centre or family daycare unit has an assistant for such a child.

▶ The administrative decision on intensified or special-needs support for a child in private early childhood education is made by the early childhood education district manager.

A child’s early childhood education may be arranged by more than one organiser of early childhood education. In such cases, the decision to grant intensified and special-needs support is taken by each operator independently. The administrative decision on intensified and special-needs support will be amended or revoked if the need for support changes during the review or other evaluation of the child’s individual early childhood education plan. ▶ The decision must also be amended if the early childhood education unit changes.

### Support services for the child

If necessary, an administrative decision is made on early childhood education support services for a child receiving general support. ▶ The daycare centre director organises a hearing with the child and the guardians, sending a written invitation to the guardians approximately two weeks in advance. The early childhood education district manager makes an administrative decision on the early childhood education support services, which may include consultation and teaching by a special-needs teacher as well as interpretation and assistance services and assistive devices required for participation in early childhood education.

### Extended compulsory education:

▶ If it seems apparent that the goals set for basic education cannot be achieved in nine years because of the child’s disability or illness, compulsory education begins one year earlier than provided for in the Basic Education Act, i.e. when the child is 6 years old. The decision on extended compulsory education is primarily made before the beginning of compulsory education. The guardian’s application and its appendices are submitted to the early childhood education planner via the daycare centre director for preparation and to be decided by the early childhood education district manager. A decision on special-needs support in pre-primary education is also made for the child. An individual educational plan (IEP) is drawn up for the child. Pre-primary education for children in extended compulsory education may last one or two years. When a 5-year-old child receives a decision on extended compulsory education, the guardian decides on the child’s participation in pre-primary education before compulsory education.



## 6 Early childhood education based on alternative pedagogy or a specific philosophical system

All early childhood education follows the general objectives and operating principles set for early childhood education in the legislation, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care and Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education. These objectives and operating principles also apply to early childhood education based on alternative pedagogy or a specific philosophical system.

➤ In Helsinki, a private organiser of early childhood education can offer early childhood education services based on alternative pedagogy or a specific philosophical system. These include, for example, the Steiner, Montessori, Freinet and Reggio Emilia pedagogies or early childhood education services based on another philosophical system. In addition, private early childhood education can be arranged with an emphasis on languages, music, physical education or nature. When a guardian chooses an early childhood education service based on alternative pedagogy or a specific philosophical system, the organiser of early childhood education must ensure that the guardian receives sufficient information about the specific goals and values of the activities.

The future daycare centre has a dressing robot, from which children can choose both indoor and outdoor clothes in colours they like by pressing a button. If you press the rainwear button once, you get a raincoat, and if you press it twice, you also get waterproof dungarees. The teacher helps you select the right buttons, and you can just stand and see if the robot does its job well.

*Children’s thoughts about the future*

## 7 Evaluation and development of activities in early childhood education

The purpose of evaluating the activities is to support the implementation of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and the curricula for early childhood education as well as the development of early childhood education. According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the organiser of early childhood education must evaluate its early childhood education activities and participate in their external evaluation. The evaluation of early childhood education activities must be systematic and regular. Systematic evaluation requires the organiser to have an effective evaluation system. The evaluation promotes the quality of early childhood education, identifies the strengths of the activities, highlights development needs and develops the activities.

### 7.1 Evaluation and development of pedagogical activities and early childhood education

The purpose of evaluating the pedagogical activities is to develop early childhood education and improve the child’s development and learning abilities. Monitoring, regularly evaluating and developing the implementation of the local curriculum for early childhood education and the child’s individual early childhood education plan are part of this task. The early childhood education activities are evaluated and developed on the national level and from the viewpoints of the organisers, units and individuals.

The purpose of national-level evaluation is to support early childhood education organisers in matters relating to evaluation and quality management. National-level evaluations serve the development of early childhood education on the local, regional and national levels. The evaluation data can also be used in international comparisons.

#### Evaluation and development of early childhood education in Helsinki

➤ In Helsinki, the evaluation and development of early childhood education is carried out according to the Guidelines and recommendations for evaluating the quality of early childhood education and care by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (Karvi). The development of the activities is guided by the objectives and values set out in the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, Helsinki’s curriculum for early childhood education and the Helsinki City Strategy. Based on the principles of developmental evaluation, the various levels of activities invest in the evaluation process and maintain an open culture of discussion and development in order to improve the quality of early childhood education. An essential part of the quality and development work is that the management and staff are committed to the work and the evaluation supports the day-to-day work on the unit level. The evaluation is based on documented data, which is collected using various methods.

The quality of early childhood education is evaluated on the national level, municipal level and unit level in early childhood education.

As an organiser of early childhood education, Helsinki evaluates not only structural factors but also the quality of pedagogical activities in early childhood education. On the local level, the achievement of the goals set for pedagogical activities is evaluated by auditing and by means of self-evaluation common to all. Information obtained through customer feedback and customer surveys is used in the development and evaluation of operations. The results are discussed with the families, and development needs are raised on the basis of the results. Staff surveys, various studies and key performance indicators are also an important part of the local-level evaluation. The results of the evaluation are communicated internally and externally.

In Helsinki, the goal-oriented and systematic self-assessment of employees plays a central role in maintaining and developing the quality of early childhood education. In the self-assessment, special attention is paid to the quality of the interaction between staff and children and sensitive encounters with the children. Various evaluation tools have been developed to support the self-assessment of early childhood education units and child groups. The units use the tools to support the evaluation in accordance with the set goals and criteria.

The evaluation tools include:

- ▶ Unit's action plan
- ▶ Group's pedagogical plan
- ▶ Valssi self-assessment
- ▶ KAMU self-assessment
- ▶ Reading Wheel
- ▶ Physical activities in early childhood education (Liikkuva varhaiskasvatus) – evaluation of the current situation

The unit's action plan, group's pedagogical plan and group portfolio form a whole of pedagogical documentation, which includes the planning, documentation, evaluation and development of the activities. The achievement of the goals set out in the plans is evaluated by the units in accordance with the common evaluation model. In Helsinki, consistent evaluation and development work is also carried out in pre-primary and basic education.

Unit's action plan

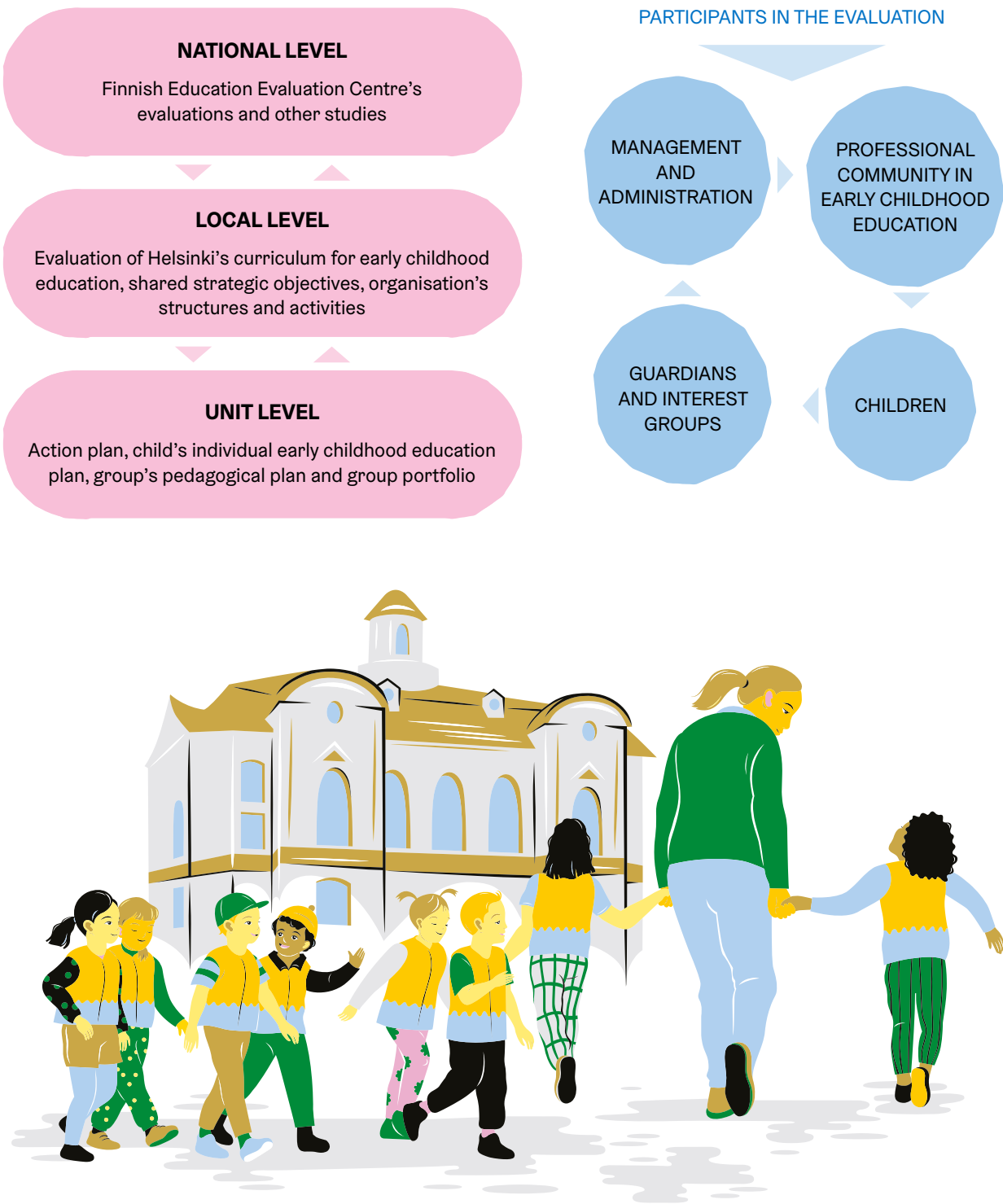
Early childhood education units draw up an annual action plan based on Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and pre-primary education, describing the pedagogical principles for organising the activities and the measures for achieving the goals. The units set goals for their activities based on evaluation, curricula and current research data. In Helsinki, common city-level goals are also raised annually from the city strategy. The action plan and the achievement of the goals and criteria set out in it are evaluated on the unit and group level by means of the action plan's evaluation tables.

Group's pedagogical plan and group portfolio

The structured pedagogical activities of early childhood education groups are based on goals and measures. The goals are based on staff observations and the children's interests, strengths and needs recorded in the children's individual early childhood education plans. Planning, evaluation and development are recorded in the group's pedagogical plan. The activities carried out are documented and evaluated in the group portfolio together with the children. With the help of the group portfolio, the children's own perspective can be made visible, for which reason it is essential that documentation is done in various ways, taking into account the individual needs and strengths of the children.

Child's individual early childhood education plan

A child's individual early childhood education plan evaluates, together with the child and the guardians, how the child's growth, learning, development and support needs have been met and how the child's strengths and interests have been taken into account in the group's activities. The impact of the measures recorded in the plan are regularly monitored and evaluated on the basis of comprehensive observation and documentation. The purpose of evaluating the child's individual early childhood education plan is to find out how the recorded measures and pedagogical methods have promoted the child's learning and well-being. Based on the evaluation, the necessary changes are implemented in the child's individual early childhood education plan and in the activities with the child and the child group.





**Helsinki**