

Helsinki

Guide to early childhood education and care

Information on early childhood education and preschool in Helsinki for families who have moved to Finland



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Welcome to early childhood education and preschool in Helsinki



The Guide to early childhood education and care focuses on key aspects of early childhood and preschool education. This guide supports you and your child in getting started with early childhood education. It also provides practical information on starting early childhood education and everyday life at daycare.

Early childhood education is provided at daycare centres, family daycare or activities organised in playgrounds.

It is important that children participate in early childhood education. Early childhood education allows your child to play, exercise and learn together with other children. Our activities are planned so that your child learns new things and their development and wellbeing are ensured. We follow the City of Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care, and our operations are planned and goal-oriented and we take children into account in our activities. Early childhood education staff is trained for their tasks.

Children have a right to early childhood education. All children participate in preschool education one year prior to moving onto basic education.

I hope that you will find useful information on early childhood education and care and preschool in this guide. Don't hesitate to ask our staff for further information.

We are glad to have you on board!

Satu Järvenkallas

Early Education and Care Director

Various forms of early childhood education and care

Most commonly, early childhood education is provided by daycare centres. There is a suitable group for each child at the daycare centre. Read on to find out more about activities and staff at daycare centres.

Preschool education: All children participate in preschool education at the age of six, one year before they start primary school. More information on preschool education will be provided in this guide.

Family daycare is care and education at the home of a family daycare caregiver. Each family daycare group consists of four children. Group family daycare facilities have two family daycare caregivers and eight children. Family daycare is popular among children aged 1–4.

Playgroup clubs are intended for children aged 2–4. The activities are held in playgrounds and at daycare centres. The clubs are held on 1–3 days per week for approximately three hours at a time.

Playgrounds host shared activities for small children and their parents in the mornings before noon. In the afternoons, playgrounds host activities for small school children. You can visit playgrounds with your children any time of the day each day of the week.

Early childhood education at daycare centres and in family daycare as well as preschool education are also provided by the private sector.

How to apply to early childhood education and care

- You must apply to daycare, playgroup clubs and family daycare four months before the planned start of your child's attendance.

- You can apply to daycare or family daycare on the internet by using the City of Helsinki service data system (asti.hel.fi) or by submitting an application on paper. You can ask the daycare centre director, your social worker or the City's advice services for help in completing the application.
- You can apply for placement in family daycare or clubs on the internet by using the City of Helsinki electronic services (asiointi.hel.fi) or by submitting an application on paper.
- You should book an appointment with the daycare centre director in advance, if you wish to submit your application in person.
- If you start a new job or studies unexpectedly, we will try to arrange a place for your child within two weeks of you presenting proof of employment or study place to the daycare centre's director.
- You can request a certain daycare centre on the application. If the centres you have indicated on the application are full, the daycare centre director will offer you a place at the nearest centre with availability.
- You may not be able to place your child in the nearest daycare centre, but you should accept the place nonetheless.

Early childhood education at a daycare centre or in family daycare is subject to a fee. The fee is determined based on the guardians' income. Time spent at the daycare centre and the size of the family also affect the fee. Early childhood education is free of charge for low-income households. The early childhood education and care of children aged five and the preschool education of children aged six is free of charge for four hours each day. Playgroup clubs are also free of charge.

Visit hel.fi (address: hel.fi/helsinki/en/childhood-and-education/day-care/daycare/applying) and playgrounds or ask social workers for more information on applying.

You can also apply for private early childhood education. Private daycare centres and family daycare providers will provide further information. (hel.fi/helsinki/en/childhood-and-education/day-care/private)

Child groups and staff at daycare centres

Daycare centres have many different child groups consisting of children of different ages. Each group may have 12–21 children depending on their age.

The daycare centre director is in charge of the daycare centre. You can contact them regarding any questions you may have about the staff or instructions and activities at the daycare centre. The early education teacher is in charge of the goal-oriented activities of the child group. Early education teachers and child minders are in charge of the wellbeing of the child group and their daily activities.

In addition to this, an assistant may work at the daycare centre, or an early childhood education special needs teacher and Finnish as a second language teacher may visit the daycare centre regularly. Some daycare centres employ multilingual instructors. Multilingual instructors help children get to know other children and the activities at the daycare centre in their own mother tongue. One of the key tasks of the multilingual instructor is to support cooperation between homes and the daycare centre. Cooperation becomes easier when you have the opportunity to use your mother tongue to sort out any matters.

The names of staff members and daycare centre contact details are provided in daycare centre bulletins and on the notice board.

Daycare centres also employ staff in charge of meals and cleaning.





Daily daycare schedule

You will receive more detailed information on the daily schedule at the daycare centre when your child starts going there.

An example of daily activities:

6:15–8:30 children arrive at the daycare centre, play games, look at books, listen to music

8:00 breakfast is served

8:30–11:00 outdoor recreation, playing and other planned activities

11:00 lunch is served, followed by a nap

14:00 snacks are served

14:30–17:00 planned activities, playtime and outdoor recreation

Staff are always present throughout the day. Staff care for the children and help them understand what is next on the schedule, if the children do not know Finnish yet. The staff will use methods such as picture cards to explain the various situations during the day (mealtimes, going outside, naptime, etc.) and what will be happening next.

The group room is equipped with an illustrated schedule for the activities of the day.

The group staff will provide more detailed information on which activities will be organised, which games the children are playing and what the group is learning at the moment to the guardians in a weekly newsletter or on the noticeboard.

The guardians will be notified of any outings and their planned dates and times by message.



6:15-8:30

Children arrive at the daycare centre, play games, look at books, listen to music.



8:00

Breakfast is served.



8:30-11:00

Outdoor recreation, playing and other planned activities.



11:00

Lunch is served, followed by a nap.



14:00

Snacks are served.



14:30-17:00

Planned activities, playtime and outdoor recreation.

When a child starts at daycare

Starting early childhood education and care is a new and exciting event for the child and the family. Trust between the daycare centre staff and the guardians is very important. This will also make the child feel safe. Daycare centre employees are under an obligation of confidentiality. Confidential discussions between the guardians and staff members will never be shared with other guardians.

Daycare centre placement decisions will be provided in writing. After the decision has been made, daycare centre staff will contact you and schedule an introductory period and starting discussion. During the starting discussion, the daycare centre staff will explain the activities and daily schedule at the daycare centre to you, tell you what you need to pack for your child (clothes, shoes, nappies) and what the core objectives of daycare activities are.

You can use this opportunity to ask any questions concerning the daycare centre and starting there. The discussion will include important facts about the child that the daycare centre should know. These include the child's mother tongue, siblings and matters related to diet and health. An interpreter will be used during the starting discussion, if there is no shared language with the guardians.

The introductory period will last for five days. The child will familiarise themselves with the daycare centre with you for a few days. This will also provide you with an opportunity to experience the child's day and activities at daycare. You can also discuss daycare at home with your child. After the introduction period, your child may practise staying at the daycare centre for shorter days at first.

When you bring your child to the daycare centre in the morning, the staff will be there to greet them. The child may cry and miss their parent when left at the daycare centre. You should tell your child that you are leaving and that you will be back later to collect them. The employees at the daycare centre will never leave your child alone.



Malik's familiarisation and start at daycare

Two-year-old Malik is about to start daycare in the toddler group at Daycare centre Sinivuokko. Malik does not speak Finnish yet, and the daycare centre is a foreign environment to him. The early childhood education teacher of the group has called Malik's guardians and they have had a starting discussion. Malik has visited the daycare centre together with his mother during the introductory period. During the five-day introductory period, Malik's mother accompanied him to outside games with the other children at the daycare centre at the beginning of the week. Halfway through the week, they participated in indoor playtime, and towards the end of the week they also ate with the other children.

The mother's presence makes Malik feel at ease and helps him discover the daycare centre environment knowing that his mother is there to support him in the new situation. The daycare staff have shown the mother and Malik where everything is or takes place at the daycare centre, including Malik's mealtime, naptime and clothes and things. This week, Malik will stay at daycare for the entire day without his mother.

Malik has now spent his first day at daycare. Malik was a little bit teary when his mother left in the morning. Early childhood education and care teacher Leena comforted and held him. They looked at pictures of animals in a book together. Leena has a stack of different pictures related to everyday activities at the daycare centre, which she has shown to Malik to explain what happens next. The children ate fish and mashed potato for lunch today. When the children go outside in the afternoon, Malik plays with cars in the sand pit together with other children. He lets out a happy shriek when he sees that his mother has come to collect him. What a nice day!

It was a fun day.



Co-operation between daycare and home

Co-operation between daycare and the home is always in the best interests of the child. You are welcome to participate in the activities at early childhood education. You can also participate in planning and developing the activities together with staff and the children. A customer survey will be sent out regularly. You will be notified of the survey separately. The survey provides you with an opportunity to assess early childhood education.

A curriculum for early childhood education and care (the child's varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma or VASU) will be drafted for each child. The early childhood education and care (ECEC) teacher will conduct an ECEC discussion with you and your child. The discussion will focus on your child's interests, sources of joy and feelings about being part of the child group. An interpreter may be used for the discussion when necessary.

The teacher will then record the ways in which the daycare centre will promote the child's development and learning and improve the child's language skills. The child's cultural and religious background will also be considered in the activities.

The implementation of the plan will be assessed and supplemented together with the child and the guardians once a year and every time it is deemed necessary. Early childhood education and care is based on the curriculum for early childhood education and care

The objectives and activities within early childhood education and care are governed by the curriculum for early childhood education and care and the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care.

According to the act, early childhood education must be equal and equitable for all children. Early childhood education must be goal-oriented and it must provide children with the opportunity to play, exercise, experience art and engage in culture-based activities.

You can find Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care on the City of Helsinki website in English. hel.fi/static/liitteet-2019/KasKo/vare/Helsinki_Vasu_EN_Sivut.pdf

Children learn through play and exercise in early childhood education

Areas of learning consist of content that is combined with activities and children's games according to the group's plan and the children's interests. Children also learn things in different environments during outings and outdoor recreation. The content of learning may be inspired by playtime, fairy-tales, outings and various interactions. The staff are responsible for ensuring that the pedagogical activities promote the development and learning of children of various ages.

In addition to areas of learning, activities also take the development of children's transversal competence into account.

Transversal competence



Thinking and learning



Self-care and everyday skills



Multi-literacy and ICT



Cultural competence, interaction and expression



Participation and advocacy



Preschool education curriculum: ICT skills

Versatile language skills

Every child should be able to feel that they, their language and their family is important. When a child learns the language or languages spoken at home well, they will find it easier to learn Finnish. It is important to talk with the child often at home, tell stories, read aloud and expand the child's vocabulary in their mother tongue.

Finnish as a second language (S2) education is provided mixed with play and other activities at the daycare centre throughout the day, e.g. at mealtime and when putting on outside clothes. The child's Finnish language proficiency is developed and they are helped with self-expression. Pictures and drawings are used as aids in language learning. The teachers explain to the child what is going to happen next and ask the child to tell them what they need and ask for help.

S2 education supports the child's lingual development. The child will gradually be able to practise listening, telling stories and expressing their opinions and thoughts in Finnish, too.

Support for development and learning

Sometimes, children need special support for development and learning. The ways in which the child's learning and development may be supported most effectively are discussed together with an ECEC special needs teacher, the child's ECEC teacher and the parents. We will discuss together how to help the child succeed and find joy in learning in early childhood education and care and preschool education. An interpreter will be present during the meeting when necessary. A second meeting will be arranged later for assessing whether the child has received sufficient support. Other experts with valuable input into the child's situation may sometimes participate in these meetings.

The nurse and doctor of the maternity and child health clinic are experts in children's health promotion, growth and development. Early childhood education and care and preschool education work together with the public health nurse from the maternity and child health clinic.

Preschool education

Four hours of preschool education is provided per day during the school year. In addition to preschool education, children may also participate in early childhood education at the same preschool education location.

Preschool education is compulsory.

All children participate in preschool education one year prior to starting basic education. Preschool education promotes and supports children's growth, development and learning. It facilitates children's transition from preschool education to school education.

Preschool education has its own curriculum. The activities consider the children's individual needs and their ways of learning and behaving. The learning and goal-oriented teaching methods of preschool education include playing, moving and exploring things together with other children and adults.

Pupil welfare

Children are entitled to pupil welfare services in preschool education. Support from pupil welfare services ensures that children feel well and learn. Pupil welfare services include psychologist and school welfare officer services. Do not hesitate to contact them if you are worried about any matters concerning your child. You can find the contact information for these services at the preschool groups or you can ask the preschool staff for it. All discussions are always confidential.

Preparatory education in preschool and development of language skills

If your child cannot speak Finnish, you may apply for preparatory education in preschool. The daycare centre director or the family's social worker may help you with completing the application. Preparatory education is organised at the same location as preschool education. Teaching focuses on Finnish as a second language (S2).



Safir in preschool

Safir's preschool group goes to the forest every week, and Safir is going to go on her very first forest outing the next day. Safir does not speak Finnish yet, but she understands what they are about to do by looking at pictures.

On the day before the trip, the children look at a picture board of the upcoming trip together in the group. The destination, how to put on safety vests, how to walk in double file and the activities planned for their trip to the forest are all illustrated on the board. The same picture board is also given to the mother when she collects Safir. The family may discuss the trip at home in their own language in advance.

Safir is confident in going on the trip, because she knows where they are going. In the forest, the children learn more about nature and play together. Safir likes looking for sticks and rocks and builds a hut together with her friends. The children and the adults take photographs of the activities.

Back at the preschool after the trip, Safir looks at photographs of the destination, games and insects that she saw on the outing and names them. The photographs are also used to tell guardians about the activities on the trip.

In the afternoon, Safir cuts out images of things seen on the trip together with other children and glues them into her own notebook. She draws some of the animals she saw. Safir takes the notebook home to look back on the trip with her family in her own language.



Introduction to school

Children are introduced to school learning during the year of preschool education. During their preschool year, children will engage in shared activities with children from the local school. Guardians are also given an opportunity to learn more about the school and its activities.



Useful information!

What does your child need in daycare?

Your daycare centre will provide more information on what you need to bring to daycare with your child. Here are some examples:



Nappies, dummy and bedtime toy, slippers, indoor trousers and a change of clothes. The change of clothes may consist of a top and bottoms, underwear, sweater, socks and gloves.



Clothing suitable for the outside temperature and weather conditions.
Waterproof clothes: waterproof dungarees, raincoat, waterproof mittens and rubber boots.



Write your child's name on the clothes. Children often have similar clothes and shoes. If your child's boots are labelled, they will not be mixed up with someone else's.

A sick child is not allowed to come to daycare. If your child has fallen ill, or will be absent from daycare for some other reason, you must notify the daycare centre first thing in the morning. If your child falls ill during the day, the guardian will be notified and the child must be collected as soon as possible.

The daycare centre must be notified of any absences. It is important that you know the telephone number of the centre and remember the name of the daycare and the child group.

You must bring your child to and collect your child from the daycare centre

Guardians must bring and collect their children from the daycare centre at the agreed times. The guardian must escort their child to their group and ensure that the employee has received the child. When the child is collected from the daycare centre, you must greet the employee. They must know whether a child has been collected. Children are not allowed to leave the daycare centre area alone

If someone else is going to collect the child from the daycare centre, the employees must be notified in advance. The child will only be allowed to leave with the guardian or another person agreed in advance.

Further information and links

See the following websites:

hel.fi/helsinki/en/childhood-and-education/day-care/options

See the brochure: Activities, play and friends at daycare

hel.fi/static/liitteet/kasvatuksen-ja-koulutuksen-toimiala/Varhaiskasvatus/Helsinki/Helsinki/6/index.html

The Introduction to school guide in Finnish

hel.fi/static/liitteet-2019/KasKo/koulu-tutuksi.pdf

The Introduction to school guide in Swedish

hel.fi/static/liitteet-2019/KasKo/bekanta-dig-med-skolan.pdf

The Introduction to school guide in English

hel.fi/static/liitteet-2019/KasKo/introduction-to-school.pdf

The Introduction to school guide in Russian

hel.fi/static/liitteet-2019/KasKo/koulu-tutuksi-venaja.pdf

The Introduction to school guide in Somali

hel.fi/static/liitteet-2019/KasKo/Koulu-tutuksi-somali.pdf

The Introduction to school guide in Arabic

hel.fi/static/liitteet-2019/KasKo/koulu-tutuksi-arabia.pdf

The Education Division helpline: 09 310 44986

Mon–Fri 10–12 and 13–15.

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www.hel.fi

