



## Information about early childhood education and care for parents and guardians

### **Dear parent or guardian!**

We have put together an information package for you about the significance of early childhood education and care (ECEC) for the child, the forms and provision of ECEC, and obtaining a place in early childhood education and care for your child. At the end, you will find a brief summary of the acts and documents that guide early childhood education and care.

This information package was prepared by the Finnish National Agency for Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.

### **The child has a right to high-quality early childhood education and care**

Early childhood education and care comprises systematic and goal-oriented activities offered to children aged between 0 and 6. The child has a right to attend ECEC which has an important task in supporting the child's growth, development, learning and well-being in cooperation with the parents. While the primary responsibility for bringing up children rests with the guardians, early childhood education and care supports this task.

Early childhood education and care is part of the Finnish education system. Its purpose is to promote the child's lifelong learning and the realisation of equality in education. A great deal of research is conducted on early childhood education and care, and ECEC has been actively reformed based on this research evidence. Studies show that ECEC has numerous positive effects on the child while also creating benefits for society. As referred to in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the term daycare is today replaced with early childhood education and care.

Early childhood education and care is inclusive. This means that every child can participate in the activities, whatever their capabilities. ECEC staff ensure that each child feels accepted as themselves and as a member of the group. Encouraging children and providing them with opportunities for experiencing success support the development of the child's positive self-image.

The conception of learning in early childhood education and care is based on the idea that children learn together with other people and their surroundings. Friends and being part of the group are important for the child. The work in ECEC is guided by the principles of inclusion, equity, equality and togetherness. In keeping with these principles, each child's ideas, views and opinions are listened to, and the children have an opportunity to influence matters in their daily lives. Cultural and linguistic diversity and different worldviews in the children's community and surroundings are valued in early childhood education and care. Early childhood education and care does not demand or lead to religious, philosophical or political commitment.

The child's linguistic development and learning of the language of instruction used in ECEC are supported diversely. Bilingual and plurilingual children can speak and use their mother tongues in early childhood education and care while learning ECEC's language of instruction.



Early childhood education and care is provided in Finnish, Swedish and the Sámi languages. ECEC may also be provided in the Roma language, and in sign language for children who use this language. In addition, a municipality or private ECEC provider may offer bilingual early childhood education and care or language immersion.

The children are at the centre of early childhood education and care activities, with focus on their needs, strengths and interests. In ECEC, the staff promote the child's interest in learning and create favourable conditions for it. Children and ECEC staff work together to build an environment where children can be participants and active agents. Using suitable methods, children and their guardians are involved in planning, carrying out and evaluating the activities.

ECEC activities are based on play, as play has an important role in promoting children's well-being, learning and interaction. Children practise working together as a group with their friends and respecting each other in ECEC. This gives children experiences of being part of a group as well as allows them to practise ways of and skills needed for interacting with others and following the group's common rules. Bullying in ECEC is prevented by learning these key social skills. Cooperation with the children's homes is highly significant in preventing bullying.

In ECEC, children practise recognising, expressing and regulating their feelings. Emotional skills are the foundation of self-knowledge and good mental health. Children also improve their mathematical and physical abilities as well as different expression skills. In early childhood education and care, children explore the world around them and familiarise themselves with their surroundings and community.

### **The child has a right to the support they need in early childhood education and care**

In early childhood education and care, every child has a right to support for their learning, development and well-being. The child is supported as part of the group's activities as required by their individual needs. The staff's task is to provide the child with the support they need, using suitable forms of support. Support for the child may be provided flexibly as general, intensified and special support alike.

Support is provided in the child's own group as a rule but it can also be organised in a small group or a special group if necessary. The delivery of the support may include instruction by and consultations of a special education teacher (ECEC), various aids needed in ECEC, or assistance in situations where the child needs it. If a child needs several forms of support delivered regularly or continuously to promote their development, learning and well-being, a decision on intensified or special support or on support services is issued to the child.

In addition to early childhood education and care staff, the initiative on support provided for a child in ECEC may also come from the guardian or a social welfare and health care expert, such as a public health nurse or physician at a child health clinic. No expert statement is required for support organised in early childhood education and care. Cooperation with social welfare and health care services, including speech or occupational therapists or psychologists, is resorted to in an effort to ensure appropriate support for the child.

### **The child's personal early childhood education plan**

In cooperation between the ECEC staff and the child's parents, a personal early childhood education plan is prepared for each child in family daycare or at a day-care centre. The child's opinion must also be taken into account when preparing their personal ECEC plan. The personal early childhood education plan is a shared plan for promoting the child's individual development, learning and well-being. The plan is prepared on paper or in digital format. A joint discussion is important when preparing a personal early childhood education plan for a child. If necessary, an interpreter can be used in discussions on the ECEC plan to ensure a shared understanding of matters concerning the child. If the child needs support for their development, learning or well-being, a plan for providing support for the child is recorded in their early childhood education plan. The child's personal plan can



be used to evaluate the delivery and impact of the support. An early childhood education plan is a confidential document.

At a day-care centre, the ECEC teacher of a child group is responsible for pedagogical work in early childhood education and care and the preparation of the child's personal early childhood education plan. A family daycare childminder can draw on ECEC teachers' expertise when preparing a child's personal early childhood education plan.

## **Forms and provision of early childhood education and care**

Early childhood education and care is offered at day-care centres, in family daycare or in other forms, such as club and play activities. Parents and guardians choose a suitable way of participating in early childhood education and care for their children. The municipality has a duty to provide early childhood education and care that meets the residents' needs. Private sector providers also offer early childhood education and care services.

**At day-care centres**, children attend early childhood education and care provided for groups. As set out in the Act and Decree on Early Childhood Education and Care, ECEC teachers, social pedagogues and ECEC childcarers work with the groups. The head of the day-care centre directs the activities as a whole.

**Family daycare** is early childhood education and care delivered in a small group. Family daycare can be provided in the childminder's or the child's home, or as group family care in cooperation between two or three childminders. A family daycare childminder is responsible for the activities of their child group, and the planning and implementation of goal-oriented family daycare activities is supported by family daycare supervisors.

Special education teachers (ECEC) may work at day-care centres and in family daycare, either by alternating between different groups or as mobile consultative workers. Other consultative employees may also work in early childhood education and care, including teachers (ECEC) working with children with an immigrant background. Staff in assisting roles may also work with child groups, such as ECEC assistants.

**Open early childhood education and care activities** include playground and club activities, which involve guided and goal-oriented pedagogical work. Open early childhood education and care may include outdoor activities, play, and arts, music or physical education. Parents and guardians can also participate in the activities together with their child.

**Shift care**, in which ECEC services are offered to a child also in the evenings, at night and on weekends, is organised at a day-care centre or in family daycare. Shift care is provided for a child as required by the parent's or guardian's work or studies.

## **Obtaining a place in early childhood education and care**

The parent or guardian must apply for a place in early childhood education and care for a child four months before the child needs care. If your child needs early childhood education and because of your employment, studies, education or move to another municipality for work or studies and you have been unable to anticipate the need, you must apply for a place in early childhood education and care no later than two weeks before the child needs it. A child may participate in early childhood education and care provided by the municipality or by a private service provider. Municipalities and private providers offer more information on how to apply for a place and what happens when a child starts attending ECEC on their websites.



If the child lives and spends time in two municipalities, they are entitled to participate in early childhood education and care in both. Children who are receiving temporary protection or seeking asylum or who have refugee status are entitled to early childhood education and care organised by the municipality if, for example, their guardian is working or studying, or for other similar reasons. In an urgent situation or if this is otherwise required by the circumstances, a place in early childhood education and care must be organised within two weeks. When organising early childhood education and care, the child's best interests must always be considered, and the provision of ECEC must be based on an assessment of the child's needs. A child is entitled to attend early childhood education and care organised by the municipality once the family and the child have been granted asylum.

### **Cooperation between early childhood education and care and the guardians**

Cooperation between parents or guardians and early childhood education and care is important for the child's holistic development, learning and well-being. Appreciative encounters between the staff and parents lay a foundation for good cooperation. Cooperation in an atmosphere of trust is based on respectful interaction and both parties playing an active role, for example when catching up with the child's daily news. ECEC staff have a duty to listen to the parents and their initiatives and to offer the parents an opportunity to participate in planning, delivering and evaluating the child's early childhood education and care. Linguistic and cultural diversity and the diversity of families are taken into account in the cooperation. An interpreter is used whenever necessary.

Cooperation is particularly important when the child starts attending early childhood education and care, in such transitions during early childhood education and care as changing groups, when the child changes ECEC places or starts in pre-primary education, and in connection with support provided for the child. The parents and ECEC staff consider together the best ways of supporting the child's development, learning and well-being. Exchanges of information between ECEC staff and the parents are crucial.

### **Cooperation between ECEC and other services for families with young children**

Early childhood education and care works together with the child health clinic and other necessary healthcare and social welfare service providers. This cooperation supports the child's well-being and, consequently, the family's welfare as well as the provision of high-quality early childhood education and care for children.

In particular, cooperation with the child health clinic takes place in connection with extensive health examinations carried out when the child is aged 18 months and again at 4 years. With the guardian's written consent, the ECEC staff's assessment of the child's development and well-being in early childhood education and care is included in the notes of the child's extensive health examination. Cooperation is also important if the child needs support in early childhood education and care.

Information on the basis of which a child can be identified or that deals with such issues as the child's health or behaviour comprises personal data. Personal data must be kept secret. Transfers of information concerning a child between child health clinics and early childhood education and care primarily takes place by the guardian's written consent but is also possible without it. Under the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018), an ECEC provider has a right to receive secret information about a child that is essential for the organisation and provision of early childhood education and care and evaluating support from healthcare and social welfare service providers and professionals without the guardian's consent.

**Early childhood education and care works together with pre-primary education and basic education to** guarantee the child's smooth transition from ECEC through pre-primary education to school. Attending pre-primary education or other activities that achieve its objectives is mandatory for all children one year before they



reach the age of compulsory education. As a rule, this means 6-year-olds. In addition, early childhood education and care works together with libraries and other cultural services, sports and rescue services and with different worldview communities.

A child may start attending extended compulsory education before starting basic education if a physician or psychologist finds that the child, due to a disability or illness, cannot otherwise achieve the goals set for basic education. In order for the child to start extended compulsory education, an expert statement and a decision made by the municipality are required. Once a decision on extended compulsory education has been made for a child, the child can start pre-primary education that precedes extended compulsory education at the age of 4 or 5, or pre-primary education included in extended compulsory education at the age of 6. The guardian decides if the child should already participate in pre-primary education preceding extended compulsory education at the age of 5.

### **Legislation and documentation that guide early childhood education and care**

Early childhood education and care is guided by the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) and the Government Decree on Early Childhood Education and Care (753/2018). The Act contains provisions on the child's right to early childhood education and care and support for their development, learning and well-being delivered in early childhood education and care. The Act defines the objectives of early childhood education and care as well as the obligations concerning the organisation and provision of ECEC, the planning and evaluation of ECEC, staff sufficiency and staffing ratios, and the staff's qualification requirements. In addition, the Act lays down provisions on staff training, secrecy and information exchanges, the data warehouse for early childhood education and care, and private early childhood education and care.

ECEC is delivered on the basis of the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care prepared by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The National core curriculum is a regulation in accordance to which the municipality, joint municipal authority or a private service provider of early childhood education and care prepare local curricula for early childhood education and care. Early childhood education and care is delivered following a local curriculum for early childhood education and care.

For more information on early childhood education and care, see the websites of the Finnish National Agency for Education and your municipality of residence.