

Dear parent or guardian,

We have compiled information about Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) for you. More information about ECEC is available from your municipality of residence.

[The child has the right to participate in ECEC](#)

ECEC is systematic and goal-oriented activities that are offered to children between 0 and 6 years of age. ECEC is part of the Finnish education system and it is governed by the Act on early childhood education and care and the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care. ECEC is provided in general in Finnish, Swedish and the Sámi languages.

The child has the right to participate in ECEC before reaching the age of starting school. ECEC has an important task of supporting the child's development, learning and wellbeing in cooperation with the parents. While the parents have the primary responsibility for bringing up children, ECEC supports this task. In Finnish ECEC, the child is taught by trained personnel through play and games, physical activity, exploration and self-expression. The children has the right to receive the support they need for their learning and development.

[Importance of ECEC](#)

According to studies, high-quality ECEC has several positive impacts on the child. Early childhood is a phase of intense development and learning. During this time, the events in the child's life are meaningful both for the child's present and future life.

Regular participation in ECEC provides the child with an opportunity to learn Finnish or Swedish and to make new friends. The child's day also includes the meals served during the day, rest and outdoor activities.

The child has the right to play, learn, feel included and get support

The pedagogical activities in Finnish ECEC are firmly based on play and the child's participation. Playing is important for children's learning, wellbeing and social development. The experience of belonging to a group of children and to the ECEC community are key to the child's learning and sense of inclusion. When acting in the group, children practice social skills through play, form friendships and learn to discuss and negotiate shared issues. In ECEC, the child's previous experiences, interests and competences are the starting point for learning. Children are engaged in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the activities according to their abilities.

Worldview education

The goal of worldview education is to promote mutual respect and understanding of different worldviews and to support the development of children's cultural identities and worldviews. ECEC does not demand or lead to religious, philosophical or political commitment. Not demanding or leading to commitment means that worldviews are examined on an equal basis, without evaluating them. Children learn about the religions and other worldviews present in the child group together, for example, through the families' celebrations, customs and traditional play and games. Irreligion is discussed alongside other worldviews.

The child has the right to physical integrity

In Finland, the law prohibits physical punishment of a child: the child has the right to physical integrity. In Finland, female genital mutilation, FGM, is a punishable act under the provisions on assault laid down in the Criminal code. The circumcision of boys is strictly regulated. If matters such

as honour-based violence are discovered, the personnel have an obligation to intervene and discuss the matter with the parent or the required authority.

It is possible to participate in ECEC in different ways

The child's parent can apply for a place for the child in the type of ECEC of their choice: in an early education centre, family-based childcare or open activities in ECEC. Pre-primary education is provided to all children who have reached the age of 6.

In an early education centre, the child acts in a group. The person responsible for the activities of the child group in the early education centre is a teacher specialised in ECEC. Social pedagogues and childcarers specialised in ECEC also work in early education centres. Depending on the age of the children, the size of the child group varies between 8 and 21 children. A total of three professionals work in the child group.

Family-based childcare can be provided in the childminder's home, or as multi-practitioner home-based childcare by two or three childminders working together. One childminder usually looks after four children.

Open activities in ECEC can be organised for example as activities at playgrounds or as club activities, which are guided and goal-oriented education activities organised for a few hours at a time. Parents can participate in the activities.

Pre-primary education is part of ECEC and an important time period in the child's life. Pre-primary education is compulsory and free education in which the child participates during the year before starting school. Municipalities provide pre-primary education to children living in their area. A municipality may also provide instruction preparing for comprehensive education if the child's language proficiency requires it.

Early education centres are usually open between 6.00 and 18.00 on working days. In some early education centres or in family-based childcare, ECEC is also provided in the evenings, at night-time or during weekends, for example, because the parents work shifts. There may be exceptions in the operating times of ECEC during school holidays.

Applying for a place in ECEC and the fees

ECEC is offered by the municipality or privately. You can apply for a place in ECEC four months before you need it. If you suddenly find work or get a study place, you must apply for a place in ECEC at least two weeks before the child needs the place.

The fees in ECEC are determined according to the size and income of the family. More information about the type of ECEC, applying for a place in ECEC and the fees is available from your own municipality, for example, from the municipality's website. The child typically starts ECEC with a familiarisation period of one or two weeks together with a parent. The familiarisation period increases the child's sense of security.

Cooperation with parents

Good cooperation between the parents and the personnel is the child's best interests. The initial discussion in ECEC, the familiarisation period, exchanging the daily news and having regular discussions about the child's individual ECEC plan lay a foundation for trustful cooperation. The parents have an opportunity to influence and be involved in their child's ECEC, for example, by participating in parent's evenings or the activities of the child group. The parents can also give feedback and express their wishes to the personnel whenever they want to.

Using an interpreter in discussions

If necessary, an interpreter is ordered for discussions between a parent and the personnel so that all parties understand each other and can participate on an equal basis. The interpreter will interpret everything that the personnel and the parent say. The interpreter is impartial and bound by confidentiality. ECEC personnel order an interpreter after they have first determined the parent's mother tongue and dialect. The interpretation service is free of charge to the parents.

The child's support

In ECEC, every child has the right to receive 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. For example, the support may be activities in small groups, use of pictures or aids, or additional support in different daily situations. If necessary, the support can also be organised in a small group or special group. A special needs teacher may also work in the early education centre. The personnel always talk about the support with the parents first and a decision on it is made if necessary.

The child's individual ECEC plan

An individual ECEC plan is drawn up for every child in family-based childcare and early education centres. It is a plan drawn up on the basis of a shared discussion on how the child's individual development, learning and wellbeing will be promoted as part of the child group. The personnel, the parent and the child draw up the child's ECEC plan together. The child's individual plan is evaluated with the parent regularly, at least once a year.

Other cooperation parties

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.

Transfers of information concerning the child

Personal data is information on the basis of which a child can be identified or information about the child's health or behaviour. Personal data must be kept secret. Transfers of information concerning a child between child health clinics and ECEC primarily take place with the parent's written consent but it is also possible to transfer the information without the parents' consent. Cooperation and transfers of information are also carried out when the child moves from ECEC to pre-primary education and from pre-primary education to school.

The child's mother tongue or other language spoken at home

Knowing the mother tongue lays a basis for learning other languages. Children can speak and use their mother tongues in ECEC while also learning Finnish or Swedish. The child can learn several languages side by side. When the proportion of Finnish or Swedish increases during the child's day and its role grows, it is important for the parents to consciously strengthen the child's mother tongue. The parent takes care of maintaining the child's mother tongue or mother tongues at home. Good ways of doing this include naming things, singing, telling stories, visiting the library, reading, and talking about what has happened during the day, for example.

Instruction of Finnish or Swedish as a second language

The child's language development and learning the language of instruction – Finnish or Swedish – is supported in many ways in ECEC. The child learns the language during the day through play in

different interactive situations and different learning environments. The child's learning of the second language is monitored regularly.

Preparatory education

To give the child more time and instruction for learning Finnish or Swedish, some municipalities offer instruction preparing for comprehensive education in pre-primary education. The instruction of Finnish or Swedish takes place through play with the methods used in ECEC.