

Lower Saxony  
Ministry of Education



## My child in daycare

### A guide for parents

to daycare facilities and  
childminding services  
in Lower Saxony



**Niedersachsen.**  
Klar.

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## Dear parents,



For children in Germany, daycare has become a virtually self-evident part of growing up. In recent years, the country's national and regional governments and local authorities have made huge efforts to expand provision in response to needs.

This commitment will continue to be necessary in the years to come, with demand set to rise further; and, in the light of demographic trends and other factors, the expansion process has not yet been completed.

This growing demand is very much a positive development, not least because the education and supervision of children in daycare facilities and by childminders forms the first tier of Lower Saxony's education system. Parents are legally entitled to a daycare place for their child. Demand to exercise this entitlement – granting children the opportunity to access education and early-years support – continues to increase, which is very welcome in terms of educational, family and social policy. And, in Lower Saxony, we go one step further: to ensure that all children can participate in early-childhood education, attendance at a daycare facility has been free of charge since 1 August 2018 for all children aged three and above.

With initiatives aimed at improving the quality of services – such as the funding of three professional staff members in crèche groups and a Childminding Directive (Richtlinie Kindertagespflege) – Lower Saxony's state government plays a big part in creating framework conditions which ensure daycare facilities and childminders can fulfil their statutory educational mandate.

We have produced this informative booklet to encourage parents to take advantage of daycare, and the opportunities it affords their children for participation and education. This publication provides support and guidance on what your child can expect at a daycare facility or with a childminding service, and how this will help with their development.

Yours sincerely,



Grant Hendrik Tonne  
Lower Saxony Minister for Education

## What opportunities does child daycare create?

In daycare, children discover a new world that they eagerly explore. Within age-appropriate learning environments, they receive ongoing support from qualified educators who help to translate these new impressions and experiences into developmental benefits. They will get to know other children, make friends and build relationships with daycare staff or with their childminder.



As not all issues can be satisfactorily resolved at drop-off and pick-up times, it is a good idea – and, indeed, necessary – to make an appointment. This ensures there is enough time for parents to have an in-depth conversation with daycare staff or the childminder about their child's development.

Contact with other families provides mothers and fathers with opportunities to exchange information on their children's development and education. And daycare staff or childminders are available as the key contacts who will support you in your role as parents with their expertise.

Parents and those supervising their children enter into an educational partnership. Working together on the basis of trust, they jointly support the child in his or her development. Children benefit from having secondary attachment figures as well as their parents – people who help them explore the world and reach developmental milestones. Parents can talk to daycare staff or the childminder at regular intervals about how the child is getting on from day to day, both under supervision and with the family. Together, they can consider how to best help the child develop.

Rules, routines and a well-structured day are important in ensuring a good learning environment in the daycare facility or with the childminder – these help the child feel secure. Children must be able to explore the world around them with a sense of safety and security in order to build and strengthen relationships in daycare. In the many and varied aspects of development, children are helped by secure bonding – i.e. relationships they can depend on – with adult attachment figures, and by kind, ongoing support with diverse processes involved in learning and education.

The younger a child is, the more important it is to have regular routines (play, meals, sleep times) and dependable attachment figures, which provide a sense of safety and security.



## What can we expect as a family?

Starting daycare is a big step in a child's life. To successfully familiarize himself or herself with the new situation (daycare facility or childminding), the child, parents and staff or childminder must gradually get to know each other and build relationships in a settling-in phase. Over time, a well-structured day with reliable rules and routines give young children a sense of orientation which helps them adjust to the educational daycare setting.

Parents can help children settle into their new surroundings by encouraging them to reach out to people who are at first strangers, and to be eager explorers of their environment. Parental input during the settling-in phase conveys to the child that he or she can depend on the help and support of the adults at the daycare location.



Projects and topics explored at the daycare facility or with the childminder can be followed up on at home. To help their child settle in, parents can talk about what he/she has experienced, sing songs learned in daycare or look at picture books relevant to project topics.

Parents are the most important attachment figures in a child's life and, as the experts on their own child, they know what his or her particular needs are. Open, trust-based communication between parents and the daycare staff or childminder is thus the basis for all educational processes in the daycare setting.

Separating from their own child is something parents often find difficult. It is important that they talk freely about their personal worries and anxieties in relation to their child's daycare experience. Only if they have confidence in the daycare facility's or childminder's educational approach will their child feel secure there, and thus be able to play and learn.

With each positive experience, with every exciting opportunity to explore and discover further aspects of the world they live in, children will feel more secure in their new environment. The familiarization process involving the child, parents and caregivers/supervisors is aided by close, trust-based communication between all concerned, with everyone sharing observations and thoughts on the child and his/her outlook. Even after the settling-in phase, regular and open dialogue relating to the child's day-to-day education will ensure an appropriate response to their individual needs and experiences.



## Which educational mandate is pursued?

All children bring with them things that make up a highly individual self – their sex, personality, and social and cultural background. And, in their uniqueness, all children enrich the ongoing life of the daycare group.

Both daycare facilities and childminding services have a mandate to individually care for, guide and support children in a manner that is age appropriate and specific to their particular stage of development. Attending nursery, particularly in the final year before starting school, provides momentum for learning that helps the child transition to primary education.

Whereas childminding is a family-like and more personal form of care, with parents directly entering into a care agreement with the childminder, in daycare facilities children are supported in groups without being directly or personally allocated to a particular educator. The care agreement is made with the facility. Depending on group size, the children are looked after by two or even three staff members.



Lower Saxony has a special 'orientation plan' in place for education at elementary level provided by child daycare facilities. It defines functions and goals of these centres, covering different areas of ongoing learning and experience within this group setting. Childminding services also support children holistically, covering diverse aspects of life and learning.

Staff in daycare facilities and childminders focus on each child's strengths and interests, incorporating these into their educational services. Caregivers ensure that each child can play, explore and learn securely, satisfying their natural curiosity.



The mission statement of a childcare service reveals the educational goals and primary methods adopted, and the guiding principles of its educational work, thus helping parents choose a suitable childcare provider.

Daycare facilities and childminding services provide parents with clarity on the main focus of their educational work; they describe binding everyday rules and how the day is structured. This mission statement provides reliable information about the service and, therefore, a good idea of what children and parents can expect. It explains how a childcare service implements the educational mandate to which daycare facilities and childminders are committed.

The basis for proper implementation of the educational mandate is observation and documentation of the child's development. Through targeted observation, caregivers assess the level of development, reflect on the child's individual aptitudes and potential, and discern which forms of stimulating input can support the child in the learning and development processes they are undergoing. Observations made, and realizations that

caregivers gain from these observations and from reflecting on them, are documented. These records form the basis for discussions with parents on their child's development and how to foster it. They are also an instrument for quality assurance and for enhancing educational approaches.

Daycare facilities use different methods and materials for documentation. They are the basis for planning each child's individual support and for the regular development reviews at which parents talk with daycare staff or the childminder about their own observations and experiences in relation to the child's development.

## How and what will my child learn?

The educational mandate in the elementary sector relates to overall childhood development and envisages that, in ongoing daycare activities, children gain broad-based experience on the basis of which they can develop competencies and acquire knowledge. In shaping a stimulating environment for learning and development, daycare staff and childminders focus on the child with all his or her senses (i.e. holistically). This approach appeals to children at several different developmental levels. In these 'prepared' learning environments, a child can pursue his or her intentions in a self-determined manner and carry them out autonomously. Children receive stimuli that continually prompt their curiosity and their urge to explore.



If children are encouraged gently and with kindness, to try out new things and independently explore the unknown, this boosts their development. It is important here to continuously give the child the freedom to gain learning experiences while playing independently, without being directed or instructed to do so by adult attachment figures.

### Play as a form of learning

Play is learning. It is by playing that children discover their world. In so doing, they are both active and initiative-taking. Their own resourcefulness drives them to explore and learn, and they use all their senses to explore things that arouse their curiosity. Through play with everyday objects and interesting materials, they develop and pursue their ideas, test and expand their capabilities, and develop competencies and knowledge of the world.

In play, what children need is time, a familiar environment and quality input from adult attachment figures who kindly and gently stimulate them to play and, as necessary, provide encouragement and help them to process what they have experienced. Daycare staff and childminders provide a playing child with supportive input and are reliable contacts for him or her to turn to. They talk to children about their play experience and help them initiate contact with peers, thus aiding language development and social skills and competence.

An educationally important form of play is free play, a period of active and child-determined learning without instruction from adult attachment figures. Valuable experience is gained here that aids the development of autonomy, self-awareness and self-efficacy.



### Emotional development and social learning

Experiences gained in daycare help children to test themselves and, in so doing, develop their personality as well as emotional and social competency. 'Relationship-intensive' guidance by adult attachment figures promotes self-confidence and self-awareness, as well as sensitivity and empathy towards other children. The child learns to perceive, express and manage his or her own feelings. This takes place in a wide range of different everyday situations in daycare. Play and learning environments tailored to the age of a given child allow sensory experiences, communication and conversations, the exploration of ideas and interests, and social interaction between all the children. They also enable children to learn ways of handling frustration and conflict, and how to deal with their emotions.

It is important to take seriously the way children feel and, by mirroring and naming the emotions they perceive, to help them process these feelings.

### Development of cognitive faculties

The process of cognitive development in children is highly complex. It is reflected in children's growing ability to transform their experiences into knowledge, to increasingly form abstract concepts, and to discern and process ways (which go beyond their own perception) of looking at things. Approaches to aiding children's cognitive development include intensive language input to describe their ongoing daycare experience, and talking to them about play.



## The body – movement – health

Children go on active journeys of discovery. Physical activity opens up new realms of experience, and it is also a driving force for learning and for all aspects of development. Daycare promotes movement and gives children the opportunity to let off steam both inside and outside. Other aspects of growing up healthily form part of daycare, including a well-balanced diet and good hygiene.

## Language and speech

Language learning begins at birth. Driven by the fundamental need to communicate with other people, children learn the language – or languages – of the attachment figures that are so important to them. The ability to acquire language is innate. Language development is fostered in early childhood, especially through language input modelled by the parents. In the ongoing childcare experience within the daycare facility or with the childminder, caregivers serve as language role models and provide many opportunities that prompt speech in which children use and improve their language skills. Language education and support are a specific aim of play, singing and reading

The emphasis is on language education that is integrated into everyday life, with children receiving ongoing support in a range of daycare situations that is appropriate to their development level.



Children enjoy movement and have a need for it that must be met. In daycare, space and physical activities are provided that enable this appetite to be fulfilled.

aloud. The child's language development is documented and is addressed in development reviews with the parents; individually tailored, special language support is provided if this need has been identified. Caregivers also encourage children of pre-school age to explore signs/symbols, letters and numbers preparatory to the acquisition of written language.

There are many opportunities in everyday life – when eating together, when putting on clothes, when playing, and on the way to the daycare facility or the childminder's – to foster a child's language development by talking to them about their experiences. A non-critical, language-rich environment is important if the child is to continue to enjoy speaking and using language.



Children need time and opportunity, by means of trial and error as well as imitation, to test and improve their own ability to cope independently and well with their everyday lives.

## Practical life skills

Children want to, and must, gain independence. Daycare, therefore, especially fosters the development of practical life skills. When getting themselves dressed, washing or feeding themselves, children are given the time they need to test and develop their own abilities. The aim is for them to learn to do things

themselves and not to be discouraged when they don't succeed. In this way, children learn to cope well with their everyday lives actively and, in increasing measure, autonomously. They become less reliant on support from adult attachment figures; this boosts their positive self-perception.

### Basic mathematical understanding

The ongoing daycare experience provides a wealth of opportunities to actively explore mathematical principles. When playing, eating, painting or building, children quite naturally encounter concepts of time and space, numbers and measurements, proportions and size relations, and shapes. Adult attachment figures encourage children to draw insights from their experiences, to develop and test theories, and to communicate with others about these things.

It is especially important to integrate mathematical education into everyday situations. These provide broad scope for counting, talking about amounts, and exploring shapes and space concepts.

### Aesthetic education

From birth onwards, a child perceives his or her environment with all the senses – by feeling, smelling, tasting, hearing and seeing. Providing sensory impressions, and creating learning environments that broaden realms of experience for the senses, are a key function of childcare. Here, children gain important sensory experiences while exploring materials and objects, while balancing and climbing, while dancing and singing, and while drawing, painting and making things. They are encouraged to develop their imagination and their creativity.

Children learn best with all of their senses – hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell. This means that a creative atmosphere full of music, art and movement, in which children enjoy gaining new sensory experiences, is a particularly good environment for learning.



Caregivers, parents and children treat each other with mutual respect and in the knowledge that each person has his or her own perspective which may differ from one's own. By imitating their attachment figures, children develop into socially competent individuals.

### Nature and the environment

Children are interested in the world around them and are keen to 'grasp' it in every sense of the word. Discovering nature and the environment involves exploratory and experimental learning. Playing on the outdoor grounds of the daycare facility or at the childminding venue broadens children's experiential world; so do trips to meadows, woods and the like. They get to know local flora and fauna, and find out about natural phenomena such as weather, the seasons and gravity. In this way, children also learn how important natural resources are for them and realize that they need to take proper care of them and use them responsibly. As with every learning process, all of the child's attachment figures have an important function as a role model.

### Ethical and religious issues

Children may well be confronted by the deeper questions of life and death from an early age; they experience conflicts and challenges in the world they live in, and feel sadness, happiness or anxiety. Educators and childminders respond to children's questions with sensitivity. Activities such as being read to, looking at picture books or just engaging in attentive dialogue allow exploration of values, fundamental issues of existence, and aspects of culture and religion. In this way, based on their own experience, children are encouraged to develop their own values and to respond to those with other beliefs on equal terms, showing openness and tolerance.

Religions provide answers to existential questions. These can be communicated to children in an age-appropriate way. The distinction between 'good' and 'bad' interests even very young children and presents a challenge to their adult attachment figures in ongoing daycare.







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