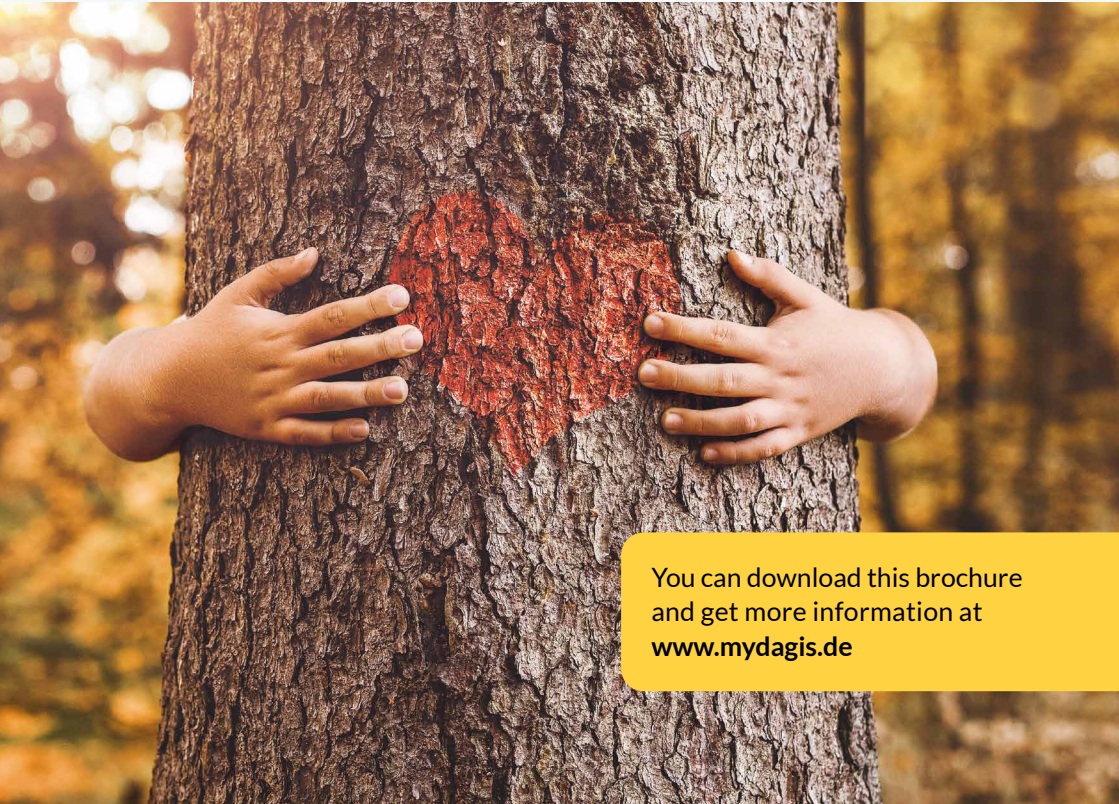


WELCOME TO MYDAGIS!



# MORE THAN JUST CHILD CARE



You can download this brochure  
and get more information at  
[www.mydagis.de](http://www.mydagis.de)

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# WELCOME TO MYDAGIS! THE KITA BASED ON SCANDANAVIAN EDUCATION PRINCIPLES

## CONCEPT

The name was derived from our underlying concept, as MyDagis is centered around the Scandinavian approach to education and works bilingually (English – German). The word “Dagis” means Kindergarten in Swedish, and “My” is English, of course, so MyDagis can be translated to mean “My Kindergarten”. Based on the Scandinavian notions for how child care facilities should be run and organized, MyDagis seeks to offer high quality child care along with long, flexible opening hours to fit each individual family’s needs. MyDagis is the epitome of optimal care, taking into account the individual needs of each child for their development.

The Scandinavian child care model performs a dual function. On the one hand, child care should enable parents to reconcile their work or study responsibilities with their family life. On the other hand, child care should support and stimulate the child’s development and learning process, and help to ensure that children grow up safely under sound conditions.

Swedish child care is based on the holistic aspect to a child’s development and learning processes, in which welfare, care, upbringing, and learning form a whole. Quality care is considered to be a prerequisite for a child to feel comfortable, which is, in turn, a prerequisite for opening up learning processes and ensuring positive development.

With a child-to-educator ratio of 4:1 or 5:1, the children at MyDagis thrive in a family-like atmosphere which greatly benefits their development.

What you find at MyDagis differs greatly from standard child care facilities: We offer flexible care by allowing parents to adjust their booked hours from month to month. We serve organic food, we speak to the children in English and German, and the program each day consists of either art projects, dance, sports, music, or excursions.

## PEDAGOGICAL ROLE MODELS

Instead of orienting the kindergarten around one pedagogical concept, MyDagis advocates a variety of different approaches. Our concept includes elements of the Reggio Approach, together with features of Montessori pedagogy and the Situational Approach. Emmi Pikler’s views on caring for toddlers in institutions have strengthened our belief that even very young children can be well accommodated for. The rights of children outlined by Janusz Korczak support our idea of a self-determined childhood, and Jesper Juul helped to shape our understanding of what it means to be a child:

creator  
wholesome  
individual  
worldly  
discoverer

Last but not least, the ideas of Carl Rogers and Thomas Gordon had a significant influence on our concept. This fundamental openness to different pedagogical models stems from the conviction that children’s development takes place in a complex, holistic, and individual way that eludes predefined plans. Each child has its own laws of



The principal goal of education is to create people who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done – people who are creative, inventive, and discoverers. The second goal of education is to form minds, which can be critical, can verify, and not accept everything they are offered.

Jean Piaget



development, which our educators treat with esteem and respect. Coexistence with children is a process of continual development, which means that our concept is also in need of revision on a regular basis.

Our educational orientation is based on the idea that childhood development should be understood as an educational process. When dealing with adults and, more importantly, their peers, children improve their communication skills, assertiveness, and willingness to compromise. Another core of this work is the ability to learn problem-solving skills and how to deal with failure. We work to support the children with these issues using different speech, perception, movement, and musical activities. Children grow best when they are encouraged and provided with a multitude of chances to explore and test their creativity. They actively seek interaction with others and learn through imitation, but they learn particularly well when they can act independently.

We inform parents regularly about the small and big milestones in their child's development. We, too, are constantly evolving and learning about the latest insights in early childhood education. Training and further education are, of course, a natural component of our work.

## OUR APPROACH TO EDUCATION

The adults' perception of children strongly influences their perception of themselves. In order to strengthen their behavior, we need to be attuned to their actions and be able to reflect on them accordingly. This includes questioning the image of children. Childhood is an independent stage of life, not just a phase of transition or preparation. Children are already small people at the beginning of their lives, and are born with the primal forces of development. And that is why we, at MyDagis, respect each child individually and center our pedagogical work around their feelings, temperament, strengths, and weaknesses.

## OUR VIEW OF THE CHILD

Our concept for early childhood development combines elements from the educational philosophies developed by:

- » Maria Montessori
- » Célestin Freinet
- » Alexander Sutherland Neill
- » Emmi Pikler
- » Jesper Juul

The concept also includes certain features of the Reggio Approach and forest schooling, along with the Situational Approach.

Every child is unique and considered to be a full-fledged person from the beginning of life. Each child has their own personality and the ability to actively shape their own development. We give the children space and the opportunity to develop themselves, allowing them to gain self-confidence and build up a healthy sense of self-esteem. We want to:

Strengthen the **ME**,  
respect the **YOU**  
and form **OUR** experiences together!

In elementary education, children should learn the basic values of social coexistence and begin to experience the diverse world in which we live. These basic values include human dignity, tolerance, equal opportunity, and solidarity. This is especially important for children with different social, ethnic or cultural backgrounds to grasp. With this awareness, together with a positive attitude toward diversity and the individual needs of each child, the professionals at MyDagis play an important role by providing inclusion-oriented education.

In an environment of mutual respect and appreciation, children can grow and flourish in a community that places value on equal opportunity, participation, respect for diversity, and sustainability.

## CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

To ensure that the children are prepared for their future in our democratic society, it is important that the children are well-informed about their rights and are allowed to participate in decision-making processes (participation). It is also important for the children to gain an appreciation and respect for diversity (inclusion), and for them to understand how to lead a healthy and sustainably-conscious life. MyDagis helps to

teach the children their rights through projects, books, games, and of course in their day-to-day interactions with other children.

Considering these rights, we developed our own "Kita constitution" together with the children, in which their concrete rights at MyDagis have been outlined.



Children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today.

Janusz Korczak





At MyDagis, toys and equipment are freely accessible to the children, and they can decide what, when, where, and how they want to use them.

# PEDAGOGICAL ROLE MODELS

## MARIA MONTESSORI

The Montessori method can be described as a philosophy that places children and their individuality at the forefront. Maria Montessori believed in the intrinsic value of children. Simply put, traditional values have no place in the Montessori practice. According to Montessori, children should learn freely, without criticism or obstacles. Montessori believed that both punishments and rewards damage a child's inner attitude. Instead of using an external form of motivation, children should learn based on their own motivation to do so. Montessori contested that children naturally want to be a part of adult life, and this desire should be enough to motivate them.

The Montessori method concentrates on the needs, talents, and natural gifts of individual children. According to this model, children should learn at their own pace and in their own way. Children are encouraged to set the learning pace and themes themselves and to repeat lessons whenever they believe it's necessary to do so. At MyDagis, toys and equipment are freely accessible to the children, and they can decide what, when, where, and how they want to use them. The children can already do some things on their own, and they should be allowed to do those things independently. Even the little ones can do a lot if you put your trust in them. For example, every group has a "Drink Oasis" where each child has a cup placed upon a picture of themselves. Thus, the children can reach their cup and put it back on their own, without having to read or ask for help.

## EMMI PIKLER

According to Emmi Pikler, each child has their own unique personality and thus their own unique pace for development and learning. This pace can differ greatly from child to child. Children move on to the next stage of development when they feel confident in what was previously learned and ready for the next step. Children's motor skills and self-confidence develop naturally when they are provided with an environment full of love and respect.

Emmi Pikler believed that a child's personality flourishes when allowed to develop as independently as possible. She argued that the manner of care that a child receives as a baby is important for the child's overall upbringing, as a baby's social experience is made up almost entirely of feedings, baths, diaper changes, and getting dressed and undressed. To Pikler, loving and respectful interaction with a baby is of the utmost importance for the healthy development of the child. With this approach in mind, every interaction with a child should be characterized by intense communication (i.e. both verbal and body language) and full attention.

### The three aspects of Pikler's work:

- » **Care:** Gentle physical care and communication with the child. The child should be involved in the decisions.
- » **Motor development:** The child develops based on its own initiative and at its own pace. There should be no efforts by an adult to steer or accelerate the process.
- » **Play:** Free, uninterrupted play in a protected environment with age-appropriate equipment (e.g. toys or furniture).

We consciously implement these three aspects of Pikler pedagogy into our day-to-day care. For example, the daily routine allows a number of opportunities for free-play. When there is an activity planned, we allow the children to decide whether they would like to participate in the offer or continue to use the time to play freely.

Taking motor development into account, we resist assisting children to climb to the top of a structure (e.g. a slide, climbing tower, etc.), but rather encourage them to master it themselves once they feel ready. During changing time, for example, there is time for one-on-one care. There is undivided attention between the MyDagis educator and the child – attention that is critical to building and strengthening the relationship between the two. This happens through thorough communication (the educator explains to the child what is happening), active participation (the child is asked if they would like to pick out a fresh diaper or clean themselves up towards the end), and through fun and games (there are always different materials for relaxation at the changing station, such as feathers, massage oils, finger puppets, massage balls, etc., that the child can pick out and use during changing time).

## THE REGGIO APPROACH

Under the Reggio Approach, the child is considered to be the designer of its development, knowledge, and ability. The child knows best what it needs and pursues the development of its competencies with energy and curiosity. The child is perceived as being both complete like an adult and as a developing human. The goal of socialization is not to shape the child's identity. A child's identity is a constantly changing expression of their experiences as well as their communicative and interpretive processes. Accordingly, identity is always personal, social and cultural and cannot be taught or learned.

As the Reggio Approach attaches considerable significance to projects, the educators at MyDagis undertake projects with the children all year-

round. Projects are not special events, but part of our day-to-day routines. This is situation-oriented work, which means that the project ideas are developed using games, conversations, or observations with the children and are therefore based on the children's authentic interests. Possible projects are often discussed and decided on in the morning, and the educators can also try to gauge or spark interest. The projects vary in duration – they could take two hours, or maybe even a full year! The craft projects are often hung up for the parents to see, and the projects are often documented both in photographic and written form and sent out to the parents. The documentation represents the evolution of ideas, in addition to the children's discoveries and findings. When the documentation is carried out parallel to the project, it teaches the children about structured processes, appreciation, feedback, reminders, and materials for selective imitation. The project documentation is also an important source for educators and parents alike, as it provides information on the thinking, feelings, abilities, and development of the children.

# THE CORNERSTONES OF OUR CONCEPT

## OUTDOOR EDUCATION

From spring until autumn the groups spend one day per week in the nearby forest. The day begins with a morning circle either on the forest floor or on a self-constructed forest sofa, followed by lunch in the forest, and sometimes even a nap. By spending so much time in nature, the children discover and experience the environment in such a way that it can shape their view on the great outdoors for life.

Nature is the ideal space for children to get out and move. Forest pedagogy pushes the children in all developmental areas and helps to teach them to love and respect for nature. The free space to roam, relative quiet, and lots of time assist the children in the development of their emotional stability, their ability to concentrate, and their

balancing abilities. With direct and continuous contact with nature, children learn to practice prudence and respect for it and they will begin to develop a sense of familiarity with the plants, animals, dirt, and water that they find. Eventually, they will start to feel at home out in nature, which is the best pedagogical realm.

### Our natural playground

We learn to love nature not only in the forest, but also out on our natural playground. MyDagis consciously limits the playground equipment available, as nature itself provides enough room to play. The children's imaginations are inspired by the natural playground, and it results in the children coming up with different possibilities for play each day, through which they create new situation-oriented



Time flies, when  
you're having fun!

Friedrich Schiller

Our natural playground offers the children a safe, green play area to romp around, discover, learn and grow.

experiences, build their courage and trust while testing their own personal limits. The children are not forced into activities or games, but instead have the chance to exercise their imaginations and test their creativity by trying to find solutions for new situations that they encounter.

## NUTRITION

Nutrition is important to us at MyDagis, which is why our food is prepared fresh each day by a chef at our own facilities. Within our approach to nutrition, it is important to us that the children learn to deal with food in a conscious manner and set the foundations for a healthy lifestyle. We put great effort into making sure that the meal plan is balanced, offers variety, and that the children's wishes are taken into account. The latest meal plan can always be found hanging in the entry ways so that the parents and children can take a look. With sustainability in mind, we serve vegetarian food that is prepared using, when possible, organic and regional ingredients, along with vegetables out of our own garden that we plant and harvest with the children. In order to teach the children to be conscious of the environment, we do not have plastic bottles of water on hand, but rather filtered water from a machine. The children also have the option of sugar-free tea. Water, tea, and fruit are, of course, available at any point over the course of the day and are left within reach of the children.

All of the food offered by MyDagis is largely sugar-free, with the exception of birthday and going away parties. Parents may bring baked goods or other products with sugar on these occasions.

MyDagis offers all meals from breakfast to the evening snack. For snack times, the children are offered fresh fruit and bread. We consciously design meals for the children and with them, when possible. We ask the children to actively participate for exchange, reflection, and learning purposes. We encourage the children to act independently and responsibly. To us, sharing a meal is not just about ingesting food, it presents a chance to socialize and gain new knowledge. Sharing a meal incites feelings of well-being and joy in a community.

## GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION

The understanding of gender differences and the development of one's gender identity is an important theme for kindergarten-aged children. In fact, the first self-categorization process begins already around a child's first birthday. Many child care providers will say that they treat boys and girls in exactly the same manner. At MyDagis, we consciously do not treat them the same. Children are not the same and should not be treated as though they are. Equality is not necessarily fair. Gender competence is based on recognizing differences in individuals.

Fortunately, many children are inclined to reject predetermined gender constructions when they realize that they do not fit their interests. But children who do not behave in a typical manner for their gender are often insecure and sometimes bullied. The foundation of gender-sensitive education is to encourage each child's individuality, regardless of gender stereotypes, and to uncover gender-typical social practices by the children that are unhealthy and/or limiting and guide these practices in a more critical manner.



The goal of gender-sensitive education is to encourage children to explore their individual interests and strengths, without constant consideration of gender clichés.

The goal of gender-sensitive education is to encourage children to explore their individual interests and strengths, without constant consideration of gender clichés. Gender-sensitive education is based on an attitude that recognizes diverse lifestyles and emphasizes the importance of equal opportunities and inclusion. Through our pedagogical way of working, we practice gender equality at MyDagis and, in this regard, support a society free of gender hierarchies.

Specifically, this means that all employees work in a self-reflective manner, pay attention to their own language choices, and use gender-appropriate language, so as not to restrict the children in their development. For example, "I need some children to help me carry this heavy table" instead of "I need four strong boys to help me carry this table". In this way, it's not just the "strong kids", the boys, or the girls who are being addressed, but rather any children who believe in their own strength. Gender-sensitive education begins with

qualified personnel. Thus, MyDagis deals with gender stereotypes and gender-specific expectations head-on through training workshops and team meetings focused on gender issues. With male staff members in the Under 3 and 3+ groups, we practice gender-sensitive education openly and actively, and we have a number of male and female role models. In addition, we take a close look at educational materials such as games, books, songs, etc., and try to ensure that they do not reinforce traditional gender clichés (e.g. books in which only men are depicted in cars and semi-trucks). But here, too, the participation of the children and their parents plays an important role. The topic often comes up in our newsletter, during parent talks, and on parents' evenings, and it is important that we can reflect and continue to evolve our approach together. We have to take the children seriously and work with them in a reflection-oriented manner if we are to accept them as independent subjects of their actions.





**The four goals for a prejudice-conscious education are:**

- » Strengthen all children in their identity
- » Learn about diversity and develop empathy
- » Discuss and criticize biasness
- » Act against injustice and discrimination

## DIVERSITY EDUCATION

At MyDagis, not only do we appreciate the children, but also the staff members and parents from other cultures and with different characteristics. We consider this diversity to be enriching. This also helps to counteract discrimination and exclusion at the Kita, because even young children can perceive differences in themselves and others. We therefore aim to offer the children a prejudice-conscious education, which provides all children, regardless of their individual or collective affiliations, with the same opportunities for participation and development.

## INDIVIDUALITY

**For quality education, the quality of the relationship (between a child and the teacher) is very important.**

In this light, a relationship is a prerequisite for learning. At most child care facilities, the relationship between the children and educators lies at the forefront. If a child has a positive bond with an educator, this provides the child with the sense of security needed to explore the surroundings and connect with others. This relationship is shaped by the understanding and acceptance of the children's emotions, the treatment of them as equals in conversation, and by taking their needs and wishes seriously. In this context, equality requires openness and respect for each other's differences.

## Freinet approach

Following the Freinet approach to education, teacher-directed instruction is replaced by lessons determined by the pupils, with children being regarded as independent and competent people. Célestin Freinet assumed that all children have an intrinsic desire to learn that makes them natural explorers and researchers. Through experimentation and discovery learning, the children are stimulated in a way that satisfies their thirst for discovery and research. This happens at MyDagis, for example, through exciting experiments. There are a number of experiments and excursions available to us through "Tiny Tots' Science Corner", especially for the preschool children. The educators assess what the children already know and encourage them rather than focusing exclusively on deficits in knowledge.

## BILINGUALISM

As part of our bilingual concept, we have German and English-speaking educators and teaching assistants that care for the children in each group. Our approach is known as "one person, one language", so as not to confuse the children and to create a sense of continuity. All MyDagis employees must be able to speak one of the two languages perfectly. Bilingualism should therefore not be viewed as an additional educational offer, but rather just an aspect of everyday life for the children. The children learn the languages in a laid-back atmosphere with no pressure through normal communication with the educators, and interaction with songs, books, and games, etc. In order to further simplify

communication for the educators, we always have English and German books on hand. In addition, we also produce newsletters and group summaries for the parents in both languages. At MyDagis, bilingualism runs through our entire concept.

## HIGH CHILD-TEACHER RATIO

Quality care and support for each child and their personal development can only be achieved through a high child-teacher ratio. In order to develop an atmosphere of trust in the group, it is critical that the qualified staff members can analyze and assess the individual needs of the children. Once a trusting environment is established, only then can the children flourish with personalized support.

We believe that young children in particular require a quiet, protected, family-like atmosphere for optimal development. We want to assure the parents that their children – many of whom are away from home for the first time for an extended period of time – are being cared for in a warm, nurturing environment.

We therefore place considerable importance on maintaining small groups, with a maximum of 12 children per day in the Under 3 groups and a maximum of 22 children per day in the 3+ groups. There are two qualified early childhood educators in each group along with two teaching assistants, at least one of which is an English speaker. In addition, MyDagis also staffs the groups with volunteers (Bundesfreiwillige) and interns.



**Equality takes differences seriously and does not aim to cancel them out.**

**Jesper Juul**





Our rooms are brightly designed. The floor-to-ceiling windows create a link between the inside spaces and the great outdoors.

# OUR FACILITIES

## INDOOR SPACES

A child's surroundings have a significant effect on their personality. We made certain that this was taken into account when planning out our spaces. Children need space to move, but also space to rest and relax. Light, colors, and acoustics can greatly influence activities and the ability to relax. The group rooms are divided so that each group has a main room for activities, a dining room that also functions as an area for crafts, a room for naps and relaxation, and a restroom.

In our group rooms, where the children are actively playing, we have bright lights together with

light paint on the walls. In most rooms, we also have floor-to-ceiling windows. This creates a link between inside and outside, and brings life and movement into the rooms. By providing different levels and subfloors, we offer the children a variety of opportunities for movement and perception. The children can sleep or relax at any point in the relaxation / nap time rooms, and the children have their own beds to give them a sense of security. The children have access to both the active and quiet rooms throughout the day, and they can decide for themselves whether it's time to relax or find an activity.



We offer the children small toilets, sinks at their level, stairs leading to the changing tables, etc., so that they can be more involved in their own care.



The group rooms are divided so that each group has a main room for activities, a dining room that also functions as an area for crafts, a room for naps and relaxation, and a restroom.



Our rooms should stimulate physical activity, but also provide opportunities to retreat.

Attentive care and the freedom of movement are important aspects of Pikler's approach to early childhood education. To keep in line with this approach, we connected the restrooms to the rooms and offer the children small toilets, sinks at their level, stairs leading to the changing tables, etc. so that they can be more involved in their own care.

In child care facilities, exercise rooms are often thought of as large rooms that provide the children with space to romp around and practice aerobic exercises. But these rooms can be so much more. They should contain different incentives to

move about, such as climbing walls, ropes, nets, bridges, pits, and caves. They should stimulate physical activity, but also provide opportunities to retreat. Based on this line of thinking, we have a large gymnasium with floor-to-ceiling windows and different materials to encourage movement or allow the children to withdraw from the others.

In this room, MyDagis offers children both security and adventure with a balance between movement and rest. We view the room as another educator in a way, as it gives the children the chance for independent exploration and discovery.



Kita in der Wachsfabrik

## OUTDOOR SPACES

There is no better place that can advance children's development and satisfy their urge to explore and learn new things than the great outdoors.

By splashing about in the mud, children inadvertently learn some of the laws of physics. The deeper I dig, the colder the dirt is. My skin itches when the mud dries on it. There is sticky mud and crumbly mud, and so on.

Children ask questions (e.g. how can I get up into this tree?), start to experiment (e.g. how do I position the stones and branches in such a way that I can climb up?), and realize their physical skills (e.g. I can reach the bottom-most branch) and their limitations (e.g. I'm not strong enough yet to pull myself up).

Our design for the outdoor spaces followed the same line of thinking for our indoor spaces. We put much thought into providing the children with hiding spots and places to withdraw to. A variety of materials such as plants, wood, bark, gravel, stones, boulders, sand, and water provide the children with diverse opportunities for sensory experiences. We have a number of different areas on the playground including slides, swings, and playhouses, but also streams, mud pits, sand boxes, and grassy bits. At MyDagis, the children are free to pick, smell, and even taste the berries, flowers, and other plants. With small, separate outdoor space for the under 3 groups, we also took into account the needs of the smallest children among us. But of course they also have access to the larger playground.

The children have the chance to withdraw from the others behind large bushes and create their own forts or they can get creative with the other children and leave their mark on the playground.



Our child care facilities are surrounded by spacious natural playgrounds, which are multi-faceted and create numerous opportunities for creative play for the children.



Kita im Kappelshof

## CHILD CARE FOR COMPANIES

It can be difficult to balance a career and family life. More often than not, office hours differ greatly from the kindergarten's hours of operation, and both the employer and the kindergarten are less than flexible when it comes to shifting the working hours or opening hours. At MyDagis, we offer the chance for companies to get involved in the planning process. Everyone wins with optimal scheduling, and the parents have more time for their work and, above all, more quality time with their family.

When the Kita and employer collaborate, parents can skip the time-intensive search for a care provider and the complicated process of trying to match up their working hours with the opening hours. Instead, this work will be done for you, and the children and parents alike can go about their days in the Kita or at work feeling more relaxed.

Here's how it works: A company would contract a number of spots at the Kita over a long period of time, which are then made available to their employees. If the needs of the companies we work with are different, then the opening hours can be adjusted accordingly.

## OPENING HOURS AND FEES

MyDagis is open from Monday to Friday from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM. The closing periods, 8 days in summer and 2 days for the further training of staff members, are communicated in writing with the parents in a timely manner and are also on display at the Kita.

To ensure that parents have a high level of flexibility, we accept children all year-round. Children of all nationalities and religions are welcome at our child care facilities. Keeping our opening hours in mind, families can adjust their booked hours on a monthly basis.

As we are a private child care facility with recognition as a state-approved non-profit institution, the child care fees are determined by the City of Cologne based on an income table that they use. In addition, we welcome parents who join the MyDagis Booster Club to help defray the additional costs.

### The additional costs are for:

Additional educators per group, native English speakers, freshly cooked vegetarian food (breakfast, lunch, dinner, snack), extended opening hours, flexible booking times, changing additional offers (such as yoga, ballet, dancing, music, sports), animal-assisted pedagogy (Kita-dogs and -chickens), forest days, care products (such as diapers, toothpaste, toothbrushes, hygiene products), cultural program and excursions (e.g. museum, children's farm, theater), in-house library (German and English children's literature) and all group projects.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Through partnerships with other educational institutions and foundations, we attempt to optimize support for the children and offer them more opportunities to help shape their own development. For example, we are certified by "Tiny Tots' Science Corner", which supports young girls and boys in gaining an understanding and an interest in the natural sciences and enables them to act sensibly when it comes to nature and the environment.

We also participate in a project called "Fair Kita", which trains children to treat adults and each other fairly. The project helps children think globally and understand that we only have one world that we all share. In our use of fair trade products at MyDagis, the children and educators alike take on responsibility for fair and sustainable consumption habits.

In addition, we cooperate with educational institutions in the area (e.g. nearby schools and Kitas), the local public libraries, and professionals from educational and psychological institutions (e.g. speech therapists).

Through our weekly sports program, we also cooperate with the Sports Club Lövenich / Widdersdorf. In addition, our older children visit the senior center in Bocklemünd once per month.



Initiative zur Berufs- und Studienwahl



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