



# JOY IN MOTION PROGRAMME DOCUMENT

A national physical activity and well-being programme

**Contributing team:**

Ulla Soukainen, Senior Officer, Regional State Administrative Office for Southwestern Finland,  
Chair of the contributing team

Jukka Karvinen, Senior Advisor, Finnish Olympic Committee

Nina Korhonen, Expert, Joy in Motion programme

Anne Kuusisto, Expert, Families with children, Neuvokas perhe / Finnish Heart Association

Katariina Kämppi, Researcher, LIKES Research Centre for Physical Activity and Health

Noora Moilanen, Communications Coordinator, Joy in Motion programme

Arja Sääkslahti, Docent, University of Jyväskylä

Kirsi Tarkka, Senior Adviser, Finnish National Agency for Education

**JOY IN MOTION PROGRAMME DOCUMENT**

A physical activity and well-being programme for early childhood education and care.

LIKES Research Reports on Physical Activity and Health 368

ISSN: 0357-2498

ISBN: ISBN 978-951-790-498-8 (PDF)

ISBN 978-951-790-497-1 (BOUND)

Updated version. Original publication:

Joy in Motion Programme Document. Valo Publication Series no 1/2015

Layout: pirjousitalo-aura.com

Print: Grano Oy



## JOY IN MOTION PROGRAMME DOCUMENT

A national physical activity and well-being programme

# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1 Joy in Motion programme.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Building together .....	10
Sub-committee.....	11
Network of developers.....	11
Regional influence and municipal coordination.....	11
Early childhood education and care.....	12
Building an operating culture with a favourable attitude to physical activity.....	14
Equality and equity.....	15
<b>2 The operating culture of early childhood and care is     undergoing a transformation .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Physical activity is one of the rights of the child.....	18
Promotion of holistic well-being in the Act on early childhood education and care .....	18
Curricula direct the content of early childhood education and care and pre-primary education.....	20
Recommendations for physical activity: joy, play and doing together .....	22
<b>3 A good day for the child .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Every child is good enough just as he or she is.....	27
Participation of children central in early childhood education and care.....	27
Physical activity promoting well-being.....	28
<b>4 Monitoring and evaluation .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>5 The operating culture changes one step at a time .....</b>	<b>36</b>
The child's level.....	38
Unit level.....	39
Municipal level.....	40
National level .....	42
Towards the vision step by step.....	44
Sources.....	45

# INTRODUCTION

**JOY IN MOTION** is a nationwide physical activity and well-being programme aimed at early childhood education and care (ECEC). The programme was published in 2015 with the aim of enabling every child to be physically active and enjoy physical activity every day. The Joy in Motion programme is based on the new act on early childhood education and care<sup>1</sup>, the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care<sup>2</sup> and the recommendations for physical activity in early childhood<sup>3</sup>.

This programme document describes the objectives and the basic principles of the implementation of the Joy in Motion programme and envisages the future of the programme at different levels. It also examines the foundation of the programme, such as the laws and documents governing ECEC, and the scientific justifications for the physical activity of small children.

Research results have shown that child-oriented and playful physical activity supports the child's holistic growth and development. The results give us an indication of what kind of physical activity we adults can in our different roles use to support children's well-being.

Adults are responsible for supporting children's well-being, health and learning so that every child's right to be physically active and play every day is fulfilled. The pedagogical activity in ECEC is holistic and integrative. Children's physical activity should be made possible during every day in ECEC.



## Joy in Motion programme

The Joy in Motion programme provides early childhood educators with tools for increasing the physical activity of children and developing their own work on the basis of the local curriculum for early childhood education and care and the recommendations for physical activity in early childhood. The programme is realised in accordance with each unit's own situation, using the baby steps ideology and the model for continuing development.

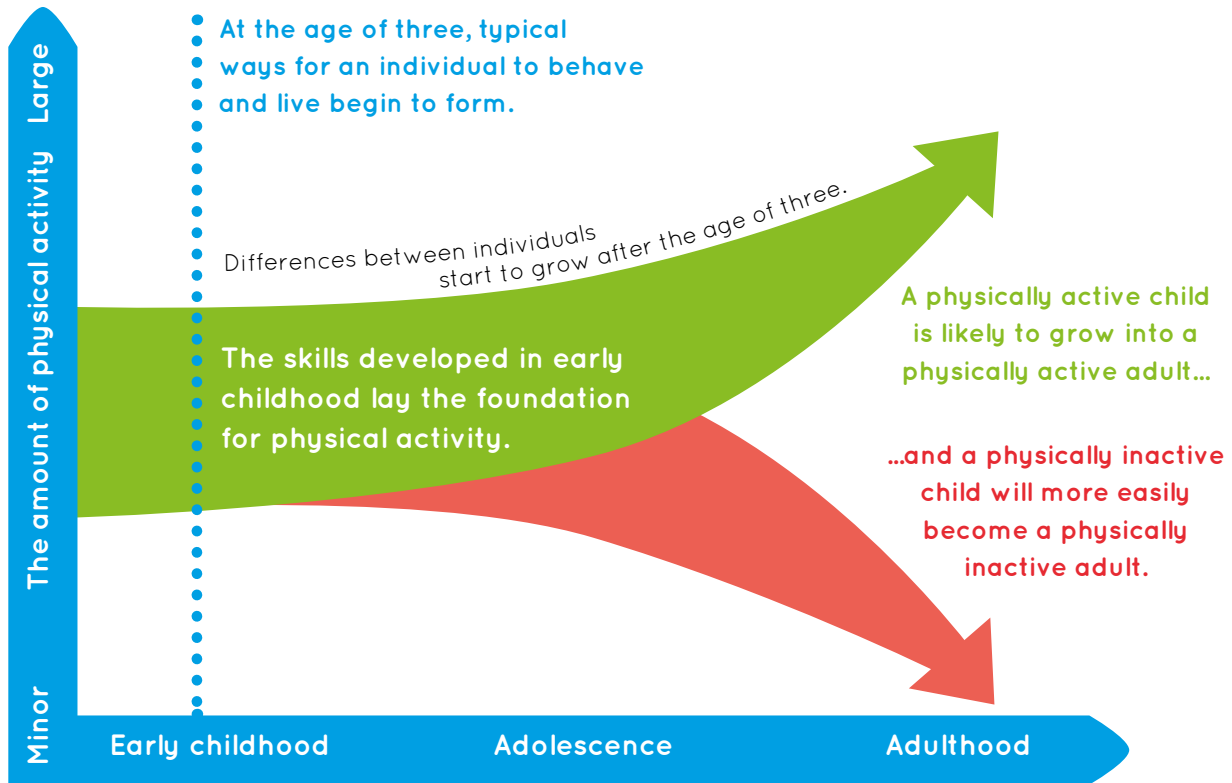
## EACH CHILD SHOULD HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE IN AND ENJOY DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The quantitative objective in the [JOY IN MOTION PROGRAMME](#) is that ECEC enables children to do at least two hours of physical activity every day, which is about two thirds of the recommended physical activity.

The Joy in Motion activities were first implemented as a trial by the Young Finn (Nuori Suomi) association in 2012. In 2015, the activities became a national programme in the Finnish Sports Confederation Valo. When the operation of Valo was discontinued, the programme was transferred to the Finnish Olympic Committee. In 2017, following a proposal made by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the programme was transferred from the Finnish Olympic Committee to the Finnish Schools on the Move programme. The Finnish Schools on the Move action programme<sup>1)</sup> includes the Joy in Motion programme in ECEC, the Schools of the Move programme in comprehensive schools and the Students on the Move programme in upper secondary and higher education. The strategic management of the Joy in Motion programme is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The programme is managed by the LIKES Research Centre for Physical Activity and Health and it is implemented and developed in wide cooperation across administrative sectors.

---

1) The funds for coordinating the programme as a whole are granted from the national lottery proceeds by the Division of Sport of the Ministry of Education and Culture.



**Figure 1** The importance of physical activity in early childhood in terms of an individual's entire lifespan.



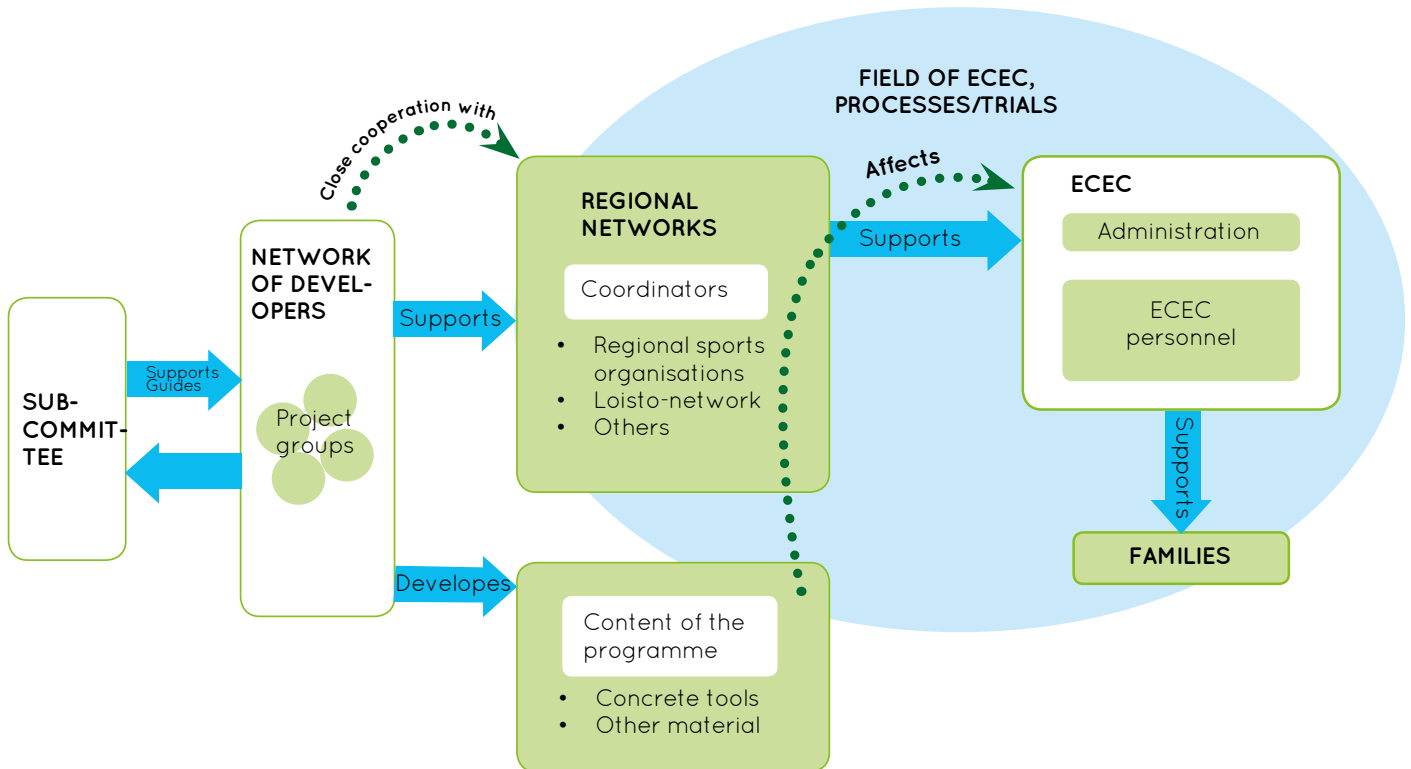
## THE JOY IN MOTION PROGRAMME

- Inspires new municipalities and units to join the Joy in Motion programme.
- Supports municipal actors and ECEC directors in developing an operating culture with a favourable attitude to physical activity in all ECEC units of the municipality.
- Supports the work of ECEC personnel in promoting physical activity among children.
- Supports families in building a physically active way of life.
- Further develops the programme in cooperation with a network of experts and partners.
- Implements the monitoring of the programme and supports self-evaluation in the units.



## BUILDING TOGETHER

The Joy in Motion programme is implemented in cooperation with a wide network of experts. The network-based operating method strengthens cooperation between national and regional actors and the support services available for realising a more active day in ECEC.



**Figure 2** The Joy in Motion programme is implemented at many levels and in a variety of networks.

## Sub-committee

After the Joy in Motion programme had been transferred to the Finnish Schools on the Move programme in 2017, a sub-committee on ECEC was added to the Finnish Schools on the Move key project. Before that, the sub-committee was the principal planning group of the programme. The task of the Joy in Motion sub-committee is to develop, support and prepare proposals for measures related to the Joy in Motion programme. The sub-committee also tries to find solutions to the problems and challenges observed in the implementation of the programme.

## Network of developers

The network of developers in the Joy in Motion programme has been in operation since 2012 and has specified its objectives and organisation over the years. Its work is long-term cooperation between different actors and is based on mutual trust. The network consists of ECEC experts and is an important link between those working in the field of ECEC and the Joy in Motion programme. The network of developers plays a significant role in the Joy in Motion programme, for example, by developing support material for the actors in the field of ECEC.

Mutual trust and commitment make it possible to carry out long-term development

that flexibly produces new innovations to meet the needs of all parties in the partnership. Every two years, the network of developers has been organised into project groups that support the objectives of the programme. The following project groups are in operation between 2019 and 2020: municipal coordination, monitoring and evaluation, support for ECEC personnel and influencing the parents.

## Regional influence and municipal coordination

The Joy in Motion programme is aimed at reaching municipal actors. At the municipal level, the decision to join the programme is made by the ECEC administration.

The Joy in Motion programme is building a national network of municipal coordinators responsible for physical activity in ECEC and linking the network with the municipal coordinators of the Schools on the Move programme. The aim is to enable municipal coordinators to work locally in cooperation also with other development networks such as Loisto, the development network of ECEC coordinated by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

Regional sports organisations promote the Joy in Motion programme locally. Their projects make it possible for the different

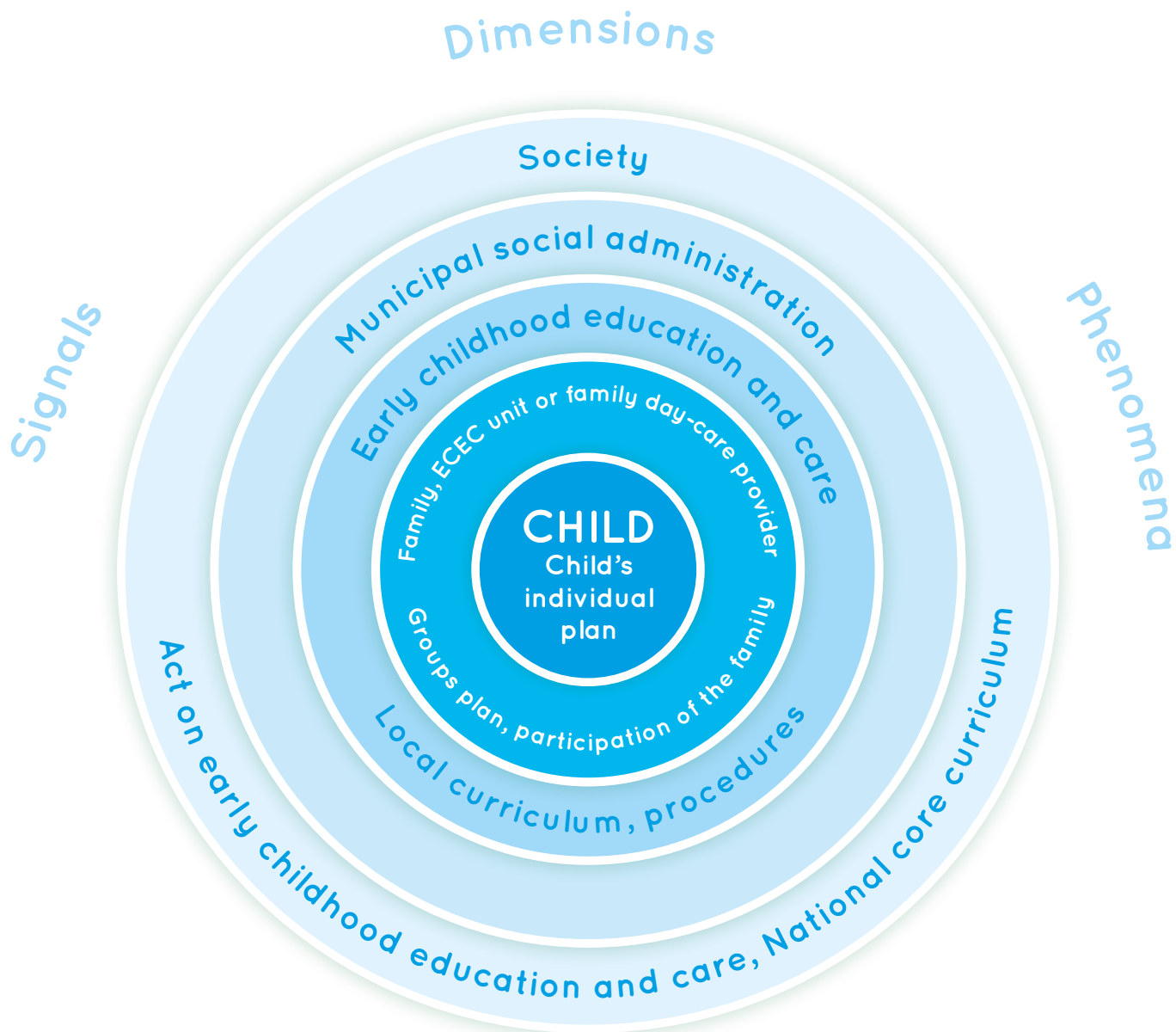
units to meet. The objective of regional sports organisations is also to promote and develop the work of regional and local ECEC networks and to offer regional training. With the expansion of the Joy in Motion programme, cooperation with partners that provide services for a more active day in early ECEC is further strengthened.

### **Early childhood education and care**

Municipal and private ECEC centres, family day-care providers and open early childhood education and care can all register for the Joy in Motion programme. Each ECEC unit realises the Joy in Motion programme in accordance with its own situation.

The units are provided with concrete tools for the evaluation, planning and implementation of their activities to support the development work. The available sets of material have been compiled on the Joy in Motion platform, for which the municipalities and units receive user IDs when they register for the programme. Separate handbooks are provided to ECEC personnel, administration and municipal actors to support the implementation of the programme. An idea guide for including children has been drawn up in cooperation with children.

TO INCREASE THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF CHILDREN, WE NEED A CHANGE, SMALL DEVELOPMENT STEPS, AT THE LEVELS OF ALL ACTORS IN DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS.



**Figure 3** The dimensions of the Joy in Motion Programme.<sup>4</sup>

## BUILDING AN OPERATING CULTURE WITH A FAVOURABLE ATTITUDE TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The development work in the Joy in Motion programme starts from the unit's needs and situation. The work is based on the baby steps ideology by trying different things quickly. The long-term objective is an operating culture with a favourable attitude to physical activity. The operating culture is shaped by the values, attitudes, principles and criteria that the work is based on. In other words, it is a question of integrating physical activity and well-being into everyday pedagogy.

THE DEVELOPMENT WORK HAS BEEN DIVIDED INTO THREE STAGES:

### 1 FAMILIARISE YOURSELF

In the FAMILIARISE YOURSELF stage, the development work starts by taking a small step. Units are encouraged to inspire and commit the entire work community to participate in the development work. A Baby steps form is available to support the definition, planning and evaluation of development steps. In the Familiarise yourself stage, the units also conduct a Self-evaluation survey for physical activity promotion in ECEC.

The self-evaluation helps the ECEC units to choose the areas in which they need development. If the self-evaluation is conducted once a year, the unit can use the results in its yearly planning and follow the development of its activities.

### 2 DEVELOP

The DEVELOP stage is based on the nine main points of the recommendations for physical activity in early childhood. Based on the self-evaluation and the discussions conducted in the unit, each unit selects its development areas from the nine main points in the recommendations. In addition to the recommendations for physical activity in early childhood, separate handbooks are available for ECEC educators, administration and municipal actors to support the development work. The Ideas section of the website also offers concrete tips for physical activity in all the development areas.

In the Develop stage, units are encouraged to share their ideas and good practices. The ideas can be commented on and improved for the unit's own use on the programme platform.



**FAMILIARISE  
YOURSELF**



**DEVELOP**



**MAKE VISIBLE**



## **3 MAKE VISIBLE**

In the MAKE VISIBLE stage, the unit reflects on the development work it has conducted and how its operating culture has changed.

The units report the measures they have taken and the changes that have taken place in their unit on the web platform. Best practices are compiled as support material for other units to use. Units are encouraged to make their own good work visible to parents and other ECEC units.

**The development and maintenance of an active operating culture continues in the units also after the Make visible stage.**

**For example, conducting an annual self-evaluation is a good practice.**

## **GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY**

The promotion of gender equality is paid attention to in all areas of the Joy in Motion programme. For example, the programme supports communication in which a realistic attitude is taken to the differences between boys and girls or men and women, as well as to their different needs. However, stereotypes are not reinforced unnecessarily.

The promotion of equity in the programme is based on what has been recorded about sports policy in the Act on the promotion of sports and physical activity, the Budget and the Act on early childhood education and care. Section 3 of the Act on early childhood education and care defines the objective of ECEC as giving all children equal opportunities for ECEC and promoting gender equality.

The following has been recorded in the National core curriculum for early childhood education: "Early childhood education and care promotes the democratic values of the Finnish society, such as equity, equality, and diversity. Children must have an opportunity to develop their skills and make choices independently of reasons associated with, for instance, gender, origin, cultural background or other reasons related to the person." This lays the foundation for the promotion of gender equality and equity in the Joy in Motion programme. Equal attention is also paid to children who need special support in ECEC.

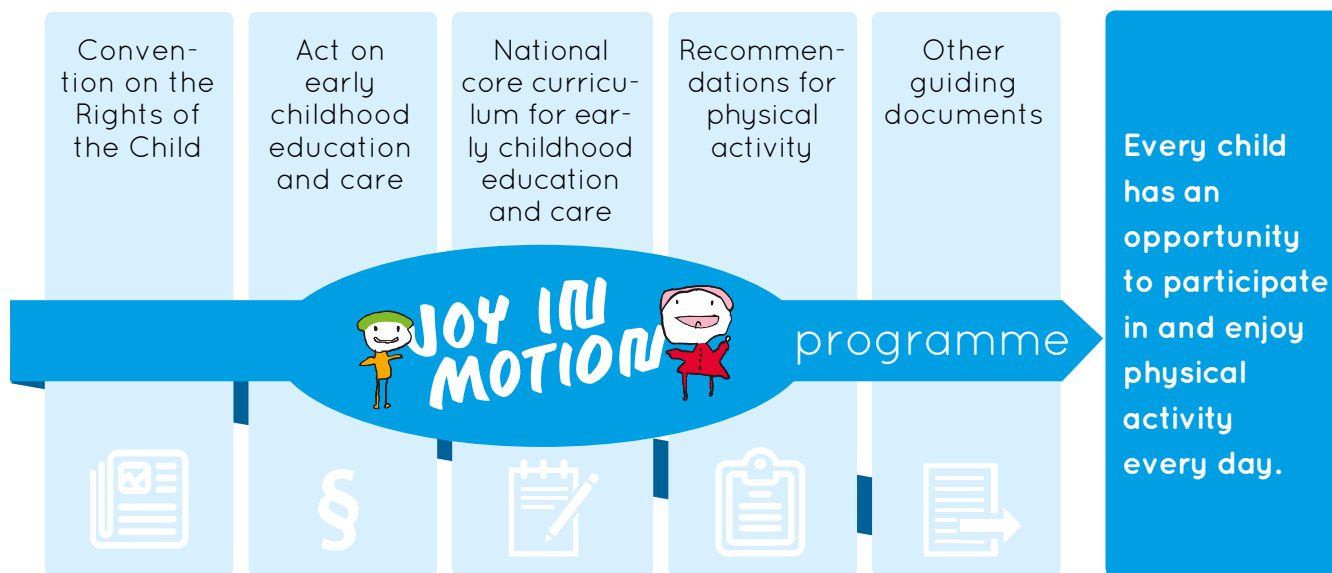


# 2

## The operating culture of ECEC is undergoing a transformation

The Joy in Motion programme is based on the Act on early childhood education and care and the other documents governing ECEC. The ECEC personnel is responsible for ensuring that the rights of children presented in the guiding documents and the objectives of ECEC are realised every day. The recommendations for physical activity and the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care were drawn up simultaneously and they are mutually supportive.





**Figure 4** The link between the guiding documents, the Joy in Motion programme and the recommendations for physical activity.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS ONE OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty that was adopted by the UN's General Assembly on 20 November 1989. In Finland, the convention entered into force as part of Finland's legislative system on 20 July 1991 and is binding for all the authorities in the central and local government and private bodies that perform official duties. The child's rights are adults' responsibilities. The statement "The child has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health" in Article 24 of the Convention obligates adults to ensure, among other things, that the child gets the opportunity to engage in enough physical activity.

The general principles in the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care include the primary consideration of the best interests of the child and the child's right to well-being, care and protection. The National core curriculum directs to consider the best interests of the child in all activities concerning the child and in all

situations in which decisions are made. Other central issues related to ECEC are the child's right to play, leisure time and participation, the child's right to influence matters concerning him or her, and every child's right to equality and non-discrimination. Children's rights and participation form the backbone of the activities in ECEC. By valuing and listening to the child, adults create well-being, which is a precondition for growth, learning and development.

## PROMOTION OF HOLISTIC WELL-BEING IN THE ACT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The new Act on early childhood education and care (varhaiskasvatuslaki 540/2018) entered into force on 1 September 2018. The act lays down provisions on the child's right to early childhood education and care and increasingly emphasises the primary consideration of the best interests of the child in all situations. There is a strong emphasis on the perspective of children's physical activity and well-being in the act.

THE CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO REST AND LEISURE, TO ENGAGE IN PLAY AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND TO PARTICIPATE IN ARTS AND CULTURAL LIFE.

(ARTICLE 31 OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD)

## ACCORDING TO THE ACT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE, THE OBJECTIVE OF ECEC IS TO:

1. Promote the holistic growth, development, health, and well-being of each child as determined by his or her age and development;
2. Support the child's prerequisites for learning, and promote his or her lifelong learning and implementation of equality in education;
3. Carry out versatile pedagogical activities based on play, physical activity, arts and cultural heritage and enable positive learning experiences;
4. Ensure that the children's ECEC environment promotes development and learning and is healthy and safe;
5. Safeguard an approach that respects children and stable interaction relationships between the children and the ECEC personnel;
6. Provide all children with equal opportunities for ECEC, promote equity and gender equality as well as help the children develop their capacity to understand and respect the general cultural heritage and each child's linguistic, cultural, religious, and ideological background;
7. Recognise the child's need for individual support and provide him or her with appropriate support in ECEC if the need arises, in cross-sectoral cooperation when necessary;
8. Develop the child's teamwork and interaction skills, promote the child's ability to act in a peer group as well as guide him or her towards acting responsibly and sustainably, respecting other people and becoming a member of society;
9. Ensure that the children get an opportunity to participate and influence matters concerning them;
10. Work together with the child as well as the child's parent or other guardian to promote the child's balanced development and holistic well-being as well as to support the parent or other guardian in educating the child.

## CURRICULA DIRECT THE CONTENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE AND PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

The National core curriculum for early childhood education and care (2018) is a national norm based on the Act on early childhood education and care. It obligates all ECEC providers. The National core curriculum for pre-primary education<sup>5</sup> has already been a norm since 2000. Like the other themes, children's physical activity and guidance for a physically active lifestyle are discussed throughout the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care.

The theme is examined from the following points of view:

- underlying values
- definition of the conception of learning
- transversal competences
- development of the operating culture
- learning environments and working methods
- planning and implementation of pedagogical activity.

The National core curriculum for early childhood education directs the entire work community to evaluate and develop its operating culture. Our understanding of

children, childhood, learning and the objectives of education influence our attitude to children and how we organise education practices. The National core curriculum obligates to make the values and attitudes governing the activities visible. Doing things the way they have always been done is not enough. Instead, the activities should be based on pedagogical justifications. This means, for example, that the factors limiting and enabling children's physical activity are identified in ECEC. Interesting, goal-oriented and suitably challenging activities inspire children to learn more. Each child is entitled to gain experiences of success and joy in his or her actions and of himself or herself.

The objectives of transversal competences pave the way for the future. The way we act with children today contributes to what kind of abilities and skills they gain for the future. The learning area of "I grow, move and develop" includes objectives related to physical activity, food education, health and safety. Learning areas are combined diversely in the activities throughout the day. For example, the physical activity and motor skills of children can be promoted in many ways through the planning of the learning environments.



### UNDERLYING VALUES

“Children have the right to play, learn by playing and experience joy of learning, and build their views of themselves, their identity, and the world from their personal starting points. The task of ECEC is to guide children to a lifestyle that promotes health, well-being and physical activity and inspires children to engage in and enjoy diverse physical activity.”



### OPERATING CULTURE

“Learning environments are planned and constructed together with the children. They shall support children’s natural curiosity and desire to learn as well as guide them to play and be physically active.”



### CONCEPTION OF LEARNING

“The conception of learning is based on a view of the child’s active agency. Learning is holistic and occurs everywhere. It combines knowledge, skills, actions, emotions, sensory perceptions, bodily experiences, language and thinking.”



### TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES

“Engaging in sufficient, daily physical activity supports children’s thinking and learning.”



### LEARNING AREAS

“Physical education shall be regular, child-oriented, diverse and goal-oriented. Sufficient physical activity is important for the child’s healthy growth, development, learning and well-being.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: JOY, PLAY AND DOING TOGETHER

The Recommendations for physical activity in early childhood<sup>3</sup> are based on the rights of the child and on the latest research data on what kind of physical activity supports the child's growth, development and well-being. According to the recommendations, children under school age should engage in physical activity for at least three hours a day.

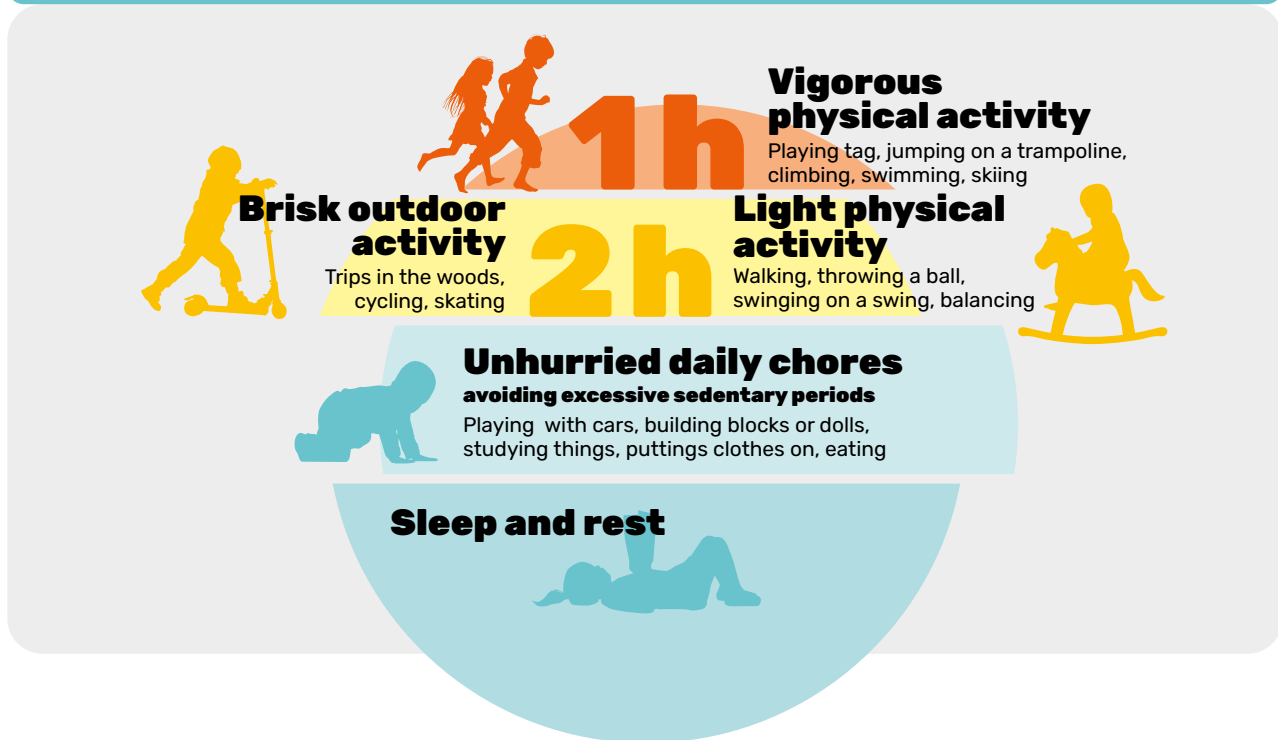
### The recommended activity is diverse and of varying levels of physical strain:

- One hour of brisk physical activity that makes the respiratory and circulatory system work harder.
- Two hours of outdoor activities and light physical activity that exercises balance and fine motor skills.



## Activity is invigorating

At least three hours of physical activity per day



**Figure 5** The recommended physical activity consists of different everyday activities of different levels of physical strain in the course of the day.<sup>3</sup>

It is natural for children to move and be active and learn things functionally in different environments, in all seasons and sometimes also by testing inspiring equipment. Adults should not through their own actions require children to be inactive for long periods of time but should break such periods down by providing meaningful ways of physical activity. Listening to the child and taking into consideration the child's wishes strengthens the child's participation and makes it easier for the child to find a meaning for his or her activities. Children learn by doing. This way

physical activity becomes a natural and integral part of the child's day.

The family has a significant role in enabling the child to adopt a physically active lifestyle. Parents should encourage and with their own example inspire the child to be active and spend time outdoors. Most importantly, the family should engage in physical activity together. However, not only the family, but all of us play an important role in fulfilling the recommendations.





# Physical activity in early childhood education and care

Every child's right



Figure 6 Physical activity is a natural part of the child's day in ECEC.



3

## A good day for the child

The child has the right to play and be physically active every day. Only the best is good enough for the child.

**A SMALL CHILD** is living the most important time in his or her life. The child's good experiences here and now are valuable and carry the child far into the future. Every child should have an opportunity to enjoy daily physical activity. Playing and being physically active are natural ways for the child to behave and learning takes place during the positive emotions. Diverse experiences should be made possible for every child according to the child's development level and age. The joy of learning is realised in an encouraging environment that stimulates the child's imagination and challenges the child to act.

## EVERY CHILD IS GOOD ENOUGH JUST AS HE OR SHE IS

Curiosity, willingness to learn, increasing independence and activity are an integral part of childhood. The differences between individual children and their temperaments affect the ways they behave and learn, and a good ECEC environment supports the growth and development of all children. A positive and encouraging environment creates a safe atmosphere in which the child's skills can develop and the child enjoys learning. The important task of the adult is to notice what the child has succeeded in and learned and highlight the child's strengths.

Some children need more encouragement to support their physical activity than children who are naturally very active and sporty. If the child needs support, it is especially important to ensure that he or she gains

experiences of participation and success. Different support measures, such as activities in small groups, the use of images supporting communication and structure, and the presence of an adult, are important ways of safeguarding learning and participation for a child that needs support. Every child has the right to feel accepted and feel that he or she is an important member of the group.

When children play, they practice skills that they will need later in their life. Playing provides emotional experiences and builds important social skills that lay the foundation for interaction skills and an understanding of oneself as an active agent. Children's strengths, competence and learning should be highlighted every day.

## PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN CENTRAL IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

In the documents governing ECEC, the conception of the child is based on the participation of children. The child is seen as an active, independent, sociable, willing to learn and capable of acquiring information, as a party in interaction and as a builder of his or her own view of the world. The child's experiences and opinions are respected and the child is included in the planning, building and evaluation of education activities and environments.

It is important to emphasise the intrinsic value of childhood, cherish childhood and guide the child in growing as a person. The

child has the right to be seen, heard, taken into consideration and understood in accordance with his or her age and development level, and both as a unique and valuable individual and as a member of the group.

Ensuring that the child's rights and participation are realised is the responsibility of the educator. Participation is realised when children are included in the planning and implementation of the activities. This enables them to feel that their opinions matter and are taken into consideration. Above all, it is a question of a sense of community and full membership in the community. The child's participation does not reduce the responsibility of the adult. The adult is responsible for the pedagogical quality. It is the adult's responsibility to organise an inspiring and activating operating and learning environment in which children have the opportunity to take initiative and choose, for example, equipment and facilities that inspire them to be physically active.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROMOTING WELL-BEING

Physical activity plays an important role in building the child's well-being. According to the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), an individual's well-being consists of health, material well-being and the perceived quality of life.

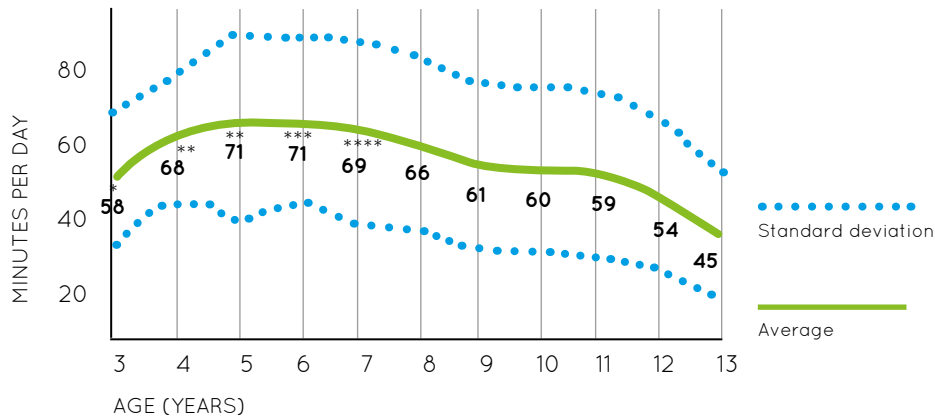
### **Towards health**

The child's health is based on his or her genetic inheritance, which forms the limits for how environmental factors and lifestyle choices affect the child's physical growth and physical, mental and socio-emotional development. To grow and develop, the child requires stimuli, challenges, interaction and small problems to solve. The child's own experience of health is what matters, not whether the child has a chronic illness or a disadvantage. Every child can feel healthy, and adults should aim at that through their actions and words.

Overweight, which is spreading like an epidemic, and the gradually developing illnesses related to it are the most serious threat to children's health today. Between 10 and 20 percent of Finnish children between 5 and 8 years of age are overweight<sup>6</sup>. The recommended amount of daily physical activity is by far the best way to prevent the accumulation of overweight<sup>7</sup>.

### **Physical activity is necessary for the human body**

A growing child needs daily physical activity for normal physical growth and development because the respiratory and circulatory systems, muscles, tendons and bones need the strain and stimulation caused by physical activity. Children's physical activity is realised in everyday activities in different environments throughout the year.



The results are based on the research materials collected with an actigraphy device.

\* Soini et al. 2012

\*\* Mehtälä et al. (Suomalaisten ja ... project, unpublished)

\*\*\* Määttä et al. (DAGIS-project, unpublished)

\*\*\*\* Tammelin et al. 2013

**Figure 7** Objective measurement of the amount of brisk physical activity of Finnish children.

A physically active child who gets diverse exercise develops physical properties such as resilience, strength, speed and suppleness. These properties help the child cope with different everyday challenges that require a good functional capacity. Children who fulfil the recommendations for physical activity (min. 3 hours per day) account for between 10 and 20 per cent of Finnish children under school age<sup>3</sup>. Children's

physical activity can be increased by sticking with daily outdoor sessions in all seasons, by allowing physical play and games in diverse and varying terrains, by making trips to different environments, by encouraging children to shared active play and games, by providing interesting equipment for them and by giving children time and a model – by being active together with them.

### **Motor skills lay the foundation**

The child's possibilities to be physically active are based on the level of the child's motor skills. To be able to move independently from one place to another the child needs to be able to crawl, move on hands and knees, climb, walk, run and jump. In addition, the ability to throw, catch, hit and kick a ball is often required in children's play and games. Motor skills develop in an interaction of the muscular and nervous system, sensory functions and physical properties. A diverse, varying environment in which children can try new things, practice and sometimes fail is essential for their development. Equipment inspires children to different play and shared games. Today, children's level of performance in skills that require balance and good motor coordination is impaired. There are also significant differences between boys and girls<sup>11,8</sup>. To be able to stop the decline in motor skills and the potential polarisation development, adults should make sure that children spend time outdoors every day, offer opportunities for physical activity in diverse terrains and encourage all children to participate in physically active shared play and games.

### **Physical activity helps to learn**

Learning motor skills is a result of a demanding and complicated development process. Hence

all volitional movement improves the cooperation between different bodily processes. For example, such cooperation between the right and the left side of the brain or between the eyes and the hands also strengthens the child's general learning abilities. These factors are also related to learning to read, write and count and through them to more demanding academic skills<sup>6</sup>.

Children who are physically active and have good motor skills have slightly better cognitive skills and perform slightly better at school than children who are less active<sup>7</sup>. We also know that between 5 and 6 percent of children have problems in learning motor skills. Because other problems related to mental and social well-being are also typically related to difficulties in learning motor skills, attention should be paid to the physical activity of all children starting from ECEC<sup>8</sup>.

### **Physical activity builds self-esteem**

A physically active child gains a lot of experiences of what he or she is able to do<sup>9</sup>. All these encouraging experiences build the child's physical self-image, which is one of the key factors modifying self-esteem. Positive experiences encourage the child to look for new challenges and to expand the range of experiences. The diverse experiences provided by physical activity inspire the child

---

<sup>11)</sup> Girls are better than boys in physical literacy and boys better than girls in ball handling skills.

to set goals and aim at gaining new skills. Positive spirals of development such as this boost self-esteem. Good self-esteem is a desirable foundation for all areas of development. Children under school age generally have a positive view of their own skills<sup>9</sup>, which is an excellent starting point for supporting the child's growth and development towards reaching his or her personal potential. By listening to children, adults can find learning situations that are suitable for the development level of each child and support children in finding their strengths.

### **Physical education supports the development of emotional and social skills**

Children immerse themselves and their whole personality in physical activity, which for them is physically active play and games. Because the whole personality is involved, all of the emotions evoked by the activity are an integral part of physical activity. In shared games and play, children learn to identify their emotions and gradually learn to regulate them, mastering shared games and play better and better as a result. Children's emotional and social skills develop best when they play with their peers, but guidance from adults is also needed in these situations.

When help is provided by adults, physically active play and games are one of the most natural ways to support children's holistic development in physical education.

### **Too much sedentary time is harmful**

Moving around and playing is typical of children – it is a habit that also the recommendations for physical activity in early childhood are based on. From an adult's point of view, the child moves from one place to another and changes his or her position and the intensity of the activity very rapidly. However, this is natural for the child and typical especially in early childhood. It is important that adults respect this characteristic of children and ensure that they do not through their own actions create sedentary periods that are too long. The habit of offering the child screen time (tablet, mobile phone, television, etc.) as the only form of entertainment gradually leads to prolonged sedentary periods. There may be a risk that the amount of daily physical activity declines and the other related risk factors detrimental to health gradually start to accumulate.

According to diaries kept by parents, 61 per cent of children aged between 3 and 6 accumulate no more than two hours of screen time per day<sup>10</sup>. According to studies based on surveys on parents, children would seem to have even less screen time. This means that adults tend to underestimate children's screen time<sup>11</sup>. The holistic well-being of children can be supported by being aware of the challenges related to estimating the use of time and by actively offering alternative ways of spending time.



# 4

## Monitoring and evaluation

The impacts of the Joy in Motion programme can be evaluated at different levels. More monitoring data on the amount and quality of the physical activity of small children is required at a national level.



## THE IMPACTS OF THE JOY IN MOTION PROGRAMME CAN BE EVALUATED AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

### EXPANSION OF THE PROGRAMME

- Number of registered municipalities
- Number of registered ECEC units (ECEC centres, family day-care providers)

### CHANGE IN THE OPERATING CULTURE

- Quality of the development work in the units
- The development of the preconditions for physical activity: changes in the operating practices of educators and in the conditions for physical activity (indoor and outdoor facilities, equipment)

### AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Movement and motor skills of small children  
= physical activity

### EXPANSION OF THE PROGRAMME

The municipality or an ECEC unit in the municipality can register for the Joy in Motion programme. The number of ECEC units registered for the Joy in Motion programme is compared with the number of ECEC units in the whole country (Varda).

## CHANGE IN THE OPERATING CULTURE

The Joy in Motion self-evaluation survey is a tool available for the participating units to use for planning and evaluating their activities. By using the tool, it is possible to find out the current state of the physically active operating culture in the ECEC unit and based on that select the areas requiring development. The tool is available on the programme website.

**The Joy in Motion self-evaluation survey has been divided into eight sections:**

1. Implementation of the programme
2. Increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary time
3. Personnel participation, competence and well-being at work
4. Child participation
5. Indoor and outdoor facilities of the unit
6. Sports equipment of the unit
7. Action-based methods and development of motor skills
8. Cooperation to promote the physical activity of children

Each section consists of several statements in which the current state of the ECEC unit is assessed on a scale of 0 to 4 (0=is not realised at all, 4=fully realised). It is recommended that the assessment is completed as group work so that different points of view are taken into account.

A unit that has completed the self-evaluation survey receives a summary of its responses. If the assessment is conducted once a year, the unit can use the results in its yearly planning and follow the development of its activities.

The self-evaluation survey provides a picture of the preconditions for physical activity in ECEC units in the whole country. This information helps to structure the progress of the programme in line with the objectives. The results of the Joy in Motion self-evaluation survey can be viewed in a virtual database (Virveli) nationally and by the area of the Regional State Administrative Agency.

## AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The physical activity of small children describes the amount and quality of their movement. Estimating the amount and quality poses challenges for the evaluation carried out in the Joy in Motion programme. The educators in ECEC units play a key role in making children's diverse physical activity a natural part of their day in ECEC. Educators also make sure that children's motor skills are suitably challenged and they have opportunities to be physically active in inspiring environments. The actions of the educators are therefore crucial regarding whether children have the opportunity to use equipment that encourages them to be physically active both indoors and outdoors in all seasons.

Diverse indicators at different levels are required for assessing the physical activity of small children. At the process level, some fragmented information compiled from different information gathering systems is already available, but so far there is no systematic monitoring data at the national level. The best way to form an overall picture of the situation is to measure the amount of children's physical activity through a combination of methods (surveys, observations and objective indicators), but the gathering of information is still insufficient. Developing the monitoring of children of ECEC age to determine the amount and quality of their physical activity shows which measures in ECEC contribute most to achieving the objective (two hours during the day in ECEC).



## The operating culture changes step by step

# 5

The objective of the Joy in Motion programme is to ensure that all children have the right to daily play and physical activity. For this to happen, an operating culture with a favourable attitude to physical activity is required in every ECEC unit. At the municipal level, it is important to ensure that physical activity is recorded in strategies and documents that steer well-being. At the national level, it is important to recognise the importance of physical activity of small children and support its realisation.

## CHILD LEVEL

- Every child has the opportunity to engage in and enjoy diverse physical activity every day.
- The recommendations for physical activity in early childhood are realised for every child.

- Attention is paid to child participation in the planning, realisation and evaluation of physical activity.
- Child grows, develops and learns through play and physical activity.
- Physical activity has been recorded in the child's individual early childhood education and care plan.

## UNIT LEVEL

- Physical activity and well-being have been recorded in the unit's curriculum for early childhood education and care and in the curricula specific to the groups.
- One of the focuses of pedagogical management is physical activity and well-being of children.
- The education personnel are committed to developing an operating environment that inspires

- physical activity and ensuring that children do enough daily physical activity and get diverse physical education.
- The operating culture of ECEC favours physical activity and there is little sedentary time during the day.
- The education personnel are committed to actively discussing the importance of children's physical activity for their well-being, growth and development with the parents.

## MUNICIPAL LEVEL

- Physical activity and well-being have been recorded in the municipality's strategies and central plans governing well-being.
- The implementation of the physical activity and well-being programme has been recorded in local curricula.
- It is possible for early childhood educators to receive in-service training for how they can support children's holistic development with physical activity.

- There is extensive cooperation between different municipal sectors and services in the promotion of physical activity and well-being both within the municipality and in the cooperation networks that have been created across municipal boundaries.
- The recommendations for physical activity in early childhood are realised in every unit.
- Education personnel is committed to increasing their own development skills.
- The promotion of physical activity in ECEC is coordinated in the municipality.

## NATIONAL LEVEL

- Physical activity and well-being of small children is recorded in guiding documents, the key acts and decrees, the government programme and the strategies of the ministries.

- The education of ECEC personnel is of a high standard and consistent quality everywhere in Finland.

**Figure 8** Measures for the implementation of the objectives.

## CHILD LEVEL

The experience of being included increases and the operating environment develops when children's ideas are heard and taken into consideration in the planning of the activities. An encouraging atmosphere is of primary importance both in ECEC and at home. Efforts are made to discuss the child's physical activity during the daily interaction with the families and families are also encouraged to engage in diverse physical activity.

The physical activity of the child is recorded in the child's individual early childhood education and care plan. An active lifestyle adopted in childhood follows the person throughout life. It also has far-reaching impacts on society as it creates savings and increases health and well-being.



## UNIT LEVEL

At the level of the unit, it is important that the head of the unit maintains the structures in the unit. In practice, this means that the physical activity coordinator is allowed time for cooperation in the municipal network and promotion of physical activity at the level of the unit in the duty rota. The coordination of the Joy in Motion self-evaluation survey is one example of this. The head of the unit leads the pedagogy of the unit, at the same time enabling the development of the operating culture. Briefings and meetings between groups of different compositions are good forums for planning how physical activity can be increased.

The competence of the personnel is a resource for ECEC. The training plan for the unit is drawn up according to need so that the training needs related to physical activity can also be taken into account in the plan. The well-being of personnel increases coping at work, which directly benefits children's well-being. The norms of the work community play an important role

in whether the operating culture encourages both the adults and the children to be more active.

Working with children is an excellent way to implement active daily routines in which adults can with their example make children more active.

The goal is that children engage in physical activity for two hours during their day in ECEC. This is two thirds of the recommended amount of physical activity. Fulfilling the recommendation also requires physical activity outside the day in ECEC, so interaction and discussions with the guardians and families are of primary importance. Some families may need help in supporting the child's motor skills or ideas for how they can continue the physically active day with the child at home. When the child's individual plan is drawn up, matters related to physical activity should be brought up (see Figure 9).

# MUNICIPAL LEVEL

At the municipal level, cooperation with the neighbouring municipalities and nationally on the one hand and cooperation that benefits the core competence of each operator on the other are emphasised. Central partners include the education, social services, health, culture, technical and sports departments, individual service providers, parishes and non-governmental organisations, educational institutions and the centres of expertise in the social sector.

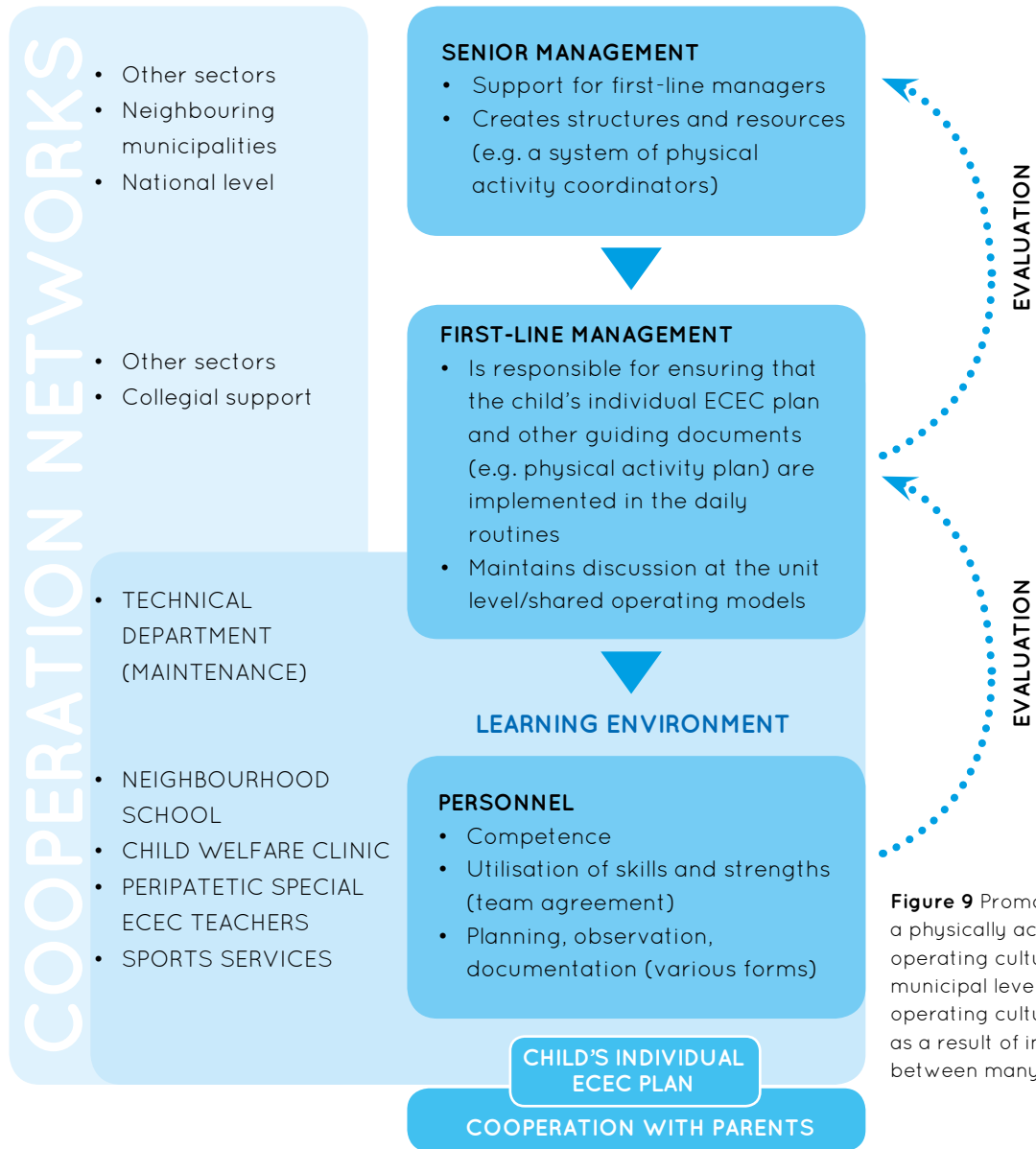
At the municipal level, the task of the senior management is to create good preconditions for the implementation of the Act on early childhood education and care and the local curriculum for early childhood education and care. The municipality will specify the strategic policies for ECEC with different guiding documents. The matters recorded in the guiding documents are in line with the local council, the municipal committee and the strategy of the sector. The perspective of

physical activity and well-being should also be included in these municipal guidelines.

Figure 9 describes the municipal structures for the implementation of the Joy in Motion programme. Clear structures help to introduce the agreed policies in practice. The implementation of the programme in the municipality requires cooperation between different actors. It is also important for municipalities to create and maintain a network in which the structures related to the implementation of the programme are discussed. The municipal network serves as a kind of steering group ensuring that physical activity is included in different guiding documents, training plans and processes that are important regarding the evaluation of the activities. The coordinator appointed by the municipality is responsible for the coordination of the cooperation and the local network and participates in the work of regional networks and in national events.



## THE LEVELS OF A PHYSICALLY ACTIVE OPERATING CULTURE IN THE MUNICIPALITY



**Figure 9** Promotion of a physically active operating culture at the municipal level. The operating culture is built as a result of interaction between many levels.

# NATIONAL LEVEL

Well-being and physical activity in early childhood has been successfully paid attention to in the Act on early childhood education and care, the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care and the National core curriculum for pre-primary education. These documents laying down the norms in ECEC obligate to ensure daily physical activity and diverse physical education in accordance with the recommendations. The establishment of a physically active operating culture can be supported at a national level for example by developing cooperation, directing funding to ECEC providers and increasing the competence of ECEC personnel.

## Cooperation

The Joy in Motion programme has been implemented in cooperation with an extensive network from the beginning. The operation of national, regional and municipal networks is an important foundation for the work carried out in the units. As the programme expands, the importance of networks and partners will be increasingly emphasised. It is important to intensify cooperation with services such as child and family services.

## Report on sports policy

The first report on sports policy in Finland was published in 2018<sup>12</sup>. The report is based on a scientific research review and the results of participatory information gathering, on the basis of which measures have been recommended to central government. For example, the report states that because the problems caused by a high level of physical inactivity (i.e. lack of physical activity) already start to emerge before the age of seven, a comprehensive action plan aimed at children under the age of seven is required in Finland.

## The report on sports policy states that

- Physical activity should be a part of the daily activities of the ECEC unit of every child.
- The facilities and playgrounds of ECEC centres should be developed so that they promote the implementation of physically active ECEC.
- Good networks and operating practices for increasing physical activity in ECEC have been created in the Joy in Motion programme. They can be used as a basis for the activities in the programme supporting physical activity in ECEC (Liikkuva varhaiskasvatus).

- A funding of EUR 4 million for a period of three years between 2020 and 2022 is required to implement the new programme and spread the operating practice to all municipalities.

### **Increasing the competence of the personnel**

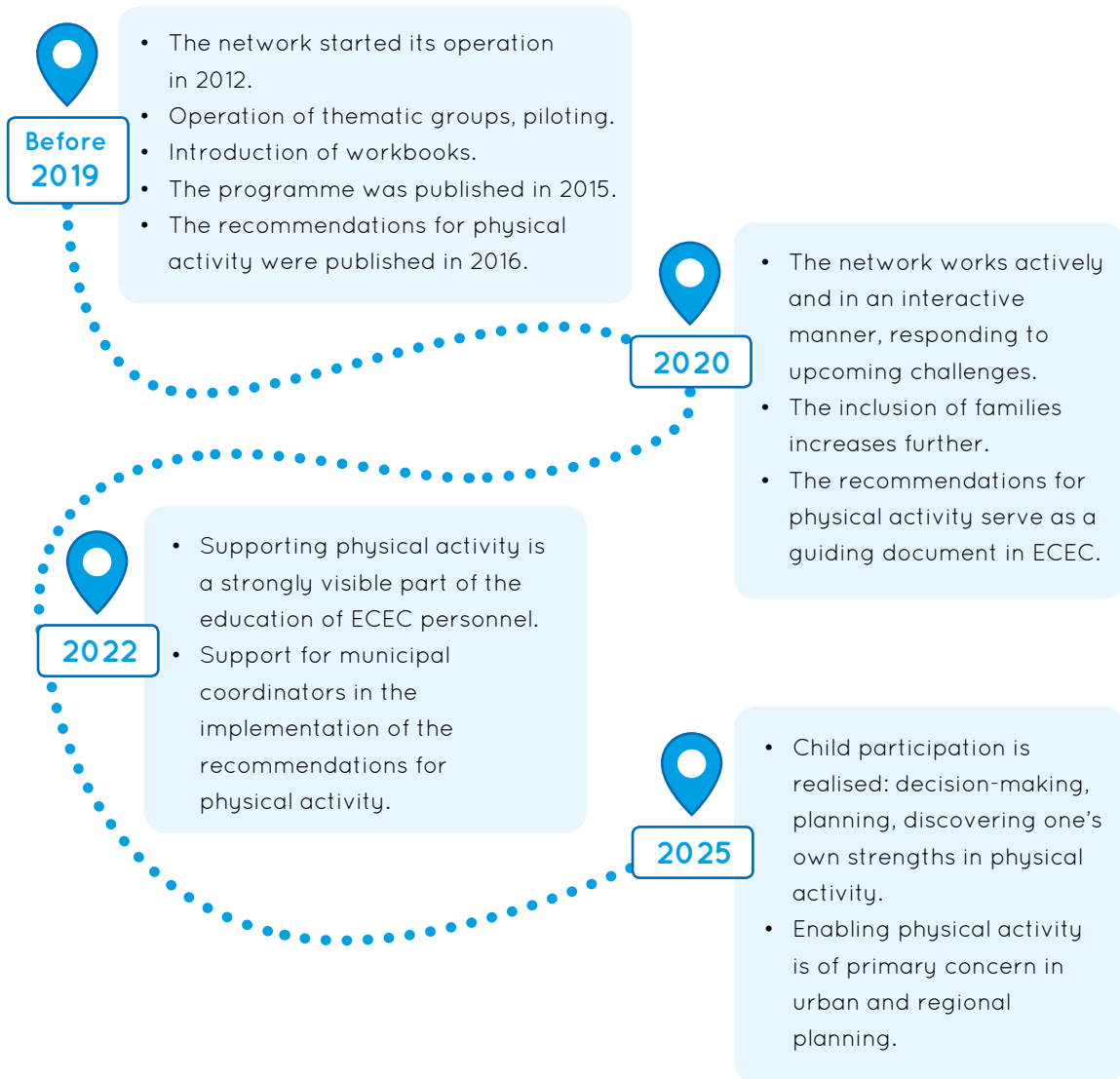
Education providers (such as universities, universities of applied sciences and educational institutions in upper secondary education) exert extensive autonomy in terms of modifying the content of their education. It is therefore possible to formally qualify for the same tasks in ECEC at very different levels of competence.

FINHEEC's final report on the investigation and evaluation of the content of degree programmes<sup>13</sup> recommended that, to ensure consistent quality, education providers should draw up better descriptions of the content of the curricula and shared definitions of the necessary areas of knowledge and competence.

ECEC personnel should be given a sufficient knowledge and competence base for supporting the child's holistic development in diverse ways. Currently, there is lack of competence above all in supporting children's physical activity and motor skills.



# Towards the vision step by step



## SOURCES

1. Act on early childhood education and care 540/2018.
2. Finnish National Agency for Education. National core curriculum for early childhood education and care 2018. Regulations and guidelines 2018:3a. Finnish National Agency for Education: Helsinki.
3. Recommendations for physical activity in early childhood 2016. Joy, play and doing together. Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2016:35.
4. Adapted from: Bronfenbrenner, U. 1979. *The Ecology of Human Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press and Bronfenbrenner, U. 1989. *Ecological systems theory*. *Annals of Child Development: A Research Annual: Six theories of child development. Revised formulation and current issues*. JAI Press inc.
5. Finnish National Agency for Education. National core curriculum for pre-primary education 2014. Regulations and guidelines 2016:1. Finnish National Agency for Education: Helsinki.
6. Haapala, E.A., Pulakka, A., Haapala, H.L. & Lakka, T.A. 2016. Fyysisen aktiivisuuden ja fyysisen passiivisuuden yhteydet terveyteen ja hyvinvointiin lapsilla. In: *Tieteelliset perusteet varhaisvuosien fyysisen aktiivisuuden suosituksille 2016*. ('Links of physical activity and physical inactivity with health and well-being of children. In: Scientific justification for the recommendations for physical activity in early childhood 2016'). Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture 2016:22,12-21.
7. Iivonen, S., Laukkanen, A., Haapala, E. & Reunamo, J. Motoristen taitojen kehitys ('The development of motor skills'). In: *Tieteelliset perusteet varhaisvuosien fyysisen aktiivisuuden suosituksille 2016*. Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture 2016:22, 32-27.
8. Asunta, P., Viholainen, H., Ahonen, T., Rintala, P. & Cantell, M. Motorisen oppimisen vaikeudet ('Difficulties in learning motor skills'). In: *Tieteelliset perusteet varhaisvuosien fyysisen aktiivisuuden suosituksille 2016*. Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture 2016:22, 38-43.
9. Niemistö, D., Barnett, L.M., Cantell, M., Finni, T., Korhonen, E. & Sääkslahti, A. 2019. Socioecological correlates of perceived motor competence in 5 to 7-year-old Finnish children. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sms.13389>
10. Finland's report card 2018. Physical activity for children and youth. LIKES Research Reports on Physical Activity and Health 350. LIKES Research Centre for Physical Activity and Health.
11. Le blanc, A., Broyles, S., Chaput, J.-P., Leduc, G., Boyer, C., Borghese, M. & Tremblay, M. 2015. Correlates of objectively measured sedentary time and self-reported screen time in Canadian children. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity* 12: 38. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-015-0197-1>
12. Government of Finland. 2018. Valtioneuvoston liikuntapoliittinen selonteko liikuntapoliitiikasta ('Government's report on sports policy').

13. Karila, K., Harju-Luukkainen, H., Juntunen, A., Kainulainen, S., Kaulio-Kuikka, K., Mattila, V., Rantala, K., Ropponen, M., Rouhiainen-Valo, T., Sirén-Aura, M., Goman, J., Mustonen, K. & Smeds-Nylund, A.-S. 2013. Varhaiskasvatuksen koulutus Suomessa. Arviointi koulutuksen tilasta ja kehittämistarpeista ('Education and training in early childhood education in Finland – evaluation of current situation and development needs', abstract in English). Publications of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council FINHEEC 7:2013.

## OTHER SOURCES

Berg, P. & Piirtola, M. 2014. Lasten ja nuorten liikuntatutkimus Suomessa – tutkimuskatsaus 2000–2012 ('Research in physical activity of children and young people in Finland – research review 2000-2012'). Studies and reports of the National Sports Council no 10.

Itkonen, H., Lehtonen, K. & Aarresola, O. (eds.) Tutkimuskatsaus liikuntapoliittisen selonteon tausta-aineistoksi ('Research review as background material for the report on sports policy'). Publications of the National Sports Council 2018:6.

Mehtälä, A. Tiedonanto tutkimusprojektista suomalaisten ja hollantilaisten 2–6-vuotiaiden lasten liikunta-aktiivisuus kotona ja päiväkodissa ('Announcement regarding the research project Physical activity of Finnish and Dutch children aged 2-6 at home and in day-care centres). Professor Marita Poskiparta, leader of the research project. University of Jyväskylä.

Määttä, S. Announcement regarding the DAGIS research project. Eva Roos, Principal Investigator. Folkhälsän research centre.

Soini, A. 2015. Always on the move? Measured physical activity of 3-year-old children. Studies in Sport, Physical Education and Health 216. University of Jyväskylä.

Tammelin, T., Laine, K. & Turpeinen, S. (eds.) 2013. Oppilaiden fyysinen aktiivisuus ('Physical activity of school-aged children', abstract in English). LIKES Research Reports on Physical Activity and Health 272. LIKES Research Centre for Physical Activity and Health.





The Joy in Motion programme has been planned and developed to create a child-oriented operating culture with a favourable attitude to physical activity in ECEC. It is time for us to take on the challenge posed by inactivity and increase the physical activity of children. Increasing children's well-being and physical activity and encouraging them to adopt a physically active lifestyle requires new everyday operating practices in early childhood education and care.

The Joy in Motion programme is realised in accordance with each unit's own situation, using the baby steps ideology and the model for continuing development. Join us to develop the activities.

[www.ilokasvaaliikkuen.fi](http://www.ilokasvaaliikkuen.fi)