

educcare

Da will ich Kind sein.



POLICY FOR RAISING AND EDUCATING CHILDREN
Handbook for Parents

Please send your requests, suggestions and questions to:

educcare Bildungskindertagesstätten gGmbH
Alter Markt 36-42
50667 Köln

info@educcare.de

All rights reserved

1st Edition 2014

Text and conceptual design:
Dorothee Zippmann, Cologne
Marcus Bracht, Cologne

Printed in Germany

This work and parts thereof are protected by copyright.
Any use other than where legally authorised requires
the prior written approval of the publisher.

Additional information can be found at www.educcare.de

Content

Just a few words first of all	5
1. educcare – identity, sense of purpose and responsibility	6
1.1. A home away from home for parents and children	7
1.2. Elementary educational institutions	8
2. Goals for raising and educating children	9
2.1. Definition and understanding	9
2.2. A treasure chest of competences	9
2.3. Traditional areas of education	12
3. All roads lead to Rome	17
3.1. How children grasp the world	17
3.2. The methodical approach	19
3.3. Digression – one of many opportunities	23
4. Guaranteeing methods	24
4.1. educcare educational childcare centres – quality and certainty	24
4.2. educcare as provider – commitment and security	27
4.3. educcare and parents – sharing responsibility together	29
5. Our concept is dynamic	30
6. Contact and accountability	31

For ease of reading, the masculine form (he) is used to refer to the child and the feminine form (she) to refer to educators throughout this handbook but all information naturally applies equally to both genders.

„UNCOVER A CHILD'S FULL
POTENTIAL“

Just a few words first of all

They do all this continually, in their own unique manner, from the moment they first cry; so diverse are children, simply incomparable.

This idea of the child poses a challenge for us adults. It forces us to unconditionally recognise each child as an individual and do justice to this uniqueness. From birth, we have to join him on his fast-paced voyage of discovery while providing love and protection so he can recover in our arms, over and over, from the “exertions” of discovering the world.

This is a wonderful and highly responsible task for all those involved – parents and the educare team jointly.

This handbook provides an insight into educare’s policy on raising and educating children. We would like to share our understanding and our view of children; how important early childhood education is for a happy and self-determined future; and consequently, which responsibilities we assume. We hope this will assist you in determining whether educare is the right partner for you and your unique child.

Here I am
and this is how
the world works!

1. educcare – identity, sense of purpose and responsibility

The fact that children spend up to 10,000 hours in childcare underlines the need for sound practice

All children should have access to top-quality opportunities for their education and development

A binding framework guarantees peace of mind for all parties concerned

educcare educational childcare centres

- educcare educational childcare centres are a home away from home for parents and children.
- They see themselves as elementary educational institutions.
- They are supportive partners for parents when it comes to raising children and balancing career and family life.
- They contribute significantly to the upgrading and further development of the early childhood teaching profession.
- They carry socio-political and municipal responsibility.

We recognize that the pre-school years are a formative period of education and appreciate their significance as being as equally important as that of subsequent (school) years for later life and happiness.

This is precisely why educcare – supported by its advisory board – campaigns for access irrespective of origin, income or religion. Top-quality opportunities for education and development must be available to all children.

educcare's policy is a binding framework guiding the educational work carried out in the individual educcare educational childcare centres. This guarantees peace of mind for all parties concerned: children and parents, educators, and the provider.

The regular observation and documentation of each child's development, the continuous communication with parents about individual development and educational activities, and regular feedback meetings and intensive continuing development by staff, all clearly demonstrate this commitment.

Consequently, a sound basis is created for professional educational work by each team of motivated staff at educcare's educational childcare centres. Each team then implements and shapes their work to suit specific local conditions. Our policy allows for the freedom that individuality, flexibility, and creativity require.

Realising these concepts – in line with our working partnership – requires three things from parents:

- Active and collaborative work with the educcare team.
- Prompt and open feedback if something works particularly well or could be improved.
- Patience at the outset, since we are building up something new together and its complexity needs time.

1.1. A home away from home for parents and children

Add your own pictures here and you will see that regardless of how individual and varied they are; they all demonstrate their importance for a home away from home:

- A comfortable and secure atmosphere.
- Attention, care and recognition.
- Having basic needs met.

We assume that the individual child can only gain the trust and confidence required to deal positively with the world around him, when he feels absolutely comfortable and sees the centre as his home away from home. We bear this responsibility.

Seen in the perspective of the daily routine, these special tasks mean that we

- Guarantee every single child a caring, individual and attentive familiarisation with his new "childcare" surroundings.
- Welcome and say goodbye to children and parents in a warm and genuine manner, every day.
- Accept the individual child just as he is and value his actions unconditionally.
- Share in what is happening, thus enabling his participation and assumption of responsibility.
- Provide the child with a safe starting point for exploring the world.

Home is
the smell of apples,
a favourite story ...

Education means
self-learning with active,
responsible support

1.2. Elementary educational institutions

Every child has the right to education from the moment of birth.

- Self-directed learning – requiring social interaction, active suggestions and support.
- Giving personal meaning to learning.
- Finding your own way and taking it.
- Thinking, acting, feeling, and finding a balance between personal values and those of others.
- Developing self-image and a view of the world and making connections.

Children are extremely keen to learn and engage themselves entirely in acquiring an understanding of the world. They let their curiosity guide them and make meaningful connections between the individual learning processes of taking action, sensing, feeling, thinking and valuing. They are open to and partly reliant on the learning stimuli triggered by adults and other children.

Children develop seemingly as a matter of course; that impresses us, keeps us on the edge of our seats, and challenges us to follow their lead, all at the same time. We pave the way and, as the children's travelling companions, we jointly take on discovering the world, we embolden them for adventures, questions and answers, and we experience their enthusiasm for unbelievable, imaginative and concrete ideas for solutions. Embolden means trusting, demanding and supporting - but without making excessive demands on them. "I know you can do it. And I'm right here."

educcare takes into account that children have a great potential for self-learning and that there is a need to involve the professional support that educators provide. Early childhood education gives children space for personal development, takes their uniqueness into account and opens up diverse realms of experience. Not complying with this understanding of education, means limiting individual opportunities for development.

2. Goals for raising and educating children

2.1. Definition and understanding

educcare specifies that goals are a “must” for educational work that focuses consistently on seeing things from the child’s perspective. Goals are a prerequisite for raising and educating children so they will develop into liberal-minded, happy, self-confident people who are responsible members of society.

Helping children be everything they can be is the fundamental concept behind all our objectives

Helping children be everything they can be is the fundamental concept behind all our objectives.

2.2. A treasure chest of competences

Every child – irrespective of culture, religion or social status – has to be given the opportunity to grow fully and develop his character and individual potential in a carefree way. Trust in one’s own abilities, creativity and the defining experiences of self-efficacy form the foundations aspired to, and enable children to actively shape their own lives. They feel secure knowing they belong and that they play a valuable role in the world. The variety of experiences, the use of trial-and-error, and being self-driven are invaluable parts of our inner wealth, particularly in a fast-paced, ever-changing world.

If we recognise competence as a treasure chest that fills up throughout life, then we find it contains the insights and skills that people possess, in their entirety. “Insights” are the capacity to gain an understanding of reality and “skills” are how we actively deal with them.

This treasure chest includes the following “gems”

- Learning competences (learning to learn)
- Life skills (developing basic social and emotional competences)

And the more traditional educational “pearls”

- Movement and body awareness
- Language and communication
- Music and the arts
- Nature and natural phenomena
- Media and technology

Individual ways of learning
all have their own qualities

2.2.1. Learning to learn

Children of all ages find new ways of entering the realm of knowledge every day. Closer inspection of what appears to be primarily playful reveals itself to be systematic, focussed and consistently thorough. The deadly earnestness with which children learn and apply their experiences to new contexts – sometimes contradictorily – finds its counterpart in the adults who join in with the research and interpretation. The individual “ways of learning” have their own qualities, and are never wrong or incomplete; neither are they a “primitive” form of adult thinking. They give a view of the manner in which children learn and project their experiences to the outside world. Through interaction with a supportive adult, children discover that they are learning, what they are learning, how they are learning, and how they can meaningfully apply their learning.

Having recourse to learning competences means being able to adjust quickly and (re)act creatively to new situations, changed expectations and/or circumstances in daily life and, later, in the working world.

Our roles and responsibilities:

- Supporting individual forms and ways of learning.
- Being able to evaluate one’s own learning and apply it successfully.
- Acquiring and organising knowledge.
- Developing procedure strategies for a course of action.
- Creatively applying skills, knowledge and experience to solve problems.

Conveying these competences efficiently and sustainably assumes that children acquire and are able to apply their knowledge in true-to-life social and multidisciplinary contexts from the outset. During the first few years, emphasis is placed on the development of all the senses, perception and movement. Experiences of the world around them, and personal experience in social settings are embedded in a holistic learning environment. This is particularly pronounced in international childcare centres where daily work includes and reflects the various cultures.

2.2.2. Life skills (I am me and you are you)

The development of life skills is determined by the skills of the individual (personal, cognitive, emotional) and skills for behaving within the social context.

Emphasis is placed on intercultural education and on children's participation in practising democracy (e.g. children's conferences).

Both children and adults are involved in the development of intercultural competence.

This forms the basis for constructive and harmonious interaction of individuals, groups and groupings with different cultural and linguistic traditions. Cultural identity only develops when being different is recognised as being both an opportunity and enrichment.

We understand that the acquisition of intercultural competence is a complex development process, involving various areas – knowledge, attitude, emotions and actions. It allows for contradictions and shifts in perspective, which enables various expectations and norms to be dealt with constructively. Children develop awareness for different lifestyles and cultures coexisting as a matter of course.

Our roles and responsibilities:

- Developing and strengthening a positive self-concept (positive self-assessment, self-confidence and self-efficacy, cultural identity).
- Being able to self-regulate (using one's own skills and opportunities, thinking something out and realising it, making decisions and organising oneself, and being able to look back, etc.).
- Social skills (a sense of responsibility and assuming responsibility for oneself, others, nature and the environment, a keen awareness of cultural differences, being in touch with one's own feelings and experiences, being able to empathise, changing perspectives, stable emotional relationships with attachment figures, positive relationships with peers, setting aside one's own interests, being able to cooperate, etc.).
- Communication and conflict resolution skills (using verbal and nonverbal forms of expression, listening, relating, expressing one's own ideas, thinking constructively, being aware of problems, dealing with conflict non-violently, multilingualism, etc.).
- Creativity and a passion for exploration (making use of intellectual and creative leeway, changing point of view, changing position, finding something out, scrutinising it and getting to the bottom of it, etc.).

Developing life skills
is a prerequisite for holding
one's own in the future

Movement and perception are the first tools used in the realisation of self-concept

2.3. Traditional areas of education

2.3.1. Get moving (movement, motion and body awareness)

Movement and perception are the first tools implemented in the realisation of self-concept and, therefore, also the most defining experiences in the process of identity development. Consequently, movement is not just a prerequisite for physical development, but also for mental and emotional growth.

Our roles and responsibilities:

Fostering gross motor skills including

- The development of body image (feeling and perceiving one's own body, being aware of oneself in relation to surroundings, sensing one's inner feelings, etc.).
- The use and control of the body in a variety of situations (coordination of various body parts, tensing and releasing muscles, targeted use of the muscular system, balancing, throwing a ball, walking backwards, etc.).

Fostering fine motor skills including

- Fostering dexterity (purposeful movements, grasping and releasing, handling various objects and materials, playing the piano, juggling, drawing with both hands, decorating cakes with almond slivers, etc.).
- Hand-eye coordination (threading a needle, pouring liquids into various containers, catching an airborne ball, etc.).
- Pleasant anticipation of everything people handle throughout life.

2.3.2 Playing with words (speech, language and communication)

Speech and language are conveyed to children solely by ear (before they learn to read and write). The child perceives and imitates the words of others. He tries to understand their meaning and make use of them. He babbles and vocalises until, at some point, the first word is uttered. Language acquisition is “sound production”, playful, experimental but meaningful, nevertheless.

Speech and language
enable understanding
and create a conscious self

As means of communication, speech and language demand a complex interplay between intellectual and physical capabilities:

- Speech is a top physical performance and consequently also motion.
- Speech and language enable understanding.
- Speech extends body language like signs, facial expressions and gestures. Speech frees you from space and time.
- Speech enables us to centre our ideas and to deal with particular matters thoroughly. Speech steers, directs and focuses attention.
- Language enables us to reflect on our thoughts, our actions and their effects, and ourselves. Language creates consciousness and a conscious self.
- Language summarizes, enables associations and generalisations. It structures our thinking – cognition.

Our roles and responsibilities:

- The correct, deliberate and critical use of the German language and – in certain educare childcare centres – of a second language.
- Increasing the range of vocabulary commonly used.
- Age-appropriate grammar skills.
- Strengthening each child in his relationship to the world (being able to express oneself verbally in order to share experiences and thoughts and understanding others).

A second language
opens doors to other people
and cultures

Bilingualism - Viel Spaß! ... Bienvenue ... Merhaba ...

Speaking a second language is a gift. It opens doors to other people and cultures. It marks the beginnings of internationalism. The first few years offer the best opportunities for playfully acquiring another language. Children should be given this chance. Moreover, good language skills open up opportunities for further personal development.

Children of kindergarten age focus on decoding new words, sentences and expressions. Life in a childcare centre is ideally suited to the acquisition of a second language. The children learn through immersion: listening, imitating and other supporting activities.

Our roles and responsibilities:

- The playful and natural introduction, comprehension and use of a second language.
- Learning the second language follows the same principles as that of acquiring the first (understanding a situation through the activity).
- Supporting children's potential for self-learning, by picking up on the creative strategies they use to enable them to find their way through the "jungle" of strange words and sounds.
- Only using skills that the children already possess.

2.3.3. Hey diddle diddle, the cat had a fiddle (music and the arts)

The development of musical and artistic skills is known as arts education (or aesthetics education). These skills build self-confidence and trust to other children through musical interplay.

Consequently, educare childcare centres provide children with the opportunities for letting their imagination run free. They provide materials with which children can work well and give them the space (area and leeway) that they require for personal expression. Music and art, the "language of feelings", form a creative process through which children give shape to their sensations, feelings, relationships, problems, current theories, ideas of the possible, and the obviously impossible.

Our roles and responsibilities:

- Active artistic learning.
- Pleasing games with signs, symbols, colours, shapes, materials, one's own body, etc.
- Experimentation with various forms of expression.
- Leaving one's mark.
- Development of a personal visual language (on paper, in clay/pottery, as sounds, as movement, etc.).
- Broadening life skills.

Particular focus is placed on encouraging sensory awareness. Integrative music and arts promotion involves

- The sense of hearing (E.g. ability to differentiate between sounds, development of phonetic rhythm and intonation).
- Sight (E.g. spatial orientation, perception of structures, visual memory).
- The senses of touch, taste and balance (E.g. kinaesthesia, tactile awareness, orientation and spatial visualisation).

educare childcare centres rate creative media highly. They combine fun, pleasure and gaining insight in unique ways. The sky is the limit for children and their imaginations. They acquire knowledge through their experiences and they draw deep satisfaction from the connections they make.

And get a new idea (of themselves) ...

The sky is the limit for children and their imagination.

They acquire knowledge through their experiences and they draw deep satisfaction from the connections they make.

Wonder is the springboard
for research

2.3.4. Wisdom starts in wonder (nature and natural phenomena)

educcare childcare centres focus in particular on inanimate nature. An experimental introduction to natural phenomena makes children aware of the choices of interpretation. Wonder is the springboard that arouses curiosity, awakens the enquiring mind and supports children as they examine their intuitive understanding or vague awareness of "something". They transfer meaning and understanding to other phenomena in order to further increase their knowledge.

The systematic method of the children's approach is reflected in their exemplary series of experiments. The children's interest, their (intuitive) understanding and a strong connection to everyday life are always the rationale for the variety of experiments.

Our roles and responsibilities:

Embedding the natural sciences into educational work:

- Play of light and und vision games (experiments with shadow and light, lenses, magnifiers, etc.).
- Experiments with air (diving bells, extinguishing a candle by removing the oxygen, catching the wind, etc.).
- Floating and sinking (experience of density of materials).
- Forces (experiments with magnets, compasses, gravity, etc.).

2.3.5. Buttons and a mouse for a bit of the modern world (media and technology)

Media and technology
are a part of how children
experience the world

Children understand best how technical equipment works when they experience it as a useful tool in everyday life. Radios, CD players, cassette recorders, telephones, cameras, PCs are just some of the examples of information and communication technology that children naturally grow up with today. Media and technology make up part of children's experiences of the world and need to be integrated into educational work.

Our roles and responsibilities:

- Playful and explorative access to media and technology.
- Conveying appropriate, self-determined and responsible use of technical equipment and media.
- Fostering communication and cooperation through a shared engagement with technology and its use.
 - Developing age-appropriate media skills for
 - Print media (books, newspapers, letters, etc.).
 - Audio media (radio, cassette recorder, etc.).
 - Visual media (slides, overhead-projection, etc.).
 - Audio-visual media (television, film, computer, etc.).

3 All roads lead to Rome

3.1. How children grasp the world

3.1.1. All senses set to receive

Individual thought and feeling develop between the ages of two and six years. This is when the head does its sorting. Neural connections that are frequently called on are strengthened and little-used connections are partly “melted down” irretrievably. Such is the manner in which opportunities arise and disappear.

Up to two million new contacts are formed per second

We deem knowledge of this to be a prerequisite for high-quality educational planning and practice. Boredom and under-stimulation impact negatively on healthy brain development.

Learning activities and stimuli need to be closely connected to feelings. It will not last if it does not move you. The more senses are involved and connected to one another, the longer lasting the effects of learning and understanding, of retaining and remembering. An image of a fire is hardly impressive when compared to the practical action of making a fire. Seeing the flames, feeling the heat, smelling the smoke, hearing the crackling, and perhaps even listening in on group storytelling, all play a part in creating a personal experience.

Permanence can only occur by touching the senses

3.1.2. Individuality is an educational challenge

educcare centres are “places of learning and development”. They are exciting workshops where children – always individually and suited to their personal stage and pace of development – construct their self-image and their view of the world. They draw on a variety of opportunities where every question and answer provokes further thought.

The child develops his own strengths and learns to accept his weaknesses

There is no developmental characteristic that is equally distinct in all children of the same age. Children of the same age are so diverse because inherent characteristics and skills are different for each child and mature at differing rates. It is not the age but the child’s individual stage of development that is definitive for support and advancement. Raising children as individuals means that each child develops his own strengths and learns to accept his weaknesses.

educcare educational childcare centres provide a thought-out environment that invites discovery, and companions who assume responsibility for the personalised, child-focussed educational work required by children so they can learn and develop as fully as possible.

3.1.3. Digression – this is not the way learning should be

Once upon a time, the animals went to kindergarten. The educational programme consisted of running, climbing, flying and swimming. All the animals were educated in all subjects.

The duck was good at swimming, even better than the educator. His flying was average but his running was hopeless. Being so bad at running, the duck had to practise and keep at it and was not allowed to go swimming. This continued for so long that duck ended up being just an average swimmer. Average was acceptable so no one worried about this – apart from the duck.

The rabbit was the top runner of the group but had a nervous breakdown and had to leave the kindergarten. This was due to all the hours of extra swimming training.

The squirrel was the best at climbing but the educator made the squirrel start his flying lessons from the ground and not from the treetops. So the squirrel then had muscle ache from over-exertion and ended up being worse and worse at climbing and running.

The practically-minded prairie dogs gave their young to the badger in the group after the education committee denied the request for digging to be part of the curriculum.

At the end of the year an abnormal eel, who was good at swimming, and who could run, climb and fly quite well, gave a closing speech in two languages.

(Author unknown)

3.2. The methodical approach

3.2.1. Play, more play and learning through play

Playful goings-on make sense to children – and that is important. What non-participating adults often only see as an aimless or indiscriminate handling of materials or objects is a serious and important matter for a child, regardless of his age. The child is working. He researches, tries things out, examines, plays with the possibilities. Using his mouth, hands and eyes to investigate objects sheds light on their size, shape and characteristics. Repeatedly throwing objects down forms the basis of “flight duration” and the child who endlessly runs about in circles is finding out about body and space. The experiences that a child makes when playing and the actions themselves remain important since they account for the meaning of his play.

Play is in deadly earnest
and neverending fun

- He practices ways of behaving.
- He gains skills.
- He acquires knowledge.

Play is universal. How children play, however, reflects their time and culture, and differs from generation to generation and society to society.

This understanding enables us to fully appreciate children’s play behaviour. Play and exploratory behaviour at educcare centres are fostered age-appropriately by:

- A daily routine with structured timings that explicitly emphasises space for “free” play.
- A stimulating room design that enables the child to freely choose his games, to begin them independently, to initiate and enjoy play.

By means of “playthings”:

- And this includes all items that can be played with. We have the most distinguished experts on our side – the children themselves.

By means of adults who “actively play along”:

- And – just as in “free play” – let themselves be drawn in and lead by the child. It is the child who takes the initiative and takes charge, or
- They actively direct the process – as with planned activities. “Play” methodology is used to support individual stages of development and interests or to realise objectives.

Questions are never unimportant

During “free play”, the educator’s approach as an “active companion” fulfils many purposes:

- She is an observer.
Her attention and “detective” instincts arise from a true interest in getting to know and understand the child better. There are no unimportant questions or subjects; but rather learning processes that are both intensive and meaningful. What exactly is the child interested in? What will he do and how will he do it? How does he express himself?
- She paves the way and is a “travelling companion”.
She accompanies, acts, and reacts to the child’s “direction”. She emboldens the child for new challenges. She provides a variety of stimuli that foster and increase the children’s involvement. She does not lecture. She shares her interest and wonder with the child.
- She is a listener.
She is there for the children whenever they need advice and support.

3.2.2. Targeted and structured activities

Specific activities are planned with the aim of reinforcing the developmental process of an individual child and/or a group of children. Key aspects are:

- Supporting individual interests and strengths.
- Targeted support for development stages and skills.
- Taking up subjects specific to the group and supporting children in their realisation.
- Participation in decision-making processes, learning within a living democracy (e.g. children's conferences).
- Inclusion of preventative measures (e.g. as regards motor skills, speech and language, health, conflict resolution, strengthening ego, etc.).

educcare's policy for educating and raising children includes clearly stated goals derived from the responsibility of ensuring the children's healthy development. Acquiring particular life skills and experiencing learning in a range of educational areas should enable children to gradually shape their own lives, step by step.

Children at educcare learn in complex real-life situations. Overlaps between areas of learning are welcome and necessary. Targeted activities are characterised by being directly related to the children's interests and by their focus on current topics. Whether exploration takes place in mixed-age, peer groups or developmentally homogenous groups is determined by goal, subject and prior knowledge.

For educational work on a daily basis this means:

- The child/the children identify "their" subject and experience adult support on their way towards its further development and realisation.
- The educators formulate an activity based on observations and their evaluation.
- The educator(s) formulate an activity based on the developmental and educational goals agreed upon.
- External factors (the digger near the door, a birthday, cultural events, etc.) provide interesting subjects and justify targeted activities.

Children learn in complex
real-life situations

Every problem,
every thought,
every question
deserves respect

3.2.3. Project work

The set-up and development of projects clearly indicates that projects are worked on long-term thus enabling a deeper examination of the subject in question. Project work is explicitly process-driven. Not only are understanding, abilities, and the item created in the forefront, but the journey there is also of the utmost importance.

This includes:

- Investigations (e.g. state, structure, size).
- Systematic planning (e.g. developing procedure strategies, progressive and sequential tasks, organising materials, supporting resources, etc.).
- Testing out various (solution) procedures.
- Detours into similar areas (for instance, a project on “my way to kindergarten” can include diversions that children find interesting: for example, to shadow and light – the sun, traffic lights, headlights; to ground conditions – tarmac, paving, clay; to mathematics – size and ideas of speed etc.).

Projects provide an ideal balance between knowledge-based learning and learning arising from research-driven activity.

Accordingly, the educators treat projects as ongoing interactive dialogue between adults and children. Every problem and every question is treated with respect and consideration. There is no prescribed learning pace.

Raising and educating “world explorers” inevitably turns every educator into a researcher and discoverer. On the one hand, they have to take up the interests of the children and on the other hand – for reasons of duty of care – they have to awaken an interest in areas that the children have not yet experienced. This may be strenuous at times but a sense of enjoyment and that “good feeling” is guaranteed on all sides for those who get involved.

3.3. Digression – one of the many opportunities

Just imagine that one morning your child discovers a stone on his way to kindergarten.

Or a shimmering button.

Or a snail's slime trail.

You know how it is. Children are constantly discovering extremely important things. They research, experiment, speculate and bombard us with questions. They laugh, argue, and make up with each other, are active and full of irrepressible curiosity. With tremendous energy and undeniable pleasure, they devote themselves to understanding people, things and the world around them. Their real world is exciting and their expression of it complex. Children surprise us – over and over again.

This is the image of the child that guides how children live and learn in educare educational childcare centres: how we accept them and let them be just as they are. That is their right. And the educators in the centres have the explicit responsibility of following children along their "unconventional" (learning) journeys, of enabling experiences and ensuring the development and fulfilment of each child's individual potential.

We are convinced: children are happiest when they can turn their ideas into action and personal work. This underlies their confidence of being in the world to shape it.

Recognising this variety in full and accepting its biological reality are fundamental prerequisites for being able to meet the individual needs and characteristics of each child.

It is therefore no coincidence that

- The stone your child found takes the whole childcare group straight to the stonemason.
- The button turns into a dragon's eye.
- The slimy snail's trail triggers experiments with soft soap – and luckily for you, this happens in the centre and not at home.

And this is most certainly just the start ...

Children are happiest when they can turn their ideas into action and personal work

4 Guaranteeing methods

4.1. educcare educational childcare centres - quality and certainty

Structures and processes guarantee the reliability and quality of educational work

Working successfully with children means being like children. Discovering and exploring in an uninhibited, curious, persevering and self-critical manner – just like the children entrusted to us. The point of departure is “wanting to understand” the uniqueness of a child, his strengths, quirks, pace, potential and fears.

The treasure chest of competences is filled with educational activity suited to the individual child based on these valuable findings.

Educational activity is rounded off with a focussed and self-critical examination of whether or not we achieved what we set out to achieve, and how we can improve matters. Our experience forms the starting point for further discovery.

Following this path reliably and successfully at educcare means that:

- Educational work takes place within certain structures.
- The quality of educational work is strengthened by certain processes.
- Educational work is embedded in its surroundings.

4.1.1. On the path to individuality

Individuality, the success factor for happiness and continuing development, is the starting point for educating and raising children in educcare childcare centres. Individuality requires professional procedures in order to be detected, read, grasped and truly understood.

Perception and observation are therefore important tools and the basis of decision-making when planning, directing and developing individual learning activities.

The evaluation of various observations must lead to an appraisal of the child that includes his position in the various areas of development, his interests and his strengths and weaknesses.

Every educational specialist is skilled at systematically observing and appraising children

Observations at educcare childcare centres are systemised. However, this should not be taken to mean surveillance but consideration and regard for what a child does, how he behaves, what he says. Educators at educcare want to understand each child in his uniqueness.

The emotional wellbeing and involvement of a child are of the utmost priority – appropriate to the goal of providing “a home away from home” – at the outset. Their positive appraisal is the basis for further learning and the formulation of initial differentiated educational goals.

The observation charts were developed in order to support educators in clearly tracking children's development and enable them to routinely check it by means of written documentation. The following questions play a central role:

- Which stages of development has the child, with his individual skills, interests and strengths, reached?
- Is the child continuing to develop?
- Which conclusions can be drawn for further educational work?

4.1.2. Planning and taking action

At educcare setting off means combining individual starting points with the policy's educational goals and current requirements.

Planning focuses on the "treasure chest of competences". The acquisition of skills, knowledge, structures, attitudes and implementation tools form the basis for activities. This corresponds to the standards set out by the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO).

Planning requires close cooperation between educators as well as key questions regarding the goal and ways towards it.

Some examples of key questions:

- What do we want to research, find out, learn and achieve?
- How can we check that we were successful? How do we know what we have learnt?
- How can we best realise this? How shall we proceed? Which methods, media, people or places will assist us?
- How can we share this with others, celebrate it and show it?

The children actively, and age-appropriately, take part in planning procedures. They come to know that they are competent and influential and that they can get things moving and control the direction.

This is the confirmation that every view and every idea is important and can shape the world, whether great or small.

This is active learning within a living democracy.

Reflection means using success, detours and mistakes equally for new avenues

4.1.3. Reflection and burning for action – again

The evaluation of educational work applies to the specific course of the activity, to methodical and personal skills and a review of which goals have been achieved.

Nothing succeeds like success. And even when things do not work out as planned, the detours taken provide at least experience for the exciting explorative journeys that follow.

Reflection and wanting to know more both ensure an understanding of how we learn.

Some examples of key questions:

- Were the children actively involved?
- Were the methods, structure and procedures appropriate?
- Which “gems” from the treasure chest of competences were particularly addressed?
- What was most remarkable? What was important?
- What had current, future or exemplary significance?
- What developments took place and which opportunities emerged?
- How can we continue to learn?

4.1.4. Documentation

To document
is to value

The children’s love of demonstrating what they have learnt knows no limits. Space to this effect (discussion circles, art room, gym etc.) is on hand as well as areas for documentation (walls, shelves, “show” cabinets).

Presentations held in the centre’s rooms (the children’s work, photos, accompanying text, etc.)

- Value children in their actions and development.
- Encourage communication, an examination of what has been, repetition and change.
- Communicate ideas and transparency regarding what occurs in the group to parents (and visitors to the centre).
- Reflect the multifaceted responsibilities and tasks of the educators.

Each child has an “All About Me” book: their own portfolio where work, photos, anecdotes, results and steps that are meaningful for the child and his development are collected. This book is an important tool in recording the child’s progress. When children learn that their “All About Me” book is a collection of precious objects, they are quite discerning at choosing what should be included. The only criteria for the child’s selection are the personal meaning he places on the result and the value he gives it.

4.1.5. Systems for recording educational work

educcare has developed a sequential system that continuously supports educators in documenting and evaluating development:

- Diary notes give an account of part of the day as either a spontaneous or planned observation.
- The individual development charts document the age-appropriate growth of the child based on concrete, observable abilities in various developmental areas. Parents are secure in the knowledge that attention is paid to each of their child's developmental stages.
- The written evaluation of the child summarises his individual development, particular interests, strengths and any potential developmental delays and it describes the educational implications and any agreements drawn up with parents.

Regular documentation ensures continuity should staff change.

Notes written day-to-day form the basis for solid evaluation, transparency and security

4.2. educcare as provider – commitment and security

educcare is responsible for ensuring reliable conditions that support the educators' work to the full. These include the group structures and the structure of daily routines as well as room set-up and centre layout and professional staff management.

4.2.1. Family-like structures

educcare practices a home group approach where every child belongs to a fixed group with stable relationships to educators and other children. This creates a "family-like environment".

Routines at educcare educational childcare centres are structured according to the children's basic needs. Drop-off times, mealtimes, times for rest or naps, and pick-up times set the day and enable parents and children to find their bearings and feel secure.

Accompanying children through the most important educational years requires more than intuition – it requires absolute professionalism

4.2.2. Staff responsibility

Accompanying children through the most important educational years requires more than intuition – it requires absolute professionalism from the educators. This is a prerequisite for doing children and their parents justice. We believe that the provider is responsible for guaranteeing general conditions so that the necessary professionalism occurs and continues to develop further, permanently.

This includes carefully selecting staff with an authentic keenness for working with children, who are clearly eager for advancement, and are ready and able to take on responsibility and enrich the team with their character and educational skill set.

educcare is responsible for:

- Ongoing personal development discussions for staff that include clear goals and continuing education measures.
- Intensive training in mandatory subjects for all staff: educare policy, observation, documentation, parent-feedback meetings, activity planning.
- Ongoing educational coaching from the provider's specialists.
- Opportunities for active participation in shaping the development of individual educare educational childcare centres.
- Assuming cross-subject responsibilities.
- Relief from administrative tasks.

4.2.3. Designing the learning environment

The rooms as the third educator free up space for the real educators

The rooms in the centres have been designed as worlds of experience and ensure the range of opportunities that children require for their learning processes. They support the children's independent activity, self-determination and responsibility. Their highly challenging character means they function as the "third educator".

Consequently, the rooms relieve the "real" educators and free up space for observations or for carrying out activities.

4.3. educare and parents – sharing responsibility together

Close and trusting cooperation with parents is a prerequisite for being able to understand and foster the individual child and give him a sense of having a second family. The basis is reciprocal acceptance and trust. Uncomplicated and honest dealings, an authentic interest in the individual child, an open atmosphere and time make up the foundations. Exchange begins during the settling-in phase and continues through the odd impromptu coffee as well as the more formal parent-feedback meetings and parents' evenings. Parent-feedback meetings regarding the child's development take place regularly every three months.

Commitment to and absolute confidentiality regarding any agreements made is understood.

Parents – just like their children – should feel comfortable in the childcare centre. Drop-off and collection times are not pressured. Parents, too, have the right to expect a home away from home and time to relax at educare's childcare centres. Some wine tasting, perhaps, at a parents' evening, taking part in working groups, opening up for visits from grandparents are all factors that contribute towards providing a second home for parents.

Uncomplicated and honest dealings, an authentic interest in the individual child, an open atmosphere and time create reciprocal acceptance and trust

5. Our concept is dynamic

Our concept is constantly checked and adjusted. Solid evidence of room for improvement is integrated into the policy as soon as it is available and introduced into our daily work, when practicable.

Checks and sustainable improvements follow set processes. This involves internal staff as well as external advisors and organisations. Exchange with experts from the youth welfare offices is likewise indispensable.

Moreover, educcare's further development is supported by its advisory board which is made up of outstanding people who are bound by a serious interest in the future of our children and our society.

The following people currently sit on our board:

- **Dr. Patrick Adenauer**
Dedicated entrepreneur
- **Dr. Roland Bernecker**
Secretary-General, UNESCO Germany
- **Dr. Günter Bulk**
Quality management systems expert

6. Contact and accountability

Managing Directors:

Axel Thelen

Marcus Bracht

educcare Bildungskindertagesstätten gGmbH

Alter Markt 36-42

50667 Köln

Tel.: 0221 - 466 194 00

Fax: 0221 - 466 194 99

E-Mail: info@educcare.de

www.educcare.de