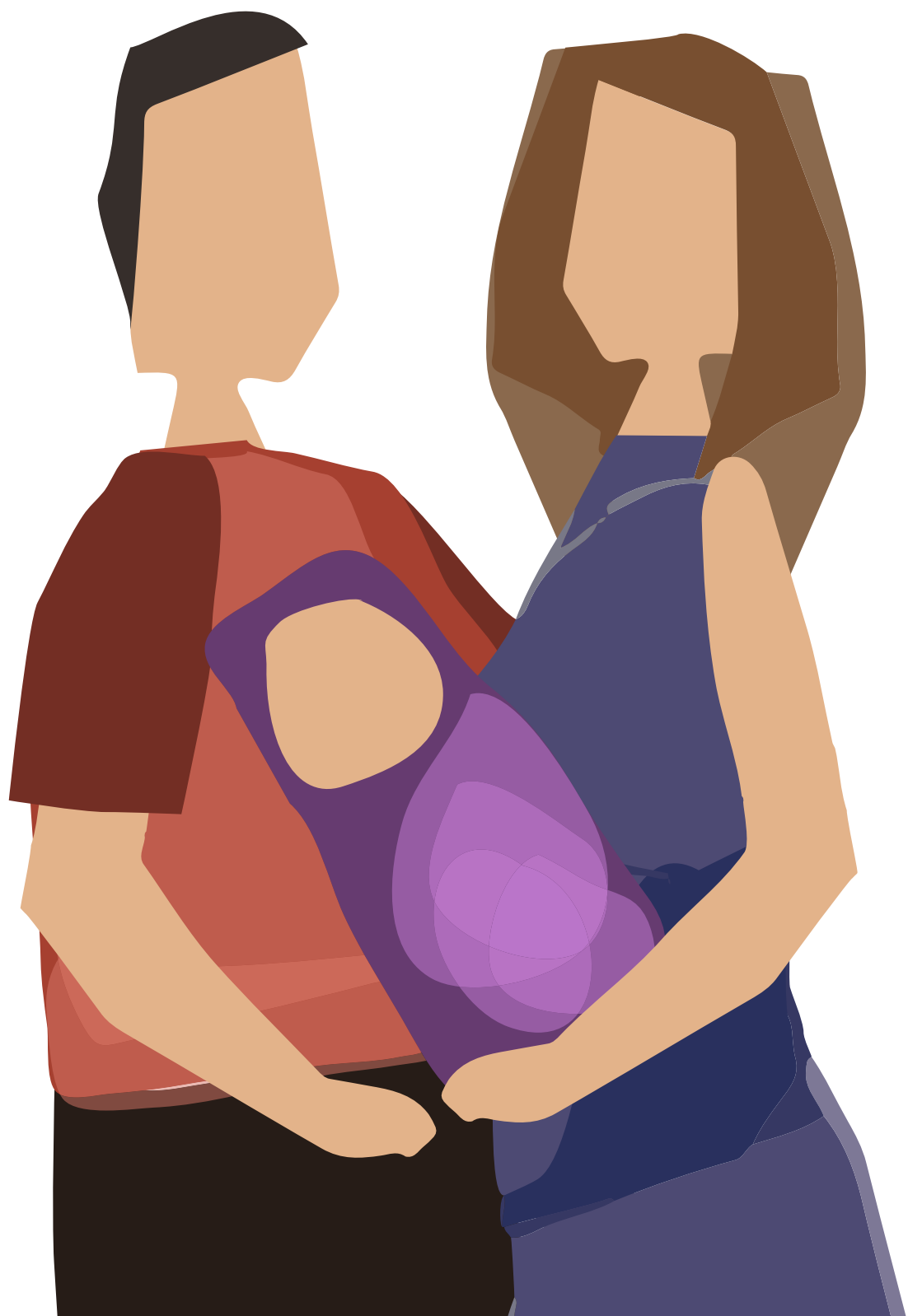


We are parents in Poland



Publikacja powstała
w ramach projektu

**Jestem
mama
w Polsce**

- II edycja

Organizator
i wydawca

PFM
POLSKIE FORUM
MIGRACYJNE

We are parents in Poland

Information booklet for migrant parents
raising children in Poland

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Information in accordance with the legislation in force as of 18 July 2016.

This publication is distributed free of charge and is not intended for sale.

ISBN No.: 978-83-945706-2-0

Izabelin, 2016



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INSTYTUT SPRAW
PUBLICZNYCH

Institute of Public Affairs Foundation

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This publication was created as part of the “I am a mom in Poland - Year II” project co-financed by the National Programme for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the state budget.

A safe harbour

The sole responsibility for the contents of this publication lies with the author. The European Commission and the Ministry of Internal Affairs do not accept any responsibility for the use of the information provided.



The publication (chapter on “Diet of children aged between 0-12 months”) was created as part of the grant competition of the educational programme entitled “The First 1000 Days for Health”, dedicated to food education for pregnant and breastfeeding women and for parents during the first year of the child’s life. More details: www.1000dni.pl

Hello!

You are holding the “We are parents in Poland” brochure, written and published especially for parents who have come to Poland from other countries and are raising their children here.

We know that raising a child is an experience which can give one lots of happiness and satisfaction. But we can't also deny that it is a difficult process, which requires hard parental work. Parents who have chosen a life outside their home country have to face many additional challenges, such as learning a new language, helping the child integrate with their culturally-different peers and raising the child away from their extended family. We hope that this brochure gives you at least a little help and support in your situation.

This publication focuses on various issues connected to raising a child from birth to 6 years of age. It provides some useful information on the Polish education system (from day care, to nursery, to primary school) and healthcare services available to children in Poland. One of the chapters describes financial assistance available to families living in Poland. Two other chapters are dedicated to planning a healthy diet for your child. Finally, the last three chapters will help you get a better understanding of the subsequent stages of the child's development, their needs and emotions, as well as the true potential of multicultural and multilingual families (your family)!

While reading this brochure, please note that the Polish Migration Forum Foundation has been supporting foreigners living in Poland, as well as Poles living abroad, since 2007. We regularly organise multicultural birth classes and set up support groups for migrant moms, hold parental skills workshops and support foreign citizens on the Polish labour market. Please visit our website and like us on Facebook. Let's stay in touch!

Polish Migration Forum Foundation

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Chapter I:

Day care, nursery school, primary school

What childcare options are there?

Preschoolers

Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centres

Hello, school!

The rights of foreign pupils

The rights and obligations of parents

If the child has special needs...

What childcare options are there?

The Polish childcare system suffers from a shortage of available places – this problem mostly affects large cities. As a result, parents often have to try really hard to secure a place at day care or nursery for their child - as there are not enough of them to meet the demand. So if you are planning to use childcare services available to your little one - start searching for the right institution well in advance. The search process can take six months or even longer.

Parents can choose from several available types of childcare facilities:

Day care centres / day nurseries (żłobek) - care facilities (public or private) for children aged between 4 months and three years old (in exceptional cases, such institutions may admit children up to 4 years of age). Usually, there are 15-35 children in a group, cared for by three female employees. Young infant groups are additionally looked after by a nurse.

Day care units (punkt opieki dziennej) - mini-day care facilities run by qualified childcare providers looking after groups of up to five children (or only three children, if at least one of them is younger than one year of age), set in home-like conditions. The childcare hours depend on the needs of the parents. In order to benefit from this service, you need to assist the carer for 8 hours per week (personally or through a volunteer).

Junior clubs (klub malucha) - small facilities where children can stay for up to 5 hours per day (the facilities can also be used, for example, twice a week or for two hours every day - depending on the needs). The main objective of the clubs is to provide a place where children can develop, play and interact with each other. These facilities are mainly intended for children between 1.5 - 3 years old and prepare them to move on to nursery school. They are often run by community centres or municipal cultural centres.

Enrolment

Admission to day cares and other facilities for young children is open year round. Many institutions start the enrolment process in January for the subsequent school year (which means that the child will be admitted in September). Parents can apply to any facility, irrespective of its location - in practice, living in the area increases the chances of the child getting accepted. Also parents in employment or education, lone parents, parents of disabled children and parents whose other children already attend the facility have a better chance of their child being accepted.

The rules of applying for day care places differ depending on the city. Sometimes it is enough to visit the facility and complete the application form there and then, other times online registration is required (in such a case, once the form has been completed, it needs to be printed out, signed and submitted to the facility of choice). In some cities, it is possible to submit applications to several day cares, while in others you can only apply to one. After submitting an application for the child to be enrolled at the facility, it's worth asking how long the processing of the application takes and if the parents are going to be notified once it's been done. Sometimes day cares post up a list of the accepted children and require a final confirmation from the parents - so you should familiarise yourself with the procedure beforehand to avoid losing your place.

Public day cares are run by municipal bodies - so their operation and costs differ from one city to another. Information about day cares and admission terms can be found on websites dedicated to your municipality (district). In Warsaw, more information can be accessed on:

www.zlobki.waw.pl

Day care starter kit:

- nappies
- wet wipes
- change of clothes
- socks for infants, slippers for older children
- feeding kit (milk bottles/beaker)
- pillow and blanket
- dummy with cover (if the child uses one)
- favourite toy

Operating hours and payments

Day cares are usually open between 7AM and 5PM. In general, children can't stay at day care for more than 9 hours per day. Private facilities sometimes offer evening or weekend services at an extra charge.

Day care fees include provision of care and food for the child and, in case of public day cares, they usually range from PLN 350 to 500 per month (for private facilities, it is between PLN 800 and up to PLN 1500). Daytime childminding services cost about the same as a place at day care - but you have to add the costs of food, which needs to be prepared by the parents beforehand and brought to the facility every day. In case of junior clubs, the fees depend on the number of hours the child spends at the facility.

Your child can't go to day care when they are sick. If the child is sick and absent from day care for a prolonged period of time - the fees are reduced (each facility has its own regulations in this regard). Parents facing financial difficulties can apply for a reduction or complete exemption from fees - please ask for more information at the day care or at a municipal body (social welfare centre).

Food and daily routine

Younger children at day care are fed breast milk provided by their mom (upon request) or milk formula. They sleep when they need to. Twice a day, children are taken outside to get some fresh air. This means that the care service mostly involves tending to their needs. The older the children get - the more time they spend playing together, participating in various activities organised to support their development (the range of such activities depends on the day care itself). Older children are fed according to the principles of introducing various foods into children's diet. When they have learnt to do so, they eat by themselves at specific times. Day cares adjust the meals to the children's needs. If your child is allergic or has any other special needs in terms of nutrition - please let the facility know.

In case of daytime childminders, the parents are responsible for preparing food and delivering it to the facility.

While planning your child's stay at day care, junior club or with a childminder, please remember that none of them can replace the parents' love and care. The more time you spend with your young child, the better for them - especially during the first three years of their life. Plan your use of the services offered by the above facilities in such a way as to ensure that your child spends the most of their time with... you.

Preschoolers

In Poland, there is no legal obligation for children to attend nursery school. However, many educators encourage parents to use such facilities – because they teach children various social skills, show them how to function in a group and help children prepare for their further school education. Foreigners have the same right to use the services offered by nursery schools as Polish citizens and must obey by the same rules.

Unfortunately, the number of places available at Polish nurseries is insufficient – as a result, in some cities it may be very difficult to find a nursery for your child.

In general, nurseries accept children from the age of 3 (sometimes 2.5). Children attend nursery school for three or four years (commonly, nursery groups are called: juniors (3-year-olds), inbetweeners (4-year-olds), seniors (5-year-olds), reception year (zerówka) (6-year-olds – sometimes reception-year classes are run by nursery schools rather than primary schools).

The daily schedule differs depending on each nursery school, usually children arrive at the facility between 7 and 9AM. They have breakfast together, play, take part in shared activities, have their lunch about noon, and then the younger groups are given some time to rest – which is known as the nap time (leżakowanie). If the weather is good – they go for a walk or play in the garden. These days, many nurseries offer various additional classes, such as foreign language lessons, dance, arts and sports classes. In most cases, there is an extra charge for participating in such classes.

Usually, there are around 10-25 children in a nursery group, looked after by two female employees. Additional teachers may hold extra classes: English, dance etc. Nursery schools usually close at 5PM.

How to enrol your child at a nursery school?

Nursery enrolment opens in March (and children start attending school in September). In most cities, the admission process is completed over the Internet, by filling out the application form – however, according to the law, you also have the right to fill out the form at the nursery. This is especially important for foreigners whose children don't have a PESEL number, which is required for online registration. In such a case, you can submit an application form filled out by hand to the nursery. If the form is completed online, it should also be printed out, signed and brought to the nursery of choice.

Around 6 weeks later (about mid-April), nursery schools announce the list of children who have qualified to be accepted – the parents then have a few days to confirm their intent to send the child to that particular facility. This confirmation is necessary! If the parents don't confirm their choice of the nursery – the child will be removed from the list of accepted applicants. The final list of children enrolled at the nursery is announced two weeks later (towards the end of April).

In Warsaw, information about the admission process is published on the website:

<http://edukacja.warszawa.pl/dla-uczni-i-rodzica/rekrutacja/przedszkolaki>

Nursery school costs

Public nursery schools are run by municipalities – each of them determines the fees independently. Children have the right to stay at the nursery for 5 hours free of charge, usually between 8AM and 1PM. Any additional hours at nursery are payable at the rate of one Polish złoty per hour – which means that if the child stays at nursery until 5PM, the cost comes to about PLN 80 per month. Parents also bear the costs of feeding the child at nursery (about PLN 8-10 per day). If the child's absence is reported in advance, the parents don't need to pay for childcare services nor food on that date. In addition, parents may commit to make contributions towards the Parents Board – the funds are used to buy additional stationary for the children, to organise trips, picnics etc. The fee is usually about PLN 10-40 per month, but it is not obligatory.

Families on a low income per person can apply for an exemption from nursery fees or for a reduction. This right is also shared by parents whose children have certified special educational needs. You can get more information from the nursery or the municipal social welfare centre.

The costs of private nurseries are much higher – at PLN 850 per month with board or more (over PLN 2000 in case of nurseries with English-speaking groups or other special services on offer). Quite often, apart from the monthly fee, parents need to pay the 'admission fee' – a one-off payment at the start. It is usually several hundred Polish złoty. In addition, parents are usually required to pay 100% of the fees, even if the child is temporarily absent from nursery school.

What will your child need at nursery school?

As children (3- and 4-year-olds) sleep at nursery school, some nurseries require a light duvet or blanket and a pillow (with covers), as well as light pyjamas. You will also have to provide slippers for your child, which will be kept in their locker, in a textile bag. It is also a good idea to bring a change of clothes to the nursery in case the child gets wet or dirty. Children often bring their toys with them – but all facilities have their own regulations in this regard. Each nursery school provides the parents with a list of the necessary items, known as “the nursery school starter kit” (wyprawka przedszkolaka).

You should also know that nursery schools operate differently over the summer – in July and August, only some of them are open (so-called przedszkola dyżurne).

Readiness for school – what does it mean?

5-year-olds undergo assessment at nursery to check their “school readiness” (gotowość szkolna) – a psychologist and a pedagogist examine the child's development, skills and emotions in terms of the child's readiness to learn at primary school. Their focus is not on whether the child knows the letters of the alphabet, but on how they solve problems, can they concentrate on the task, are they interested in learning new things, how do they cope with their emotions. Ultimately, the decision on when to send the child to school is made by the parents (whether they want the child to start their primary school education earlier than at 7 years of age). The specialists at the nursery school can help the parents assess the child's abilities.

It is also a good idea to keep in touch with the nursery school psychologist – who may bring any special educational needs of the child to the parents' attention. It is important to diagnose such needs early, as it makes it possible to plan the child's further education better and to quickly provide them with any support they may need.

Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centres (poradnia psychologiczno-pedagogiczna)

The job of counselling centres is to examine children with various additional educational needs and to assess their school readiness. Some counselling centres only focus on diagnosis (for example, they diagnose dyslexia or attention deficit disorders), while others also offer therapy and various developmental activities for children.

If parents want to send their child to school early or to postpone the start of the child's school education, they need to get an opinion from a psychological and pedagogical counselling centre. Such a centre will assess whether the child is ready to start their education or if they need more time before they go to school. The specialists can also check if the child is developing well or if there are any problems.

Counselling centres can issue two types of documents for the child:

- opinions (opinia) – which are guidelines for the child's school regarding their special educational needs. On the basis of such an opinion, the child can get access to additional classes at school, held on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, on the subject they have problems with.
- certificates on the need for special education (orzeczenie o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego) – such documents give children the right to special treatment (for example, to benefit from additional educational support in integrated schools, or to individual tuition) or to attend a specialist school (for example, for blind children or an integrated school).

Important! A certificate on the need for special education is not the same as a disability certificate (orzeczenie o niepełnosprawności). A disability certificate is a document issued by a special medical board. It confirms the state of the child's health. However, it does not grant the child any educational privileges. That is what the certificate on the need for special education, issued by a counselling centre, is required for. Not all disabled children are issued with certificates on the need for special education.

Hello, school!

From the age of 7, all children in Poland have the right and obligation to receive education – that's the age when their school education begins. **Irrespective of the legal status of the child or their parents, the country of origin or any other factors, the child has an obligation to be in education.**

Mandatory education ceases when the child reaches 16 years of age or graduates from lower-secondary school (gimnazjum, whichever happens first). Children still have an obligation to learn between the ages of 16 and 18 – but not necessarily at school. During that time, they can, for example, undertake a professional internship.

School enrolment

All school-age children have an obligation to pursue education. This means that they must be admitted at school.

The school obliged to accept the child is their district school (szkoła obwodowa) – the one allocated to the region where the child lives. The district school cannot refuse to accept a pupil, for example, by claiming that there are no available places. To find out which is your district school, please ask at the municipal/district government office.

Parents can also submit applications to other schools than their district one – however, such other schools do not have an obligation to accept a pupil from outside their region if there are no available places. It is also possible to apply for admission to several schools – and to make the final decision after finding out which of them are prepared to accept the child.

As it is the case with nursery schools, the child's family and personal circumstances are also important during the primary school admission process: for example, children being raised by lone parents, disabled children and children whose siblings already attend the school are given priority in the application process.

The school application process is often carried out over the Internet. Admission deadlines, a list of available schools and a step-by-step guide for Warsaw can be found at

<http://edukacja.warszawa.pl/dla-uczni-i-rodzica/rekrutacja/szkola-podstawowa>.

In other cities, information can be obtained from schools or municipal offices.

The school admission process begins in March. Parents have an obligation to take the relevant steps at specific times – you need to follow that procedure, as otherwise the child will be excluded at one of the subsequent stages of the enrolment. The process ends in May – that is when municipalities publish information on schools which still have available places. You should be aware that your child can apply to a school even after the enrolment process has ended – but they will only be accepted if there are available places.

How do schools operate

The school year starts on September 1st (or on the first working day after September 1st, if it lands on a Saturday or Sunday) and ends towards the end of June. There are no classes in the last week of June nor in the months of July and August.

Children attend classes from Monday to Friday. School holiday dates change slightly from year to year – parents are informed about them at the start of the year. Some school holidays depend on Catholic holidays:

- in December, children usually break for Christmas on 22 December (at least until December 27th, although sometimes it may be even until the first week of January),
- in winter (January-March) – winter holidays. Two weeks off school, which land on various dates depending on the province (the holidays calendar changes each year),
- in spring – during Easter (March-April) schools are closed for nearly a week,

- on national holidays – such as November 11th, 1st and 3rd of May.

Most Polish schools are co-educational – boys and girls learn together. There are schools only for boys or girls, most often they are private institutions run by Catholic religious orders.

School and costs

Education in Poland is free, but parents incur different costs, such as:

- Handbooks. Currently, some years receive free handbooks, but others need to buy them themselves.
- Insurance for the child. The school insures its pupils every year. Parents don't have to pay insurance contributions at the school, provided that they insure the child independently.
- Parents' Committee fees. The payments are collected from parents by parents. Parents' Boards operate at all schools - they represent all parents whose children attend the school. The Board collects funds and spends them on various needs of the children: competition prizes, additional classes, courses, etc.
- Trips – Usually, parents pay the costs of additional attractions organised for the children, such as: trips, visits to the cinema, theatre, the Zoo, etc. Older pupils can go on trips lasting several days (even for a week or more - so-called “green schools”, during which children learn and play at attractive tourist destinations). Participation in school trips is not obligatory.
- The class fund – are voluntary contributions made by the parents of children from one class towards various shared expenses (the costs of little attractions for the children or flowers for the teachers).

On the other hand, parents can get financial assistance to cover the costs of the child's education. Depending on the family income (if it does not exceed PLN 574 net per person), foreigners who hold the right to reside in Poland permanently on any basis, can expect:

- Extra funding for school handbooks,
- Extra funding for school dinners
- Assistance with covering the ongoing costs of the child's school activities.

More information on financial assistance available can be obtained from the school or a social welfare centre at the municipal administration office.

The rights of foreign pupils

Foreign children, especially those who don't speak Polish fluently, can get additional assistance at Polish schools. The school should offer such support without the need to apply for it.

- Additional Polish language classes - available to children who don't speak Polish fluently (2 - 5 hours per week).
- Additional compensatory classes (lekcje wyrównawcze) – lessons to help children catch up in case of any gaps in knowledge (or differences in the curriculum compared to the country where the child attended school previously - 1 hour per week on each subject in which the pupil has fallen behind, during the first year of education).

Schools with greater numbers of foreign pupils may employ a so-called cultural assistant (asystent kulturowy). It is a person who knows the language and the culture of the foreign pupils and helps the pupils and the teachers communicate on school matters. Quite often, the assistant also helps parents communicate with the school.

One of the subjects in Polish curriculum is Catholic Religion – the lessons are voluntary. All parents decide at the beginning of the year whether their child should learn Religion, Ethics, both or none or those subjects.

Rights and obligations of parents

The basic obligation of parents is to ensure that the child attends school. Education is obligatory for children aged between 7 and 18, and parents may face serious penalties for not sending their child to school. Parents have the right to receive information on how their child is doing at school. They also have an obligation to stay in contact with the school.

Parents' meetings

Polish schools operate a system of regular meetings between the class tutor (Head of Class) and the parents. Meetings organised for parents of children from one class (year) usually take place once a month and attendance is obligatory. More senior years also have "open days" once per month – when the parents have an opportunity to talk to all of their child's teachers.

If the parents don't speak English and find it difficult to communicate with the teachers – it may be a good idea to arrange a system of meetings or a method of exchanging communication with the tutor which suits the family. You could ask the teacher to contact you individually, to meet in a small group with other teachers so that one of them can act as the interpreter during the conversation, to seek help from an interpreter through a non-government agency, or to find another solution. What's important is to let the teacher know that the child is well-cared for and supported in their education – even if you find it difficult to express that directly.

Communicating with teachers

Many schools have so-called electronic class registers (dziennik elektroniczny), which let teachers share important information with parents online. They may contain information about pupils' grades, homework assignments, school trips, etc.

Children can only skip classes in justified cases, such as an illness or important family matters. Parents should inform the school about the absence or write an explanatory note to the tutor – in the electronic class register or in the pupil's daily record book (dzienniczek ucznia - a notebook which serves as a log of correspondence between the teacher and the parents).

If the child has special needs

In Poland, there is a school system in place to address children's special needs; it includes schools for children with music or sport talents. To enrol at such a school, the child needs to pass an additional exam verifying their skills or predispositions in the given discipline.

There are also schools for children who require additional educational support for a variety of reasons, for example, schools for blind, deaf, blind and deaf children, or for those with learning difficulties. Children can attend such schools if they have been issued a certificate on the need for special education (orzeczenie o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego) – a document prepared by a psychological and pedagogical counselling centre (more information on that subject can be found in the chapter on Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centres). Disabled children who are able to learn at ordinary schools are permitted to do so.

In Poland, we also have so-called integrated schools (szkoła integracyjna). Such schools have both able-bodied and disabled pupils. Classes (tuition groups) at integrated schools are smaller and quite often each group is looked after by two teachers at the same time.

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Chapter II:

Healthcare for children

Legal status and the right to healthcare

Voluntary insurance with NFZ

Voluntary insurance - policies

How to choose your paediatrician?

Medical specialists

Doctor's note

Screenings

Vaccinations

Dental care for children and malocclusion treatment

Caring for a disabled child

Emergencies

Legal status and the right to healthcare

Access to free healthcare in Poland depends on whether an individual is insured. Whereas the ability to get insurance depends on the legality of the foreigner's stay in Poland. In general, insurance is obtained after starting employment. The employer, upon signing the employment contract, is obliged to report the employee to the Social Insurance Institution - ZUS. This obligation also exists in case of a commission contract (umowa zlecenie). Please remember that an employee who signs a specific-work contract (umowa o dzieło) is not covered by insurance.

If their children and spouse are not yet insured, the employee should ask the employer to report them to ZUS. Once this has been done, we obtain medical insurance – which gives us the right to use public healthcare services free of charge.

IMPORTANT! Report the birth of your child for insurance purposes as soon as possible (through the employer or independently).

In addition, free insurance applies to:

- Refugees and persons under subsidiary protection (as part of integration programmes, for the period of 12 months from gaining protection),
- Registered unemployed persons (insurance may also cover the spouse and children),
- Insured foreigners are treated by the healthcare services in the same way as Poles. Uninsured foreigners – in general, have to pay to use healthcare services.

Voluntary insurance with NFZ (National Health Fund)

Foreigners residing in Poland legally are able to take out medical insurance independently. To do that, you should register with the National Health Fund (Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia, <http://www.nfz.gov.pl/dla-pacjenta/zalatw-sprawe-krok-po-kroku/jak-ubezpieczyc-sie-dobrowolnie/>). Next, the insurance documents should be submitted to the Social Insurance Institution (Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych, ZUS, www.zus.pl). The reference number of the form for the insurance policy holder is ZZA. The form concerning the family members of the insurance policy holder is called ZUS ZCNA. The forms can be submitted in person or by post (to the competent office, depending on the place of residence).

The costs of voluntary insurance change slightly every three months. At the time of this publication (July 2016), it comes to PLN 378.17 per month. The voluntary NFZ insurance rates are different for non-EU students – at PLN 46.80 per month.

While choosing your GP or healthcare facility, you should check if it is a public institution (usually they have a “Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia” sign by the entrance). Poland also has a comprehensive network of non-public (private) clinics and surgeries – you always have to pay to use their services.

IMPORTANT! The right to healthcare expires after 30 days from the end of a paid insurance period. This means that an employee is still insured for another month after finishing their employment. Whereas the right to healthcare for graduates of higher-secondary schools expires 6 months after graduation or removal from the student register (student being expelled). In case of students in higher education, the right to healthcare expires 4 months after they graduate from or leave university.

Individuals applying for old-age or disability pension hold the right to healthcare during the process of applying for such benefits.

Voluntary insurance - policies

You can also hold the right to healthcare on the basis of a medical insurance policy taken out before coming to Poland. The scope of medical services available to you in Poland is determined by the policy – which describes the healthcare services covered. You can take out an insurance Policy, for example, with Falck or PZU Życie S.A. The monthly cost

starts at PLN 60, depending on the scope of insurance.

Some workplaces insure their employees with companies offering healthcare packages: such as Luxmed, Medcover and others. In such a case, the employees can also use medical services (irrespective of their insurance policy) provided by the company.

How to choose your paediatrician?

Parents in Poland have the right to choose the doctor they want to treat their children – if there are several physicians in your city. You should do that as soon as possible – so that the doctor can also monitor the child's vaccinations calendar (the first vaccinations are scheduled for the 6th week of the child's life). Register your child with a medical practice and complete a form to choose your child's physician. You can change the doctor – but not more often than twice per year.

While choosing the doctor, you should consider the distance between the practice and your home, its opening hours and the doctor's general availability, whether you can communicate freely (do they speak foreign languages), the doctor's availability in emergencies, the possibility of contacting them by phone, etc.

A PESEL number is not necessary to register the child, but you should provide it to the practice once you receive it, within 6 months – otherwise, the child may be removed from the patients' list.

Detailed information on medical facilities available in your area can be obtained by calling your local branch of the National Health Fund; you can find the right number online at:

www.nfz.gov.pl.

Medical specialists

Parents can use specialist medical services after obtaining referral from their general practitioner (paediatrician, family doctor). The physician should also indicate where to find the specialist. Information about medical specialists (addresses of the facilities) can also be obtained from your medical practice. In case of some specialist services, the waiting lists are very long – so you should enquire about the waiting times at several facilities and choose the most convenient date.

Doctor's note

If the child gets sick, the physician can issue a doctor's note (*zwolnienie lekarskie*, if needed): for the child's school - to justify their absence, or for the parent – to enable them to take time off work to look after their sick child. Parents employed on the basis of employment contracts have the right to take days off when their child is sick. In case of specific work/commission contracts, days off must be individually arranged between the employee and the employer.

Screenings

Nursery and primary schools hold so-called screenings (*badania przesiewowe*) – examining the entire child population in order to detect any problems early. All children undergo screenings. Those general examinations focus on the child's development (height, weight, posture), as well as their vision and hearing. If the doctor finds any irregularities in the child's hearing, vision, posture or anything else – the parents are informed and referred to a specialist.

Screenings are free of charge.

Children's vaccinations

Vaccinations are a method of protecting children against serious contagious diseases by making children immune to such diseases.

In Poland, there are mandatory and recommended vaccinations – given to children according to a specific vaccinations calendar. The costs of mandatory vaccinations are covered by the state (if the child is insured, otherwise the parents must pay), and of recommended vaccinations – by the parents.

Currently, mandatory vaccinations include those against: tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), polio (poliomyelitis), measles, mumps, tetanus, hepatitis B and haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib).

In case of high-risk groups (such as children with nervous system diseases, chronic heart conditions, HIV-positive, after transplant surgeries) the scope of mandatory vaccinations also includes: pneumococcal vaccinations, vaccinations against chickenpox, diphtheria, tetanus and rabies.

The first vaccinations against tuberculosis and hepatitis B are given to the child in the first days of their life at the newborn's hospital ward. Subsequent vaccinations (against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B, haemophilus influenzae type B and any other recommended vaccinations), which the child should preferably receive in the 6th-8th week of their life, should be arranged with your chosen medical practice.

There are also paid combination vaccines available on the market - 5-in-1 or 6-in-1 - which immunize the body against several contagious diseases at once. Such vaccinations enable us to reduce the number of injections given to the child. However, they come at a price. A full course of 6-in-1 vaccines will cost you about PLN 800.

It is also recommended to vaccinate your child against rotavirus, pneumococcus, meningococcus and chickenpox - which are paid vaccinations. However, they are not mandatory and not all parents decide to give them to their child.

Any vaccinations can only be given when the child is healthy. If the child is sick, the doctor decides on a different vaccination date. You need to remember that all vaccinations may result in some complications, from redness and swelling in the injected area, to fever, headache, nausea, to more complex problems. However, medical professionals stress that it is better to vaccinate the child than to risk them catching a serious contagious disease.

The current vaccination recommendations can be accessed on the website of the Main Sanitary Inspectorate:

www.gis.gov.pl

in the Health/Vaccinations (Zdrowie/Szczepienia) tab, while the current information on all vaccines registered in Poland, as well as general information on vaccinations, vaccination procedures and related news can be found on:

www.szczepienia.pzh.gov.pl.

Dental care for children and malocclusion treatment

Dental care (dental, orthodontic services) can only be accessed free of charge if you are insured. Non-insured persons need to pay for dental care services. The range of free dental care services for insured children under the age of 18 includes:

- dental examination and practical advice regarding oral hygiene given once per year;
- dental check-ups three times a year;
- first molar sealants (once under 7 years of age);
- sealing all permanent teeth;
- silver nitrate dentine coating applied on baby teeth;
- cosmetic coating for enamel hypoplasia in permanent teeth;
- treatment of periodontal diseases;
- orthodontic treatment under 12 years of age – removable braces;
- 'white fillings' in incisors and canines, 'grey fillings' in other teeth;
- tooth decay treatment;
- root canal treatment of all teeth (up to three canals per tooth. If more – additional canals need to be paid for);

VACCINATION SCHEDULE

Child's age	Tuberculosis (BCG)	Hepatitis B	Diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus (DTP)	Polio	Hib	Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR)	Diphtheria, tetanus (dT)
At birth	X	I dose					
2 months old		II dose	I dose	I dose	I dose		
3-4 months old			II dose	II dose	II dose		
5-6 months old			III dose		III dose		
7 months old		III dose					
13-14 months old						I dose	
16-18 months old			IV dose	III dose	IV dose		
2 years old							
6 years old			I booster	I booster			
10 years old						I booster	
14 years old							II booster
19 years old							III booster

- anaesthesia;
- plaque removal once per year;
- treatment of lesions in the mucous membrane of the oral cavity;
- tooth removal and selected surgical procedures.

Insurance also covers an introductory visit – to familiarise the child with the dental surgery. Such visits are available to children under 6 years of age.

The child's insurance also covers malocclusion treatment:

- treatment with removable braces – up to 12 years of age;
- follow-up appointments to check braces provided as part of guaranteed benefits – under 13 years of age;
- panoramic imaging – once in the course of the orthodontic treatment;
- braces repair once per calendar year – under 13 years of age;
- corrective tooth reshaping;
- children's partial or full dentures.

Caring for a disabled child

There is a number of non-government organisations and institutions in Poland which support the parents of disabled children – helping the child enjoy and live their life to the fullest. The family circumstances and needs of all disabled children differ – so it would be difficult to describe all available forms of support here. Assistance is available to foreigners who are entitled to use social welfare services in Poland (this mostly means persons who hold the right to permanent residence in Poland, on various grounds). You should know that:

- a disability certificate issued for the child grants them access to various forms of additional support from the state;
- disabled children can access education. Depending on the degree and type of their disability, they can attend special, integrated or ordinary schools;
- there is a public support system in place for transporting children to schools;
- there is a financial support system in place for parents raising disabled children (more information can be obtained from social welfare offices), including assistance with covering the costs of rehabilitation (more information: www.pfron.org.pl)

Emergencies

In case of an emergency or accident, free assistance can be provided to persons from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, the Russian Federation and Serbia – on the basis of bilateral agreements. You must hold a valid visa to access such support services.

Free medical assistance is also available in emergencies to holders of the Pole's Card.

Other foreigners will be charged for any services used.

If human life is at risk, everyone has the right to get help from emergency services. According to art. 15 (2) (10) of the act on healthcare services financed by public funds of 17 August 2004 (consolidated text, Journal of Laws of 2008, No. 164, item 1027 as amended), emergency medical services are available free of charge to everyone, irrespective of their insurance or the legality of their stay.

Ambulance services

If life is at risk, everyone can call an ambulance (on 112).

You should know that you will be charged for unjustified callouts. This means that you should only use ambulance services when necessary.

Accident and emergency departments

There is a hospital in your area with an A&E department, which offers specialist medical services in emergency situations: if human life or health is at risk, 24/7. You can access such services in urgent, serious cases – such as breathing difficulties, poisoning, fractures, eye injuries, etc. Doctors will provide urgent help, but they won't issue a doctor's note for your workplace, don't treat chronic diseases nor provide treatment in non-urgent situations.

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Chapter III:

Financial support for families

Maternity allowance

Family benefits after the birth (so-called kosiniakowe)

Newborn allowance

Family allowance

Supplemental allowance to family allowance

Large Family Card

Family 500+ allowance

Support for disabled children

Family tax credits

Child support

Maternity allowance

Women employed on the basis of employment contracts, operating their own business or working on the basis of a commission contract and making voluntary medical insurance contributions have the right to maternity leave (zasitek macierzyński), during which they can collect benefits at the value of 100% of their previous earnings. Maternity leave can last up to 20 weeks (at least 14 weeks must be taken by the mother after the birth).

The law also provides for additional parental leave – supplemental 32 weeks of leave (which can also be taken by the child's father in some cases). During that time, the parent has the right to receive 60% of their previous earnings.

If during the first two weeks after the birth the woman applies for both types of leave and allowance simultaneously – the maternity and the parental leave – she will receive 80 per cent of her earnings for the entire duration of both leaves.

You should apply for leave or allowance at your workplace – before you can start collecting the allowance.

You should also know that the right to maternity leave also applies to women whose employment contract expires soon after the birth. The woman keeps the right to claim allowance during the entire maternity leave, even if the contract expires earlier. In such a case, the allowance is paid out by ZUS (Social Insurance Institution - the employer should submit the employee's records to ZUS).

Family benefits after the birth (so-called kosiniakowe)

The Polish law also provides for allowance for people who are not insured with ZUS (mothers, or in some cases fathers) for the first 52 weeks after the birth (this period is slightly longer if you give birth to twins or triplets – 65 and 67 weeks respectively). The benefit is also available to foreigners who hold a Polish residence card with the provision on “access to the labour market”, as well as refugees and individuals subject to subsidiary protection.

The benefit amount is PLN 1000 per month and it is considered non-taxable family income (tax is not payable on it, but it is taken into consideration while calculating family income for the purpose of claiming other benefits). It is available, for example, to students, non-insured individuals, persons employed on the basis of specific-work (umowa o dzieło) and commission (umowa zlecenie) contracts.

The benefit is not available in the two following cases:

- if at least one parent receives maternity allowance,
- if both parents wish to claim parental allowance at the same time and for the same child.

Various institutions may be responsible for paying out this benefit, depending on the place of your residence. The municipal or district office can provide more information on where to submit an application form to.

Newborn allowance (becikowe)

The newborn allowance is one-time financial aid due in relation to giving birth to a child, in the amount of PLN 1000 per one child. This benefit is also available to foreigners who hold a Polish residence card with the provision on “access to the labour market”, as well as refugees and individuals subject to subsidiary protection.

In order to receive newborn allowance, your family income per one person must not exceed PLN 1922 net, and you need to provide evidence that the mother remained under a doctor's care during her pregnancy (from week 10 onwards).

Applications for the newborn allowance can be submitted until the child reaches one year of age. Families on a very low income (under PLN 674 per person) can apply for an additional PLN 1000 as a supplement to the newborn allowance.

The newborn allowance is paid out by municipal and communal social welfare centres.

Family allowance (zasiłek rodzinny)

Family allowance is a family benefit which helps cover some of child maintenance costs. The right to this allowance also applies to foreigners who:

- hold a Polish residence card with the provision on “access to the labour market” (except for students and holders of short-term residence cards – issued for periods of less than 6 months);
- hold the status of a refugee or are subject to subsidiary protection.

Applications for family benefits should be submitted to the municipal/district office in your area of residence.

Family benefit	Children up to 5 years of age	Children aged 5-18	Children aged 19-24
	PLN 89 / month	PLN 118 / month	PLN 129 / month

The monthly benefit is paid out to the parents, one parent, legal guardians or actual guardians of the child, or to a person aged over 18 and remaining in education, if they are not under the care of their parents. It can be claimed for children under 18 years of age. The allowance can also be paid out to persons up to 21 years old, if they are continuing their education, as well as to disabled persons (with moderate or severe disability) up to 24 years of age, if they are in school or at university.

The benefit is not available to children placed in facilities that provide all-day maintenance, nor to young people who are married. The child benefit is also not available to parents who already collect such aid in another country. The law also specifies some cases in which the benefit is not payable after the parents' divorce (please note that after the divorce, the right to family benefits stays with the parent who takes actual care of the child).

Eligibility for family allowance depends on the family income. The benefit may be granted if the family's average monthly income per person or the income of an individual attending school/university does not exceed PLN 674.00. Income is a net amount at the family's disposal after paying taxes and mandatory contributions. In case of children who have been issued a disability certificate, moderate or severe disability certificate, family allowance may be granted if the family's average monthly income per one person or the income of an individual attending school/university does not exceed PLN 764.00.

Information on the application process and the required documents for Warsaw residents is available here (in Polish): <http://www.um.warszawa.pl/zalatyw-sprawe-w-urzedzie/sprawa-w-urzedzie/pryzyznanie-zasilku-rodzinnego>.

Your district or municipal office can provide you with information on the available family benefits.

You can find a lot of useful information about family aid in Poland at:

www.rodzina.gov.pl

and

<http://www.mpips.gov.pl/wsparcie-dla-rodzin-z-dziecmi/swiadczenia-rodzinne/>

Important! You can't apply for family benefits for children who remain in the country of the parent's origin – even if the parent regularly supports the child financially. Allowance may only be granted (if other criteria are met) for children staying with the parent in Poland.

Supplemental allowance

Persons who claim family allowance can also apply for allowance supplemental to family allowance:

- supplemental allowance for multi-child families (PLN 90/month for the third and each subsequent child)
- lone parent allowance (PLN 185/month, if the parent looks after one child or PLN 370/month, if they take care of more than one child)
- supplemental allowance for persons on child care leave (PLN 400/month)
- school allowance – for school supplies at the start of the school year – PLN 100 per child (one-off payment)

You can apply for the supplemental allowance at the district/municipal office competent for your place of residence. Allowance can only be granted for children staying with their parent(s) in Poland.

Large Family Card

Families with three or more children can apply for the so-called Large Family Card. It is available to foreigners who hold a Polish permanent residence card, the refugee status or are under subsidiary protection and are staying in

Poland with at least three children under the age of 18 (or under 25 in case of children in education).

The card offers lots of financial savings – such as cheaper train tickets, discounts on admission tickets to theme parks, cinema, museums etc.

More information about the Large Family Card:

<https://www.mpips.gov.pl/wsparcie-dla-rodzin-z-dziecmi/karta-duzej-rodziny/czym-jest-karta-duzej-rodziny/>

Large Family Card partners search engine:

<https://rodzina.gov.pl/duza-rodzina/wyszukiwanie-partnerow-karty-duzej-rodziny>

Family 500+ (Rodzina 500+)

In 2016, the Polish government introduced a benefit for parents raising children in Poland, irrespective of their income, for the second and each subsequent child. The benefit is payable until the child reaches 18 years of age. This means that if a family has three children (aged 8, 12 and 17), they will receive monthly allowance at the amount of PLN 1000 (for two children). Whereas if a family has three children (aged 8, 12 and 19), they will receive monthly allowance at the amount of PLN 500 (the 19-year-old is not considered and the benefit is only granted for the second, underage child).

In case of families whose monthly income per person does not exceed PLN 800 net, the benefit is also payable for the first child (for disabled children, the income threshold is PLN 1200).

The 500+ programme is available to foreigners who hold:

- a permanent stay permit or a long-term EU resident permit for Poland,
- a temporary stay and work permit,
- a temporary stay permit issued to reunify a family, provided that they are living with the child in Poland in the period covered by the benefit.

Important! If you hold the right to work on the basis of the Polish law but there is no entry of that on your permit (no provision on “access to the labour market”), you should apply for your residence permit to be replaced. Without that remark, you have no access to family benefits.

Applications for the Family 500+ benefit should be submitted to the municipal/district office competent for the place of the applicant's residence. The programme provides for benefits to be paid out until September 2017, after that applications will have to be submitted once a year.

The procedure is very simple when applying for allowance for the second and each subsequent child (you just need to complete the application form). For the first child, parents also need to demonstrate their income (earnings, but also any other income: child support/alimony payments, grants, benefits, income obtained abroad –parents must submit declarations on such income).

The waiting time for your benefit payment is up to three months.

Caring for a disabled child

The social system in Poland provides extra support for disabled children. As discussed before, the benefits are available to foreigners who hold a residence card with the provision on “access to the labour market”, a refugee status or are under subsidiary protection.

The available forms of support include:

- attendance allowance (zasiłek pielęgnacyjny) - PLN 153/month for looking after a child who has been issued a disability certificate

- attendance benefit (świadczenie pielęgnacyjne) – PLN 1300 /month for the child's parent or guardian who gives up employment to look after the disabled child. In such a case, the parent loses the right to perform any work (for example, they can't enter into a specific-work contract).
- carer's benefit (zasiłek dla opiekunów) – PLN 520/month for the parents and guardians of disabled persons over the age of 18 who require ongoing care.

To obtain support for your disabled child (financial, but also social and medical support), you will need a disability certificate (orzeczenie o niepełnosprawności). To receive it, you should apply to the Poviato Disability Evaluation Board (Powiatowy Zespół ds. Orzekania o Niepełnosprawności) competent for your place of residence. More information can be obtained from municipal and district offices.

Tax credits for families (*ulgi podatkowe*)

If you have a child, you are entitled to tax credits. This means that you can deduct a certain amount from the tax due while doing your annual tax return. With tax credits, the tax amount you need to pay will be lower, which usually means (depending on your personal circumstances) that you will receive a tax refund after submitting your tax return for the year.

Tax credits are available:

- for each child under 18,
- for each disabled child who receives attendance allowance (benefit) or social pension,
- for each child up to the age of 25 who remains in education and whose income does not exceed PLN 3089 (this amount does not include family pension).

Tax credits depend on the number of children, length of marriage and income. If a family has more than one child, they are entitled to tax credits irrespective of the income.

You can apply for tax credits via the tax return form (PIT form) submitted each year. Some non-government organisations, such as, among others, the Polish Migration Forum, can assist you with completing the tax form.

You should know that family and attendance benefits and allowances are not taxable - these forms of government assistance are exempt from tax.

Child support

Child support means funds paid by one parent to another to cover part of the costs of the child's maintenance after the divorce. The amount of child support payable is determined by a family court, depending on the earnings of the parent responsible for paying child support.

In addition, there is the Child Maintenance Fund (Fundusz Alimentacyjny) in place in Poland, which provides assistance for children whose parents don't pay the child support ordered by court (you need to demonstrate that child support was granted by court but has not been paid for over two months). Maintenance allowance received from the Child Maintenance Fund may not exceed PLN 500 a month. Only parents whose income per family member does not exceed PLN 725 net per month can apply for such assistance, for children up to 18 years of age (or up to 24 years old – in case of children in education, or with no age limit – in case of children with severe disability).

Maintenance allowance paid out by the Fund is only available to foreigners staying in Poland on the basis of a permanent residence permit, holding the refugee status or under subsidiary protection, as well as those originating from countries with which Poland has signed bilateral agreements on social assistance (such as Ukraine, Moldova, USA, Canada, South Korea, Japan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia).

More information on the Child Maintenance Fund can be accessed here:

<http://www.mpips.gov.pl/wsparcie-dla-rodzin-z-dziecmi/fundusz-alimentacyjny/>



Chapter IV:

Diet of children aged between 0-12 months

Breastfeeding – the best thing for your child

If you don't want to or can't breastfeed...

Is my child eating enough?

Diet of children aged between 6 and 12 months

The science of children's nutrition is developing very quickly. It is happening so fast that the recommendations should change on average every 3 years. The most recent baby feeding chart was prepared in 2015. It is vital to remember that today's recommendations could change in a year or maybe in just several months. Currently, the Polish Paediatric Association is discussing changes concerning the supplementation of vitamin K in breastfed newborns and infants. For that reason, please don't treat the information found in this brochure as valid for ever. Try to search for the newest findings on children's nutrition published by respectable sources, such as the educators from Zdrowo Jemy, Zdrowo Rośniemy and Instytut Matki i Dziecka (Mother and Child Institute).

This publication contains some key information on the subject of the diet of young children. Please remember that these are recommendations for the population of healthy children. If you want to establish an individual nutrition plan or therapeutic diet for your child, you should contact a paediatric nutrition specialist.

Breastfeeding - the best thing for your child

The best way to support your child's health and correct development is breastfeeding. We know more and more about lactation and are aware that the mother's milk adjusts to the child's individual needs, is perfectly composed and contains all nutrients and non-nutrients (with a small exception of vitamin D3 and K). Breast milk is easily absorbed and is a source of long-chain unsaturated fatty acids, which support the development of the nervous system, the brain and vision. Breastfeeding you also enables you to strengthen your child immune system – as milk contains compounds which boost their immunity and help them fight any infections.

While breastfeeding, you should remember that:

- The child should be fed upon request. This means that you should give them your breast every time you see that they need it and every time you need it.
- Lactation may be difficult to start with - about 3-4 days after the birth, your milk will “come in”. Your breasts will

become tender, painful and hard. You can ease the symptoms by giving your breast to the baby as often as possible, however, that may also prove to be painful. Chewed nipples hurt and may put you off from breastfeeding. In such a case, don't hesitate to get a breast pump and try to express some milk. You can get support and advice from lactation clinics (poradnia laktacyjna), which operate at most maternity hospitals.

- In the early stages of your baby's life, they may eat very often. This is caused by hunger, thirst, as well as their need to be close to you. Be patient and ensure that you are comfortable during the feeds. It is a good idea to prepare some meals for yourself in advance - especially if you are going to be home alone with the baby for most of the day. Trying to cook yourself dinner with a baby that's always hungry can be a challenge. Remember that your health, diet and wellbeing are as important as the baby's. Just as they are the most important thing in the world to you right now, you are the centre of their universe. Look after yourself.
- You should supplement your diet with long-chain unsaturated fatty acids (DHA). They occur naturally in breast milk, but their amount depends on the mom's diet. In our Polish cuisine, there is a DHA deficiency - they are naturally found in seawater fish, which, due to high prices, are not very popular in Poland. Therefore, you should supplement them in your diet.
- Remember to give your child vitamin D at the amount of 400 international units (IU) per day, all year round.
- Remember to supplement vitamin K from the 15th day of the child's life until they reach 3 months of age¹.
- If you breastfeed your child, do not give them extra water. Even in hot weather – the child may want to feed more often, but the mom's milk satisfies all their needs fully.
- The World Health Organisation recommends that during the first six months of the child's life, they should only eat breast milk.
- There are no recommendations on breastfeeding upper-age limits - just trust your instincts.
- Watch out for salt and sugar – limit their consumption in your diet (it's important to shape the right dietary habits in the child, as well as for your own health). Learn about the health pyramid and plan your meals accordingly.
- On the Internet, in magazines, and sometimes even at doctor's surgeries you can find contradictory information on the diet of breastfeeding moms. Remember – there are no special recommendations on your nutrition during the lactation stage. Your diet should be varied, rational, based on high-quality, fresh products. Pay attention to the ingredients of the products you buy and choose the least processed ones.

What you eat influences the smell and taste of your milk, which your child won't always like. For example, the smell of garlic or vegetables that cause gas (such as green peas, beans, cabbage) may not meet with your baby's approval. However, there is no proof to show that such products influence breast milk composition or cause colic. There is also no evidence to suggest that allergens (such as milk or citrus fruit) should be eliminated from your diet preventively. A breastfeeding mom's diet does not contribute to allergies in the child. You and your child are the best indicator of what is good or bad. If there are products that make you feel bad (for example, cabbage) or if you can see that they make your child uneasy, give the child stomach ache and make them cry – eliminate them from your diet. If there are a lot of such products – you should always consult a dietician to avoid creating deficiencies in your own diet.

If you don't want to or can't breastfeed...

If for whatever reason you can't or don't want to breastfeed – choose infant formula. Don't give your child goats' or cows' milk. The composition of infant milk formula has been changed to closely resemble breast milk. For example, the protein composition is changed to make it more easily absorbable for the baby. Also the long-chain unsaturated fatty acid contents are increased, with added minerals, vitamins (D, A, C) and probiotics. The amount of iron and iodine is also increased, while sodium, potassium and chlorine contents are decreased. But we can't replicate the ideal, natural solution – milk formula contents don't adjust during the feeds. It doesn't change to meet the child's current needs and does not protect the child like their mom's milk. However, if you decide not to, or are unable to feed your baby naturally – this will be the second best option for them.

¹ Works are currently ongoing on the new recommendations for vitamin K supplementation in infants. Most likely, supplementation will only be recommended for children who were administered vitamin K orally straight after the birth, and will not be necessary for infants who were given vitamin K by intramuscular injections. Follow the recommendations of the Polish Paediatric Association (Polskie Towarzystwo Pediatriczne) or consult a neonatologist.

While choosing an infant formula, remember:

- To choose the right type of formula – formulas for children in the first 6 months of their life are marked with the number 1.
- To choose the right dummy for the bottle. The best choice are anatomical pacifiers which resemble a woman's nipple – eating through such a dummy means that the child needs to “make an effort” to get the milk out, which supports the correct development of their speech organ (mouth) and stimulates their digestive system.
- Milk formulas differ in terms of taste and smell. If your child doesn't want to eat the one you chose, try another one.
- Infant formulas marked with the 'HA' symbol are hypoallergenic and can be used to prevent food allergies. Formulas marked as 'AR' can be used if your baby suffers from possetting. Formulas marked as 'Pre' or 'nenatal' are intended for preterm babies (born before the end of the 37th week of pregnancy, such formula should be used according to the doctor's orders). Formulas described as 'mieszanka elementarna' (elemental mixture) are intended for children with food allergies – the protein has been broken down into amino acids, which do not cause an allergic reaction. Unfortunately, this affects the taste and smell of the formula. Such formulas are available in Poland on prescription.
- Just like with breastfeeding – children under 6 months of age should be fed their formula when they ask for it. The portion size specified on the packaging is an approximate value – always consider the child's appetite. Don't hesitate - if the child is still hungry after the feed, increase the amount you give them. If you have prepared too much formula for them – don't panic.

Is my child eating enough?

However you feed your baby, moms often worry if their child is gaining enough weight. Remember that the newborn's stomach is the size of your pinky nail – even if you think you are not producing milk – the child probably satisfies their hunger. The best way to check whether the child is eating enough is to measure their weight and body length. If the child is developing normally and the centile growth chart indicates that their development is proportional – you have nothing to worry about. You don't have to make that assessment yourself – the paediatrician will do it at each appointment.

Diet of children aged between 6 and 12 months

Once the child reaches six months of age, it is time to expand their diet. Keep giving them milk when they ask for it. Apart from that, start introducing solid foods. It doesn't matter what you introduce first, but it's best to start with vegetables – they are less sweet than fruit, which will make the child more inclined to eat them.

The key rules of adding new products to your child's diet are:

- Introduce new products separately (start from single-ingredient products), in small quantities and observe the child's reaction. In case of any problems – talk to your paediatrician.
- The portion size should be adjusted to the child's needs. It doesn't matter that baby food jars are portioned. Some children eat a little more, and others eat a little less. Remember: you decide what to give to your child, and the child decides what to choose from the products you offer them and how much to eat.
- Adjust the consistency of the meal to the stage of the child's development. When the teeth come out, it is time for less mashed products. A one-year-old should be able to chew and swallow solid foods with ease.
- If you are giving the child infant formula – start using formula marked as "2".
- Let your child be independent – give them a spoon to play with, let them eat with their hands, give them the beaker.
- Remember that a child is not a little adult – they have different nutritional needs and taste preferences than us. So don't add seasoning to children's food. Don't add salt or sugar.
- Continue to supplement vitamin D3.
- Remember not to give your child honey until they reach one year of age.





Chapter V:

Children's diet over the next few years of their life

Children over one year of age move onto the so-called family table model, which means that they sit at the table with the family at mealtimes. That doesn't mean that they should eat the same things we do. The child's quickly developing body has completely different needs.

Once the child has reached the age of one, milk is still very important in their diet. Their mom's milk is still the best option for them. The World Health Organisation recommends to continue breastfeeding even up to 2-3 years of age. If you give your child infant formula – remember to change it after their first birthday to formula marked as "3".

Infant formula should be given to the child for as long as possible. Apart from breast milk (which can't be beat), it is the most suitable product for the child's needs.

Children over one year of age should have 5 meals a day at fixed times.

While cooking for your child, you should stick to the following rules:

- Choose high-quality products, unprocessed if possible. Read the ingredients list and choose products with the smallest number of ingredients and short use-by dates.
- Don't add extra sugar.
- Don't add extra salt. You can easily replace salt with herbal seasoning. It will also be better for you and other adults in your family.
- Choose the right cooking techniques: boil, bake, stew, but avoid frying.
- Give the child low-mineralised spring water to drink. Avoid giving them fruit juices. Remember that your child should drink more than 1 litre of water per day.
- Limit sweets. Instead, give the child dried fruit. If you decide to include sweets in their diet, choose dough cake, sponge cake and dark chocolate. Avoid pastry cakes with rich creams and chocolate with fillings.
- Let the child be independent. Don't force, but encourage them to eat. Allow them to say no to food.
- Cook and eat together with the child. Go shopping together, explain to them what is good and bad for you. Look after your own diet – they will learn about food from you.
- Give the child butter. Don't use plant margarine.
- Don't give them fish more than twice a week.
- Continue to supplement vitamin D3 at the dose of 800 UI, all year round.



Chapter VI:

Supporting the child's development from birth to 2 years old

Love, self-esteem and fresh air

Learn about your child's brain

Understanding your child

Stages of your child's development

Year one - closeness and breastfeeding

Year two - vital steps to independence

From the first day of their life, a child learns about the world around them and slowly puts together an image of themselves and the world in their head: they learn whether the world is safe for them, whether they can trust people around them, believe in themselves and follow their dreams. When the child is six or seven, their basic beliefs about themselves and the world have already been established. At later stages of their life, those beliefs are usually reinforced and play a vital, decisive role in how the child deals with different emotions, builds relations with others, learns and makes decisions.

Love, self-esteem and fresh air

Supporting the child's development has nothing to do with accelerating that process, sending the child to lots of extra classes or buying them a mountain of toys and gadgets. It is best to limit the time they spend in front of the TV, computer or tablet and to choose active recreation and playing outdoors instead. You should make sure that the child feels they are loved and accepted, and that their parents have time for them.

While looking after a child from the first day of their life, the parents should know that every word they say to the child is significant. The way they react to the child's needs, answer their questions, but also how they interact with each other and with people around them is important. During the first few years of the child's life, the parents can give them strength and self-belief, which the child will use and benefit from in the future.

A vision of the future - a task for the parents:

Imagine your child as a young, nearly adult person, starting their independent life, looking for their own path, building their independence and relations with others.

Think about what kind of person you would like your child to become. It is not about their profession, hobbies or living arrangements, but about their personality traits they will need as an adult.

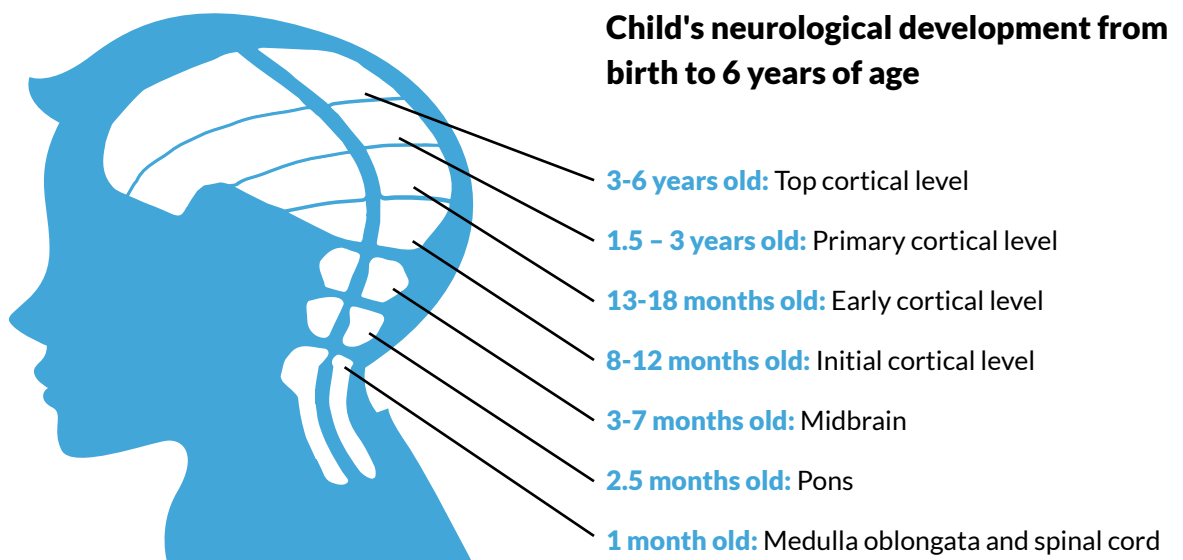
Should they be independent, brave, creative?

If we want to see such traits in them as a young person, we need to reinforce those traits when they are still very young. Children who are mainly encouraged to do as they are told, to follow instructions and satisfy the adults' expectations (i.e. very well-behaved children) will not know how to be creative and assertive in the future, how to pursue their goals and follow their dreams.

Think about what you can do to reinforce the traits in your child which they will need in the future, rather than traits that will make the child "easier to deal with" right now - in their early childhood.

Learn about your child's brain

Ever since birth, your child's brain is the fastest growing organ. However, not all of its functions are available to the child straight away.



In the first trimester, the newborn mainly uses the lower parts of the brain and depends on instincts and reflexes.

From about the third month of age up to a year, your child's thinking patterns and general functioning are mainly based on emotions.

Logical thinking, so familiar and understandable for adults, starts developing around the age of one. At that time, the child gains the ability to understand cause and effect. However, it will still be a while before the child is able to use that skill in their daily life.

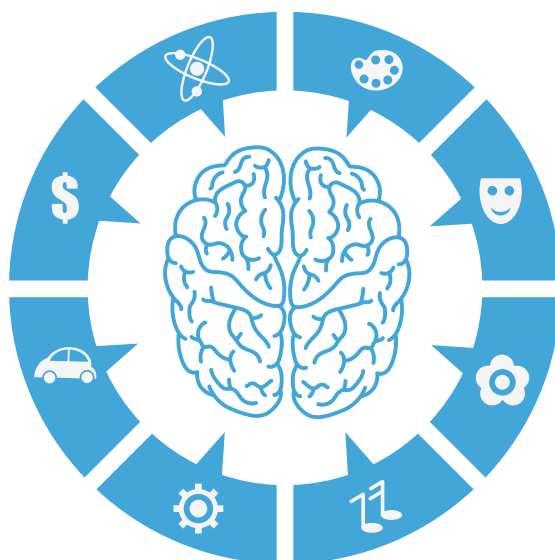
Around the age of two, children understand a lot and still want to learn much more, but they can't yet use the

knowledge they receive. They never stop asking “what's that?” and are curious about everything. They may already be familiar with the rules of the family or peer group, but they aren't always able to follow them. The activation mechanism works much faster and stronger than the 'stop' mechanism. This means that children who want to do something naughty will do it so quickly that they won't get a chance to remember that they shouldn't be doing it. They surely have known for a while what they can and cannot do, but they just can't stop themselves yet.

Around the age of three, children start asking “why”? – which is an important sign that the development of their brain has reached another vital stage. At that age, children need to learn about cause and effect, they also start to develop their deductive skills. At that time, the child is very creative, and the parents may be concerned that the child fantasises or even lies. It's nothing like that – it is just a sign of the brain's fast development.

The brain of a six- and seven-year-old becomes ready for school education, as the ability to use letters and numbers, even as part of increasingly more complex thought processes, is developed.

Apart from the brain developing from the inside, from the spinal cord upwards, new cognitive skills appear, and at the same time various functions of both hemispheres become more specialised.



The left hemisphere is responsible for:

- development and speech
- logical thinking
- understanding and using numbers
- maths skills
- arranging, categorizing
- understanding letters, reading, writing
- linguistic skills
- reasoning
- understanding cause and effect
- seeking and keeping order

The right hemisphere is responsible for:

- sense of rhythm and rhyme
- sensing, remembering and creating melodies and music
- creating and remembering images
- intuition
- seeing and using colours and patterns
- spatial perception
- experiencing emotional states
- ability to act in chaos

Both brain hemispheres are needed and used by every person. However, in children under six, the right hemisphere is dominant. At that age, children are not fully able to think logically, to predict the consequences or to control their emotions, as these skills are developed later in life, when the child reaches school age. But remember that the greatest achievements the world sees require a great imagination, intuition and the ability to break the existing and commonly accepted moulds.

Understanding your child

As part of their development, each child goes through more and less difficult stages. Children's bodies and minds, as well as behaviours and skills, are predictable to some extent. Of course, children can also surprise their parents, who often don't see the logic in their child's actions. However, if you look closely and carefully, you may find that as a parent you can learn more from your child than from any parent guidebooks.

For years, scientists have argued and concluded that the child's intellect and various talents depend on both their genes and the environment they grow up in. Also the child's behaviour depends on various factors, such as:

- their natural predispositions and temperament
- the stage of the child's development
- specific situations in which the child finds themselves in
- the way they are treated by the parents and others.

Stages of the child's development

From the day they are conceived, the child keeps developing every day:

- they grow and gain weight – this is physical development
- they learn to think and use their brain's abilities – this is mental development
- they learn to move around and use their bodies – this is motor development
- they learn to understand and control their emotions – this is emotional development
- they learn to live among other people – this is social and interpersonal development

Physical development is a continuous process which starts at the time of conception. After the birth, the parents enjoy seeing how the child grows and gains weight. It is clearly evident from the fact that the child no longer fits in clothes they wore a week earlier. The child grows a little every day.



As part of their cognitive and motor development, the child makes small or slightly bigger leaps. Children observe the environment, collect information, prepare themselves, start practising a skill, and when the "get it" – they love repeating it and are happy about their new abilities. Some time later, they see some new possibilities and start preparing to gain new skills.



Emotional and interpersonal development happens continuously, but it is possible to distinguish periods of balanced, calm behaviour and crisis periods. All well-developing children go through better and worse periods and the parents shouldn't be concerned about that. If the child used to be cheerful and open to others, and now they start being shy and hide behind their parents, it is very possible that they are just discovering a new complex emotion - shyness/embarrassment, and observing how people around them react to someone showing this emotion. When a preschooler starts to play and interact with other children, some of these relations will be difficult and incomprehensible for them and thus won't let the child satisfy their needs. As a result, the child will get upset. They may try very hard to be good at nursery, and then have a breakdown at home when they are among loving and understanding people. It is usually a sign that the child is going through a more difficult phase of learning how to function in the world with other people around and how to deal with frustration.



Individual stages of development of all healthy children occur in the same order. Of course, they may take a little bit longer in some children than in others, be a little more intense in some, and barely noticeable in others. Each child deals with them differently, depending on their potential, environment, parental support, health. Knowing those stages lets us better understand our child and help them deal with the challenges they face.

For example: If a one-year-old is very keen to throw around everything they find in the laundry basket, a drawer or a toy box, we should be glad that they have reached an important stage in their development, that they see the logic in their actions, like repetition and are happy to watch how when we throw something in the air, it falls back down. If a two-year-old does that, we should rather think that they are looking for a way to release their emotions and to get our attention, and expect that they will get very angry when we stop them. Whereas when we see a six-year-old playing in this way, they must be looking for a specific item and we can easily ask them to put everything away afterwards.

Year one – closeness and breastfeeding

The time from birth to 3 months of age is known as the so-called fourth trimester of the pregnancy!

An infant is still unstable physiologically and emotionally. They are completely dependent on how their parents read and react to their needs. Most of all, a newborn needs warmth and closeness, as they make the child feel safe. The best thing the parents can give them during that period is unlimited access to physical affection, which involves breastfeeding, carrying, cuddling and rocking the child.

3 to 6 months of age

It is a period of greater stability, as the mom and the child know each other better by now. The child starts to interact with the surroundings, is interested in toys and people. Usually they eat well from the breast and their sleep routine is rather regular.

6 to 12 months of age

It is a period of an increased mobility, the child starts crawling and walking, and new foods are introduced. The child has a lot of new experiences and may feel uneasy. They start to have dreams, so children who used to sleep well at night may start waking up screaming. Children who used to be calm may start crying when the mom leaves the room or when they see a face they don't recognise. This is not a step backwards, they are just learning a new important skill.

During each stage of the child's development in the first year of their life, the child needs order and predictability, as they make the child feel safe. Children also need their changing emotions to be accepted and respected. An infant doesn't understand those emotions, but they experience them very strongly. Quite often they don't know why they feel nervous, tired or scared. So they need the parents to help them understand and deal with such feelings. The most important things are always closeness, calmness and the parent's readiness to help their little one.

Children are born with an amazing ability to read and adjust their own emotions to the emotions of the person talking to them. It is called syntony. A newborn doesn't understand the meaning of the words spoken to them. But they can read our attitude, emotions and intentions. By observing the facial expression of the person caring for them, the child adjusts and starts acting in a similar way.

Children of women who have suffered from postnatal depression develop their emotional expressions in a very limited scope, are more uneasy and tearful as they reflect their mom's emotions.

In order to understand your child better, you should start by fully accepting their individualism. All children are different, some are calm, others tend to be more nervous. Some love sleeping, while others find it hard to fall asleep. Some enjoy lying in their pram, while others get uneasy straight away. It is important to remember that children are who they are – and the way they are is not a punishment nor a reward for the parents. Each child, even a “difficult” one, needs unconditional love and support from their parents, and trusts them to provide it.

Year two – vital steps to independence

12 months

The child is quite stable emotionally, they like to play, to have an audience, they have better motor skills, are more confident and cooperate with the parents.

15 months

It is a period of rapid development of new skills, which the child can't keep up with. They run around, throw objects, don't like restrictions. When they are prohibited to do something, they get very angry, but only for a short while.

18 months

The child is very active, rebellious, they do everything the opposite way, want everything for themselves - preferably straight away. They haven't learnt to play or share with others yet. It will come later.

2 years

It is a period of stability, good motor and language skills, the child is able to express their needs better, so they get frustrated less often. They can wait a little while, pay attention to others and are easier to be around.

When the child reaches the age of one, it is possible to start introducing the rules of the family and their environment more effectively, and at the same time to show them the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. It is important to remember that it is the parents' task to set out reasonable boundaries, and it is the child's task to cross them and question the rules. This enables the child to understand the social rules rather than just obey them. Rules and limitations don't have to be set once for all, they won't be needed at all times. It is much more effective to adopt a reasonable and flexible approach to various situations than to be stubborn and stick to the rules we once set.

For example: one- and two-year-olds should know that they can't play with knives from the kitchen drawer, but a school-age child should be able to make themselves a sandwich. This means that somewhere between the ages of 3 and 6, the rule concerning knives should be made flexible and changed.

At two, the child finds it easier to get activated than to contain themselves – they can't stop themselves from doing something tempting, even if the parents have told them many times not to do that. The child starts to understand cause and effect, so at that age they start learning the consequences of their actions. Most likely, the child will not remember them next time, but they will understand them and act more calmly to any limitations introduced.

When the child is two, two and a half, the crisis period known as the “terrible twos” may begin. It is a difficult and challenging time for both the child and the parents. At that age, children can be very stubborn, are too impatient to wait for their turn, find it hard to adjust and to compromise with others, they like to give orders to other children and to their parents, to dominate, they get angry quickly, scream, cry and throw tantrums. They like repeating the same actions, for example, reading the same book, wearing the same socks, eating the same thing all the time.

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Chapter VII:

Supporting the child's development between the ages 3 and 6

Stages of the child's development at 3-6 years old

Three simple ways to deal with the terrible twos and difficult behaviour in preschoolers

Year six and seven - the start of their school education

What may a child be afraid of when starting their nursery and primary school education?

Preparations for their nursery and primary school adventures

Stress connected to starting nursery or primary school

How to deal with emotional tensions?

Children of refugees and migrants – how to help them find their place in a new country?

Stages of the child's development at 3-6 years old

When the child is between 3 and 6, it is the start of the preschool period, when peer relations become increasingly important. The child is still developing dynamically and faces new challenges all the time.

Three years old

For most children at that age, it is a calm period. A little preschooler says “yes” a lot, is agreeable, sees that it's good to share sometimes, starts to cooperate, is willing to build relations with other children.

Three and a half

This, for a change, is a period of uncertainty, awkwardness, as well as of great difficulties with releasing emotions and maintaining relations. Expect nervous tics, thumb sucking, crying fits and “do you love me?” questions. But it is also a time of high creativity, great imagination, storytelling and long independent play.

Four years old

Four-year-olds can be very active physically: they destroy things, run away, kick and hit other children. They burst out laughing or crying, and get angry. They make up different stories and tell them as if they were real, because they can't tell the difference between reality and fantasy. They like challenges and independence.

Five years old

Five-year-old children are usually stable, calm, but also active and creative. It is a good time for children and parents. Children are happy to help out, follow their parents' instructions, ask if they can help. They develop socially, make new friends, have good manual skills and are happy with the results of their work.

Three simple ways to deal with the terrible twos and difficult behaviour in preschoolers

If you start noticing some difficult behaviours in your child on a daily basis, you can tackle them by using those three methods:

- 1. the first rules and consequences**
- 2. give instructions effectively**
- 3. manage the space and the situation**

1. While working with a two-year-old, we can start introducing the first rules of behaviour. It is best when we do that by using pictures rather than in writing, to make sure the child fully understands them. The list of rules should only contain the necessary rules relating to problematic behaviours. So if the child regularly throws sand at other children when playing in the sandbox or hits them with the spade, the list of rules should contain pictures illustrating unwanted behaviours and their desirable substitutes. If a preschooler draws on the walls and furniture instead of paper, the rules should contain an illustration relating to the correct use of crayons. It is also important for the child to know the consequences of breaking the agreed rules and to make those consequences as natural and logical as possible.

For example:

If the child hits other children in the sandbox, a logical consequence will be to make them leave the sandbox, to sit down on the bench or to go for a walk instead.

If the child uses crayons incorrectly, a logical consequence will be to take the crayons away for some time.

An illogical consequence would be to forbid a child who hits other children in the sandbox from watching a story on TV at night time, or to stop a child from meeting with their friend for drawing on the walls.

We should take similar steps when the child does something naughty, breaks or damages something – they shouldn't be punished in such situations, but bear the consequences or participate in bearing the consequences.

For example:

If the child throws the ball around the house and spills water, they should take a cloth and wipe it up, rather than be stopped from having dessert.

If your child breaks another child's toy, they should give the other child one of their own toys to compensate for the one they broke, rather than be told off and banned from playing.

When rules are introduced and followed, the child learns how to function among others and to understand the consequences of their actions. It is very important to make sure that the consequences are imposed in a calm and logical way, without getting angry or trying to humiliate the child.

2. Secondly, it is a good idea to learn how to give instructions and to remind the child about the rules in an effective way.

- First, ensure eye contact with the child, squat down next to them, take their hand, look them in the eyes,
- Then, give brief instructions they can understand and remind them about the consequences,
- Ask the child to repeat in their own words what they should and shouldn't do.

The triple repetition rule is very useful here: reminder, warning, consequence.

For example:

If we know that the child has recently been misbehaving in the playground, it is a good idea to calmly remind them the rule concerning this situation: "you can build a sand castle, but you can't throw sand at other children, if you throw sand, we will leave the playground".

3. Thirdly, a very useful method is to manage the time and space in such a way as to minimise the risk of the child's unwanted behaviour. We should analyse the situations in which undesirable behaviours occur: at what time of day, in whose presence, in connection with what actions that we take. Such analysis will certainly give us some insight and lead us to conclusions. The surroundings have a huge impact on the child's behaviour, so we can help them greatly with their behaviour by making small changes in their environment.

For example:

Quite often, the return home from nursery is a difficult time for children. They need some time to release the emotions after a day full of challenges. That's why it is best not to plan meetings with adults who the child doesn't know well, appointments at public institutions or shopping at the supermarket for that time.

Year six and seven - starting their school education

Six years old

In six-year-olds we often see emotional instability similar to the instability that concerns the parents of two-and-a-half-year-olds. At that age, the child wants to be the most important, the best, to have the most of everything, they brag a lot and mock others. A six-year-old's first response to most requests, instructions and suggestions will be "no", even though the child is keen to take on challenges and tasks. At that age, children find it difficult to deal with defeat, because they are only just learning to lose, to give priority to others and to admit their mistakes or faults. Learning often costs them a lot of anger and tears.

Seven years old

Seven-year-olds are very different from six-year-olds in terms of cognitive and emotional development. Usually, they are fully ready for intellectual work and to use symbols: letters and numbers. They are more capable of focusing their attention and staying focused on the task. It shouldn't be a problem for them to begin their school education.

What may a child be afraid of when starting their nursery and primary school education?

The start of nursery and primary school education is an important but difficult time for many children and parents. Children who used to stay at home with their mom or babysitter enter a completely different world. This new situation

may evoke different emotions in them. Children may be happy and excited about their new adventure, but they may also be concerned about:

- their mom and dad not being there, which means that they will feel lonely,
- not making friends,
- other children laughing at them (for various reasons),
- having to eat what they don't like,
- their parents coming late to pick them up,
- not getting to the toilet in time,
- the teacher being unpleasant,
- school being boring.

Starting nursery and primary school – a task for parents:

Ask your child how they imagine their school to be. What are they most happy about? What are they afraid of? Look for solutions for each of their concerns.

Preparations for their nursery and primary school adventures

- It is a good idea to ensure a good first impression: take your child for a walk by the new nursery/school, go inside, look inside the rooms, the canteen, schoolyard, toilets.
- You can tell your child what a day at nursery/school involves (classes, going in the schoolyard, brushing teeth, ...)
- You can take part in open days (the dates are announced on the websites of nurseries and primary schools) – children play with the teachers and other children with their parents present.
- It is also recommended to encourage children to communicate in Polish – if they don't know the language well yet, you can teach them some basic words and phrases to enable them to build some relations with others.
- You can give the child a “lucky charm” – a toy, a little note with a drawing to carry in their pencil case, a sticker on their t-shirt, a “tattoo” on their hand – something that will remind the child that the parents are keeping their fingers crossed for their success.
- You should also help your child get to know their Polish classmates, you can invite them to the playground, a birthday party or national celebrations.
- It is also important to stay in touch with the child's teacher – the parents should initiate contact.

Stress connected to starting nursery or primary school

How the child may respond emotionally:

- stuttering, grunting,
- wetting themselves at night and during the day,
- difficulty falling asleep, waking up, unpleasant or tiring dreams,
- nausea/diarrhoea,
- regression of some type,
- outbursts of anger with the parents and the “whole world”,
- throwing their body on the ground or throwing objects around.

Emotional difficulties connected to going to school, nursery or any other important and impactful situation in the child's life are a natural reaction to stress. If they persist for about two months in a preschooler, or for about a month

in a school pupil, you shouldn't be concerned. It is their natural adaptation mechanism. However, if the problems still persist after that time, you should consult a specialist to help the child deal with those difficulties. Otherwise, the child may develop and then reinforce a non-functional response mechanism, which will create even more problems.

Children of various ages release their negative emotions in different ways, characteristic for the stage of their development. You should become familiar with those reactions to be able to spot the early signs indicating that the child is having difficulties and needs more support.

Age	Ways of releasing emotional tensions
1 year old	Thumb sucking, rocking, rolling their head from side to side on the bed, crying
2 years old	Rocking on the bed, lots of requests at bedtime ("give me water, give me my teddy, I need to pee"), stutter
3 years old	Thumb sucking at bedtime, disturbed sleep and getting out of bed at night. Spitting, stuttering and nail biting during the day.
4 years old	Running off, spitting, pulling silly faces, naughty words, mocking. Fear and nightmares, stomach ache and nausea caused by stress
5 years old	Blinking their eyes, grunting, coughing, nail biting, loudly inhaling air through their nose. Especially intensified in the evening, after a long day.
6 years old	Anxiety, awkwardness, tripping over their own feet, kicking the table legs while sitting down. Pulling faces, coughing, grunting, sticking out their tongue, spitting.
7 years old	Blinking their eyes, grumpy face
8 years old	Rubbing their eyes, twisting their fingers, frowning, stomach ache
9 years old	Stamping their feet, twisting and brushing their hair with their fingers, ripping off buttons, muttering, moaning, dizziness

How to deal with emotional tensions?

The most important thing is patience, patience, patience. The child has the right to have difficult emotions and they need their parents to accept their feelings. It is also important to show the child how they can deal with those emotions.

To help the child calm down when they are feeling sad or angry, you should: show them your understanding, cuddle and rock them (in your arms or in a hammock), don't belittle their fears and anger.

You can also discuss "the code of anger" with the child, which sets out clearly what the child can do when they are very angry, for example, scream and stamp their feet, punch a pillow, roar like a lion, say "naughty" words in code. However, they cannot vent their anger on others, hit or pull anyone, or damage things.

The knowledge of our brain's capacities is very helpful when it comes to dealing with difficult emotions. The right hemisphere is in charge of emotions, while the left is responsible for logic. When a child is left alone with their difficult emotions, such negative feelings run through their head and become stronger and stronger. If we encourage the child to talk about them, the left, logical hemisphere becomes engaged as well. By telling the parents about their difficult

emotions, the child relies more on logical thinking, which helps them deal with the emotions better. You can also encourage the child to draw their anger – preferably with a red marker pen on a piece of paper; or the child can keep drawing passionately until holes appear in the paper.

Children of refugees and migrants – how to help them find their place in a new country?

Migration, especially urgent and forced, is the source of a great deal of stress for the entire family. Children and adults experience it slightly differently. Adults usually feel a great sense of responsibility for rebuilding their life, while children may feel like a piece of luggage, transported from one place to another.

Parents migrating with small children should remember that the experience of migration or being a refugee can have a strong impact on the child's development and ability to function in the world.

You should think about what the child may experience when they need to leave their country with the family:

What are the psychological and social effects of migration for children?

- was migration stressful for them?
- has their beautiful home and their own room been replaced by a small flat or a room at a refugee shelter?
- do they feel safe in the new country?
- do they know how long they will stay here?
- have they found their place in the new environment despite cultural differences?

What losses has the child suffered?

- have they left their loved ones behind in their home country: their grandparents, siblings?
- did they have to say goodbye to their friends from nursery/school or the neighbourhood?
- did they have to stop going to their favourite sports or arts classes?
- did they have to leave behind their favourite toys, books, clothes?

Which of their needs are being satisfied, and which are not?

- do they feel welcome and accepted among their peers at school or nursery?
- can they keep on developing and learning despite language barriers?
- do they feel that they are understood and loved by their busy parents who are desperately trying to build a life in the new country?

All this affects the child's behaviour and their ability to function at nursery/school to a great extent: it impacts their self-esteem, relations with other children, motivation to learn, etc.

Many children of migrants and refugees experience difficulties with adapting to the new environment. They may include:

- sleep disorders: trouble falling asleep and nightmares,
- difficulties with dealing with their emotions: high sensitivity, sudden outbursts of anger or crying,
- problems with communicating and building relations with others: starting arguments, trying to get attention in dangerous ways,
- difficulties with focusing and staying focused.

Children who up till now were developing well and had already mastered a lot of skills may experience some sort of regression. They may start wetting themselves at night and during the day, lose the ability to read, write or play with building blocks, they may start stuttering or even stop speaking.

If that happens, you should seek help from a specialist. The Polish Migration Forum Foundation provides psychological support for children of migrants and refugees.

Before seeing a psychologist, you should give the child your full support, acceptance and make sure that they feel safe. The best therapeutic tool for children is always a close relationship with their loved ones, based on trust. You can also follow all the advice provided earlier in the chapter on "How to deal with emotional tensions?".



Chapter VIII:

Child in a multicultural and multilingual family

The potential of multicultural and multilingual families

Shaping the child's cultural identity

How to help your child build a healthy self-esteem and cultural identity?

Bi- and multilingualism - the benefits for the child

How to support your child with learning the parents' mother tongue?

The potential of multicultural and multilingual families

Does your family consist of people from various cultures and ethnic groups? Do the family members communicate with one another in more than one language? If you have answered YES to either of the above questions, this means that your family is multilingual and/or multicultural. You should remember that even if your family members only represent one culture, the fact that you are living in Poland, which is a different country in terms of its culture and language, makes your family multicultural and multilingual. Children who grow up in such families can benefit from the potential of multiple cultures and languages.

By being exposed to at least two cultures from an early age, the child can adopt the attitude of openness to the world and master the skill of communication despite people's differences in terms of their lifestyles, values, traditions and religions. Whereas being exposed to more than one language enables the child to become bi- or multilingual. The potential benefits described above can prove vital for the child in the future – for example, by helping them find work and develop their professional career. However, in order to enable children from multilingual and multicultural families to use this potential, they need active support from their parents.

Helping the child shape their identity

First of all, it is important for parents to support their child with building relations with the culture and traditions in which they grew up. Learning the attitudes, traditions and customs important for the parents' culture(s) allows the child to better understand themselves – where they come from, their roots. What's more, if the parents share their own traditions and cultural customs, they help the child build relations with other family members remaining in their country of origin (such as grandparents, cousins). It is also beneficial for the child to know the parents' culture in case the family decides to move back to their country of origin (one or both parents). In such a situation, the child will adapt faster to their life in a new place.

On the other hand, parents should support their child with learning about the Polish culture to make the child feel confident while communicating with Poles, among whom the child will be growing up, learning, and maybe even working in the future. Moving to Poland is not enough for the child to feel confident and have positive relations with Poles. Upbringing is vital, just like the behaviours and attitudes demonstrated by the parents while interacting with the child's teachers and the local residents on a daily basis.

Shaping the child's identity based on the parents' culture(s) while also teaching them openness to other cultures is a big challenge not only for the parents, but also for many teachers and educators. Below, you can find some advice for parents who want to help their children feel confident and at ease in the world – irrespective of the culture represented by people the child may find himself/herself playing, learning and one day working with.

How to help your child build a healthy self-esteem and cultural identity?

Speak to the child in your mother tongue

Language is an important part of each culture. Most of all, it helps the child build stronger relations with the parents, grandparents and other family members. It is also a tool that lets the child fully understand the traditions and customs of its culture, because it enables the child to participate in shared rituals and celebrations, to enjoy conversations with their compatriots without any barriers, and to do simple things like reading books in the original language.

You can find some information on how to support your child with learning their parents' mother tongue further in this brochure.

Share family traditions and customs

Celebrate holidays and various traditions with your child. Explain to them why you personally and the people in your home country find them important. Show them what the celebrations look like in your home community. If possible, celebrate together with other people from your country living in Poland, and make sure you visit your homeland – this will enable the child to feel part of a broader community. You should also try to share your culture by telling the child stories and legends from your home country, singing songs together that you learnt in your childhood or teaching them traditional dance.

Keep in touch with your fellow countrymen living in Poland

Keeping in touch with your countrymen living in Poland is very helpful when it comes to maintaining contact with your home culture and sharing it with your children. It's even better if such contact involves other families with children. Such visits and interactions are an important time for children – they help children learn about their culture by talking to and spending time with adults and, most importantly, by playing with their peers who come from the same background.

Keep in touch with your family and friends in your home country

Keeping in touch with family and friends in your home country can help the child feel part of an extensive community.

If possible, visit your family and friends living in your home country and invite them to visit your family in Poland. If it is not possible to meet with your family in your home country or for them to come visit you, try calling them more often or use online communication tools, such as Skype. It is a good idea to ensure that the contact between you and your loved ones abroad is regular, so that it becomes your family's custom.

Cooperate with your child's nursery or primary school

It is important that your child wants to speak about their cultural heritage and feels proud of it while talking to other children. Your support may be very important, as children don't generally like to highlight that they are different while interacting with their peers. Whereas teachers don't always find it necessary to support children in sharing information about their origin. You could get in touch with your child's tutor and suggest, for example, arranging a class where you can tell the children about your country, traditions and cultural customs. You could also offer to prepare some traditional dishes for an event or picnic organised for the children.

Learn Polish

Your child is growing up in Poland and has an opportunity to learn the language from a very young age. There will be a time when they have mastered the language. For parents, this is a foreign language which they usually have to learn as adults and put a lot of effort into the learning process. But it is worth putting in the effort. If you can at least communicate on a basic level in Polish, it will enable you, as a parent, to talk to the child's teachers and childminders. Therefore, in the child's eyes, the parent remains the mentor and guide in the world.

Of course it may be that despite trying hard, a parent fails to learn Polish well enough to hold conversations in this language. In such a case it may be a good idea to get some assistance from other adults who can help translate for you while talking with Poles. If a parent asks their child to translate a conversation between them and another adult, the roles are reversed, as the child becomes the mentor and guide for the parent, and the parent's authority decreases in the child's eyes. So remember not to ask your children to translate conversations between you and other adults.

Get to know and befriend Poles

While learning the Polish language and getting to know the Polish mentality it may be helpful to keep in touch with and befriend Poles. If the parents are eager to get to know and talk to Polish people, the child will also feel at ease while communicating with them. It is a good idea to look around and to try to build a closer relation, for example, with your Polish neighbours, colleagues or parents of other children attending your child's nursery/primary school.

Bi- and multilingualism - benefits for the child

Being able to speak several languages has many benefits. Knowing more than one language gives one a better chance to find an interesting and well-paid job. Especially that the economy is becoming more and more globalised, which means that fluency in more than one language is now more appreciated on the labour market. Research also shows that children who learn several languages from an early age are better at solving problems and thinking logically. Learning multiple languages also helps develop the child's creativity. At the same time, linguists and academics who research children's bilingualism and linguistic education stress that learning the parents' mother tongue, especially when it comes to reading, makes it faster and easier to learn any other language.

How to support the child with learning the parents' mother tongue?

Choose a language learning strategy

While trying to teach children their mother tongue, parents can adopt various strategies, for example, decide that only one language is spoken at home, and another language outside. You should also know that one of the most effective strategies is the so-called personal rule. It means that from birth each parent only speaks in their mother tongue to the child.

Talk to your child (engage in a dialogue)

In order to enable your child to learn your language, it is important for them to use it actively rather than just listen to conversations in this language. So try to talk to your child as often as possible. You can start talking to a 2-month-old baby. At that age, you can describe the nursing activities you perform on the child. The next step will be babbling together.

Build up the prestige of the language the child is learning

It is important to show the child that the language we want them to learn is appreciated and liked by the family. This attitude should be demonstrated by both parents (even if they don't both speak one of the languages used by the family). Showing respect and interest in the spouse's language is the basic condition for shaping the child's language competency not only in one, but in multiple languages.

Control the time spent on watching TV and using the computer, smartphone or tablet

The left hemisphere is mainly responsible for the development of speech. Whereas watching TV or using the computer mostly stimulates the development of the right hemisphere. So if your child spends a lot of time using multimedia devices, it may impede the development of their linguistic skills and prevent them from using the family's ethnic language.

Create lots of opportunities to expose the child to your mother tongue (family, friends)

The child should associate such meetings with something pleasant, so that they will also find speaking in the language a pleasurable activity.

Support your child with learning to write and read in your language

Linguists indicate that fully mastering the grammar structures of a language enables the child to understand spoken and oral utterances as a whole. That is why learning to read and write is so important. In order to help your child with developing those skills, it is a good idea to read them stories from an early age and to move the finger along the text while reading. If possible, you should enrol your child in classes on their mother tongue, where they will be able to learn to read and write with the teacher's assistance. Such weekend classes are often organised by embassies, consulates and non-government organisations.

Talk to your child's teachers about the benefits of learning the mother tongue

Sometimes nurseries and primary schools don't support the child in learning the ethnic language used at the child's family home, and teachers encourage the parents to mostly focus on educating the child in the dominant (Polish) language. If you have been presented with such recommendations from your child's teachers, you should talk to them about the benefits associated with learning the mother tongue.

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Information in accordance with the legislation in force as of 18 July 2016.

This publication is distributed free of charge and is not intended for sale.

ISBN No.: 978-83-945706-2-0

Izabelin, 2016



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INSTYTUT SPRAW
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Institute of Public Affairs Foundation

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This publication was created as part of the “I am a mom in Poland - Year II” project co-financed by the National Programme for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the state budget.

A safe harbour

The sole responsibility for the contents of this publication lies with the author. The European Commission and the Ministry of Internal Affairs do not accept any responsibility for the use of the information provided.



The publication (chapter on “Diet of children aged between 0-12 months”) was created as part of the grant competition of the educational programme entitled “The First 1000 Days for Health”, dedicated to food education for pregnant and breastfeeding women and for parents during the first year of the child’s life. More details: www.1000dni.pl

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