

ISÄ Early Years PLAY POLICY

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Play at ISÄ

At ISÄ we are **committed** to play and believe that play is fundamental in the development of the whole child. The Swedish Preschool curriculum and the IB curriculum are very compatible in that they both strongly value the importance of play and inquiry in early childhood.

According to the IB Standards and Practices, play is the primary driver for inquiry and is the most authentic way that children explore, grow and learn. Play promotes inclusion, gives choice to children and allows them to inquire into their own interests and important concepts. Furthermore, the Swedish preschool curriculum states that: “Play can also challenge and stimulate children’s motor skills, communication, collaboration and problem-solving, as well as the ability to think in terms of images and symbols” (Skolverket, 2018). Research has even found that children who participate in play oriented early childhood classrooms show long-term academic gains.

Uninterrupted play allows children to explore their interests, engage in imaginative activities, and develop essential life skills like cooperation and communication. It also gives them the opportunity to relax and have fun and try out new skills they have been learning and developing. We believe it’s essential to give children extended periods of time for unstructured, uninterrupted play so they can create, explore and inquire. This is in line with the Swedish preschool curriculum, which outlines the importance of giving “children time, space and peace so that they can invent games, experiment and experience” (Skolverket, 2018).

So what does it look like?

If you were to walk into our classrooms, you would see children playing in different areas and exploring with play invitations that the teachers have set up in the environment. The teachers may be observing, taking photos or notes or facilitating the play alongside the children by offering new materials and/or asking open-ended questions. There are also times when direct teaching occurs through playful learning experiences planned by the teachers. During uninterrupted play, the teachers do not do any direct teaching but rather facilitate the play and join in if invited by the children. Each class has at least 1 hour of uninterrupted play time indoors and outdoors multiple times per day.

Learning Spaces

At ISÄ, the learning spaces are just as important as a teacher in the classroom. Our number one priority is to create a safe, **inclusive** and nurturing environment that all children feel welcome and comfortable in, and the teachers are **committed** to creating spaces that allow for that to happen. The spaces also allow opportunities for children to choose freely what they would like to play, while reflecting their interests. A wide range of open-ended materials are offered that are often changed or rearranged as new invitations for learning. Children are often involved in the design of play areas and the displays reflect the the children's process of learning.



So what does it look like?

Each classroom has a unique set up that reflects the teacher's creativity as well as that particular group of children's interests. Different areas such as blocks, role play, mark-marking and art are in each room and are frequently changed according to Units of Inquiry and what the children are showing curiosity towards. Play invitations are often set up to provoke children's play and inquiry. For example, one day there might be clay with natural materials like sticks and acorns on a table to spark creativity and to give children the opportunity to use clay in a different way they usually do.

Outdoor Learning

At ISÄ, we are **committed** to providing children with diverse environments for exploration and play. One of these crucial spaces is the great outdoors. We emphasize the importance of outdoor time, making it a priority for children to experience the benefits of nature every day, regardless of the weather – be it rain, shine, or snow. We believe that there's no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing! Our **commitment** to outdoor play ensures that children can connect with nature and engage in valuable experiences, fostering their holistic development. Below you can find different types of outdoor learning and development:

Area of Development	What does it look like?
Motor skills development	Jumping, running, hopping, balancing, skipping
Improves focus and reduces stress	Big spaces, natural light, fresh air, green spaces, natural materials
Sparks imagination and creativity	Loose parts (leaves, trees, wood chips, pinecones, sand etc) everywhere to encourage children to think about their play with the materials or equipment available
Builds resilience and risk management (Risky Play)	Problem solving when facing challenges. Thinking before they try something new.

Risky Play

What is risky play? Risky play is anything thrilling and exciting for children during play that may involve challenges, heights, speed, tools, testing limits or rough and tumble play. It might even seem dangerous to some adults but we promise there are many benefits to it!

During outdoor time, we often observe child-initiated risky play in the form of jumping or climbing from heights, balancing on a narrow surface, or rough and tumble with their peers. Facilitating risky play encourages children to be engaged in their physical activity and over time it improves children's ability to assess risk on their own. Children learn to develop risk management in terms of weighing the consequences or problem solving and thinking of methods to solve the challenge or difficult situation (Sando, Kleppe & Sandseter, 2021).

How can we assist children in this play?

1. Often, the main concern adults have will be a child unfamiliar with boundaries. As a facilitator, we must be consistent in the boundaries and ground rules.
2. We can teach them the skills which helps them navigate what they can do to keep themselves safe even when engaging in these type of play
3. The more we adults say no, the more the child will not want to follow, thus we can use specific words and language to help them navigate through the play they chose.



So what does it look like?

Types of Play	Teacher Language
Heights	Make sure you have both hands free to hold and grab on to something to climb You can squat and keep yourself low. Do you feel safe? Take your time.
Play Near Dangerous Elements	Make sure to find a big space. Please keep you hands to yourself. Do you feel that you can balance?
Rough and Tumble Play	Say no if you do not feel comfortable. Always inform your friend and check if your friend is looking at you.
Harmful objects (Sticks, rocks)	You can swing the object at that big space over there! You can hit/throw it at the trees and bushes. What is your plan with that (object)? It looks heavy. I am not going to help you with it so make sure you are comfortable holding it by yourself.

Screen Time and ICT

With our commitment to play and students learning through play, screen use and use of ICT tools is limited in our preschool program. We as a preschool staff are aware of the benefits of technology as a tool in education and focus our use of ICT tools towards enhancing lessons and student understanding when necessary and beneficial. We are mindful of the recommended screen time suggestions from the World Health Organization and are careful to limit our screen use for our preschool children.

Here are the World Health Organization and Swedish screen time recommendations by age:

- 0-2 years old: no screen time recommended
- 2-5 years old: no more than 1 hour per day

So what does it look like?

If you were to walk in our classrooms, you might find a teacher using a screen to show photos/videos of the children that were taken earlier in the day as a reflection tool, a screen displaying a story that supports the Unit of Inquiry or any other information photos or videos that support the Unit of Inquiry. Other ICT tools that may be in the classrooms are BeeBots, iPads and a green screen. Sometimes teachers may set up technological devices such as an old camera, radio, recorder etc. and give children time to investigate to help support their understanding and use of technology. “The point is not to master technology, but about using technology to extend their investigations through touching, seeing and hearing” (The Early Learner, PYP).

Social Emotional Learning

Social and Emotional Learning is a process that helps people of all ages to better understand their emotions while being able to feel those emotions fully and have empathy for others.

Children learn to navigate societal waters through play. It is through play that children discover and refine how to negotiate, compromise, cooperate, and support themselves and others. During any pretend-play scenario or game, children must follow the prescribed boundaries and rules in order to partake and be part of the group. If the child cannot do this, then they will not be able to partake nor be part of the group. It is also the place where children learn to experience and manage their emotions, build persistence, and enhance resilience.

One of the most basic ways to help children develop their social and emotional competence is to emphasize skill development. Within the IB framework we have 5 Approaches to Learning or ATL skills to support children's development. They include thinking skills, research skills, communication skills, social skills and self-management skills. These 5 areas focus on developing the whole child and preparing them to become self-regulated learners. Teachers use a variety of ways to teach these skills, both explicitly and implicitly, and there is one ATL skill embedded into each unit of inquiry.



So what does it look like?

Time is given to children when there is a conflict or problem. You won't see a teacher always jumping in right away. We believe that they need some time on their own to practice the skills they are learning.

One scenario could be perhaps a child is building a tower and wants to make it taller by adding another block, but it collapses in the process. Before jumping in, the teacher will wait to see how the child reacts. Will they be able to self-regulate and rebuild? Will they cry or get angry? If the child needs support, the teacher will of course support and here at ISÄ, in a play-based classroom, that child will be encouraged and eventually choose on their own to build again.

Role of Children, Teachers, Parents

According to IB - The Early Learner, “Encouraging and nurturing positive relationships between home, family and school provides a strong basis for learning, behaviour, health and well-being.” The Swedish curriculum similarly states, “In order to create the best possible conditions for children to be able to achieve rich, versatile development, the preschool should cooperate in a close and trusting way with the home ” (Skolverket, 2018).

Children:

Active Participants and Natural Inquirers- Children are the primary actors in a play-based school. They actively engage in various play activities that foster their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. They are natural inquirers from birth and are curious, capable learners.

Teachers:

Facilitators - Teachers in a play-based school serve as facilitators rather than traditional instructors. They create an environment that encourages exploration, creativity, and independent thinking.

Observation and Assessment - Teachers closely observe children during play to understand their strengths, interests, and areas for growth. This observation helps inform individualized learning plans, interventions and ideas for future play invitations.

Designing spaces - Teachers design the physical and social environment to stimulate learning through play. They ensure that the space is filled with open-ended materials that encourage imaginative play and problem-solving.

Guidance and Support - Teachers provide guidance and support when needed, helping children build on their interests and encouraging them to explore new ideas. They offer scaffolding to extend learning and challenge children appropriately.

Parents:

Partners in Learning: Parents play an integral role in a play-based school by becoming active partners in their child's education. They are involved in the learning process and collaborate with teachers to support their child's development. Parents are invited for **Play Dates** throughout the year in classes EY 1-3. This is a time for parents to visit the classrooms and participate in play with their child.

Communication - Regular communication between teachers and parents is essential. This includes sharing observations, discussing the child's progress, and collaborating on strategies to support learning at home. There are 2 development talks per academic year for each child.

Extension of Learning - Parents can extend the play-based learning experiences at home by providing opportunities for creativity, exploration, and problem-solving. This might involve engaging in imaginative play, reading together, or exploring the natural environment in the great outdoors!



So what does it look like?

Parents should have regular communication with their child's teachers. Development talks are offered once per term. We want our parents to feel comfortable to ask questions and talk to us any time. The teachers are open to share information with you and we hope parents are open to share information with us so we can all support the children in the best way possible.

Process Art



In our preschool process art fits perfectly with children's **creative** play. Process art is all about the process of creating, not just the final product. Children use art materials in their own way, trying out different colors, textures and shapes whether it is painting, drawing, cutting, building, gluing, playing with clay etc. We ensure that every child gets to use all their senses and experiment with different materials. It is important to wear "play clothes" at our preschool since we embrace mess and dirt while we have meaningful, **creative** and artistic child-centered play.

Art and play weave well together and are invaluable for children's growth. Children learn fine motor skills (like using their fingers and hands) as they manipulate art tools and media, cognitive skills as they problem-solve, plan and execute their ideas, and emotional skills as they express themselves freely without fear of judgment. **Creative** time supports a nurturing environment where children feel valued and understood, feel proud of what they make, fostering a love for learning and **creativity** that lasts a lifetime.

So what does it look like?

You won't find crafty projects in our classrooms where all the end products look the same. Instead, you will see many loose parts, materials and even recycled materials being offered to the children and it is up to them what they want to create with it. All children's work is individual and original. Next time your child brings home some artwork, ask them about their experience in creating their artwork!

Play Urges (Owls)

The learning environment in Owls is planned based on the children's interests and the play urges that they display.



- Destroying: the urge to knock down, crush or deconstruct.
 - Gathering: the urge to collect/gather things.
 - Giving/taking: the urge to bring an object to another person and then taking it back.
 - Trajectory: the urge to “propel” oneself/objects.
 - Hiding: the urge to cover/hide oneself, someone else or objects.
 - Transporting: the urge to carry and place objects from one place to another.
 - Connecting: the urge to connect and join things.
- (Wunderled, 2021)

“...the play urges come from deep within the child. They are universal, innate, and intense. They are all about action, and remind us what true play is” (Kindercare Learning Centers, 2021).

Next time your child keeps knocking down the tower that you have built for him/her, you can understand that the child might have the “destroying” urge. Or if your child is obsessed with throwing rocks, they might very well display the “trajectory” play urge. This same child might really enjoy stuffing the washing machine with dirty laundry as well.



Understanding play urges may also give us a new appreciation of why a child shows certain behaviors. He/she might not try to throw sand at their friends but might very well display a trajectory urge. When we observe these behaviors in preschool, we reflect on how we can provide the children with safe and fun ways to act on them. For instance, directing the child who enjoys throwing to something that is safe to throw, instead of saying “no”. This is of course something that you can do at home as well.

Fine Motor Skills

In our preschool, we focus on helping children develop their fine-motor skills (hand and finger skills) through lots of fun and interactive activities without using worksheets. Up until 6 years of age, their tiny hands are still developing and are not fully formed. Children require progressive development in their hands to enable them to grasp and hold things and eventually develop their writing skills. The activities we offer help strengthen their hands for when they are ready to start writing. We encourage children to play with blocks, puzzles, and engage in arts which are great for improving hand-eye coordination. Activities like molding playdough or clay, stringing beads and using simple tools like tweezers help strengthen their small muscle movements and precision. We also involve children in real-life tasks such as gardening and cooking, which are not only enjoyable but also teach valuable skills.

We also offer a variety of hands-on activities that are tailored to each child's interests and strengths. Whether it's playing with clay, tearing paper, or painting, these activities are more than just fun; they're designed to help kids learn important skills through play and exploration. At our preschool we are **committed** to active learning, where children can engage with things that matter to them. This way, we create a welcoming, **inclusive** space where every child can grow, discover, and enjoy learning in their own special way, fostering a love for learning right from the start.



Program of Inquiry

In EY 1-3 we follow 4 units each academic year that fit into the IB framework and Program of Inquiry. Teachers use these as a guide for teaching in an inquiry way and the units have been written to allow for student initiated thinking and interest. All these units are taught in a play-based setting using provocations, visible thinking strategies and playful learning opportunities.

Notes:

- See tables on following pages for specific units in each grade level.
- As a combined EY1 and EYP group they will rotate through these units on a bi-yearly calendar.

Who we are	Where we are in place and time	How we express ourselves	How the world works	How we organize ourselves	Sharing the planet
Central idea Every day I can learn about who I am and what I can do Key concepts: Form, Responsibility Related concepts: Growth, System, Belonging Lines of inquiry Who am I Where I belong Learning to care for myself		Central idea We all have and express feelings and ideas in different ways. Key concepts: Causation, Perspective Related concept: <u>Creativity</u>, Emotion, Communication Lines of inquiry Feelings we have Different ways we express our feelings and ideas Using the creative process to express ideas and feelings	Central idea Animals and People interact in different ways Key concepts: Form, Responsibility Related concepts: Animals, Relationship, Resource Lines of inquiry Where we can find animals Animal behaviour How we care for animals		Central idea I share the world with many living things. Key concepts: Function, Connection Related concepts: organisms, biodiversity Lines of inquiry Living things in my environment Needs of living things How living things co-exist

<u>Who we are</u>	Where we are in place and time	<u>How we express ourselves</u>	<u>How the world works</u>	<u>How we organize ourselves</u>	<u>Sharing the planet</u>
Central idea Senses connect with feelings, behaviour, and social belonging. Key concepts: Function, Connection Related concepts: Interaction, Interpretation, Prediction, Perception Lines of inquiry What are our senses and their function How we use our senses to <u>recognize</u> emotions Our senses help us to share experiences and feelings of belonging		Central idea Stories give opportunities to explore feelings and emotions. Key concepts: Perspective, Connection Related concepts: Creativity, Sequence, Performance Lines of inquiry Elements of a story Different feelings and emotions of characters in a story Expressing emotions through stories		Central idea People use different kinds of transportation to meet their needs Key concepts: Form, Causation Related concepts: Landscape, Transportation, Safety Lines of inquiry Different forms of transportation Use of transportation in our community Land, sea and air transportation	Central idea Exploring the natural environment helps us to learn more about the world around us. Key concepts: Change, Responsibility Related concepts: <u>Environment</u>, Nature, <u>Sustainability</u> Lines of inquiry The natural environment How the environment changes over time Ways we can care for the environment

Who we are	Where we are in place and time	How we express ourselves	How the world works	How we organize ourselves	Sharing the planet
Central idea Our differences and similarities make us unique. Key concepts: Perspective, Responsibility Related concepts: Relationship, Culture, Identity Lines of inquiry How we are alike and different How I treat others who are different from me Ways we celebrate our diversity		Central idea Ideas, feelings and experience enhance creativity. Key concepts: Connection, Perspective Related concepts: Creativity, Sequences, Presentation Lines of inquiry Forms of expression through art Different artists and their work People express feelings and ideas through art	Central idea There are natural occurring cycles all around people Key concepts: Form, Change Related concepts: Cycles, patterns, Seasons Lines of inquiry Cycles in our lives Changes with living things over time Interconnectedness of Cycles	Central idea Routines help us to develop independence and systems for self-management. Key Concepts: Form, Function, Responsibility Related concepts: Structure, Cooperation Community Lines of inquiry Our daily routines Our role and responsibility in following routines How routines help us function as a community	

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