



Sunshine Kids Crete

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Pedagogical Framework & Childcare Concept



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Chapter 1: Values & Our View of the Child

Our View of the Child

From birth, every child is an independent, capable person with their own pace, their own interests, and the ability to learn through their own experience, as long as they have the safety and the right environment to do so. We only step in where a child truly needs us; otherwise we stay close by, paying attention and showing respect.

Our Core Attitude

- **Respect for the child's independence**

Even during a short holiday stay, we're careful never to push a child into something they don't want, no forced activities, no comforting a child against their will. Instead, we offer options and leave room for the child to decide for themselves.

- **Relationship over role**

We don't see ourselves as “watchers” but as trusted caregivers for the time we're together. Even a few hours or days can hold a real, attentive relationship.

- **Trust in the child's own ability to learn**

Children learn the most about themselves and the world through free play and free movement. Our job is to create a safe space, not to direct them.

- **Valuing parents**

Parents know their child best. We see ourselves as a reliable extension of their care, never a replacement, and we stay closely in touch with them.

Our Caregiver Ratio as a Quality Promise

To give every child real, individual attention, we care for children under one year old one-on-one. From age one, one caregiver looks after up to three children. This ratio is what makes the relationship-based, needs-focused approach in this concept possible in practice.

What Makes Us Different: A Relationship Built in a Short Time

Unlike a typical nursery or kindergarten, we often only spend a few hours or days with a child. That calls for a more concentrated kind of attention: getting to know each other quickly and respectfully instead of a long settling-in period, reading each child's individual cues carefully from the very first minute, and keeping the same caregiver with a family for as much of their stay as possible. A short time together doesn't mean a shallower relationship, just a different, more focused kind.

Being International Is Part of Who We Are

Most of our families come from Germany, though some come from elsewhere too. We meet every child and family in their own language — German for German families, English for international guests — and stay open to different family and cultural habits. Feeling at home linguistically and culturally is part of how we build trust, not just a nice extra.

How We See Ourselves as a Team

We are trained early-childhood professionals, not babysitters. That professional foundation is what every Sunshine Kids Crete team member shares. Within that shared foundation, each of us brings our own personality, language, and way of working.

Chapter 2: A Needs-Based Approach Inspired by Emmi Pikler

Emmi Pikler's approach rests on 4 closely connected principles. We've deliberately adapted them to our short-stay context:

- **Caregiving as connection**

Everyday caregiving moments — nappy changes, getting dressed, mealtimes — aren't just tasks to get through; they're some of our most important moments for building a relationship. We talk to the child before we touch them, explain what we're doing, and wait for their response instead of just doing things to them. Since we often only have a short time with a child, every caregiving moment is a real chance to build trust.

- **Free movement**

We never push a child into a movement they haven't initiated themselves — like sitting up, standing, or walking. Instead, we create a safe, age-appropriate space where the child can move at their own pace.

- **Independent play**

Children play in their own way, with simple, open-ended materials rather than ready-made toys or structured activities. We observe rather than entertain — this is what sets us apart from a typical kids' club. The play materials we bring are chosen accordingly: simple, versatile, with no fixed purpose.

● Continuity and familiar caregivers

In Pikler's original model, this means one consistent, long-term caregiver. Since we usually only accompany a family for the length of their holiday, we adapt this idea: keeping the same caregiver with a family for their whole stay wherever possible, a structured process for the first meeting (see Chapter 3), and a careful handover between caregiver and parents at every drop-off and pick-up, so the child always knows what to expect.

Chapter 3: Settling In, Not a Classic Transition Period

Traditional settling-in models are built around weeks of time, which isn't realistic for short stays. We've translated the underlying principles: safety, the child's own pace, and no forced separation, into a more compact process.

- **Information first, not a blind start**

Before we ever meet the child, we ask parents about the essentials: sleep and eating habits, routines, comfort objects, fears, sensitivities, and how the child has responded to unfamiliar caregivers before. This happens during the free, no-obligation get-to-know call, where we also agree together with parents on booking times. That way, we're never starting from zero, even when we're meeting the child for the first time.

- **Arriving together**

At the first meeting, parents stay close by. The caregiver reaches out to the child, letting the child set the pace of getting comfortable: eye contact, an invitation to play, patience.

- **Separation with a safety net**

Once the child shows signs of feeling safe, the separation happens. Parents stay nearby for a few more minutes without stepping in. If the child stays calm and settled, parents can leave, while staying reachable and ready to come back if needed.

- **A reliable goodbye and pick-up routine**

A short, familiar routine at every goodbye and pick-up gives the child a sense of orientation, even in a short time together. No parents sneaking away, no sudden pick-ups, just a consistent, brief routine the child quickly learns to recognize.

- **Careful observation as our main task**

We watch closely, especially in the first moments: is the child showing signs of being overwhelmed like crying, withdrawing, freezing up? If so, we slow things down or bring the parents back. No schedule matters more than what the child is telling us.

- **When a child isn't ready to separate**

If a child shows strong, ongoing separation anxiety, we don't force it. We talk through alternatives with the parents as staying longer together, shorter first sessions, or care that starts close to the parents. The child's wellbeing always comes before a fixed process.

- **Handover at the end of care**

At pick-up, we give parents a short, concrete update on how the day went: mood, sleep, meals, special moments. This handover isn't just information; it's part of how we build a trusting relationship and shows parents they can rely on us.

Chapter 4: Relationship-Focused Care in Everyday Moments

Caregiving moments aren't side tasks for us — they're the most important relationship moments of the day.

- **Nappy changes as a conversation**

We announce every touch before it happens (“I'm going to pick you up now”) and pause briefly for the child's reaction. The child isn't something to process quickly. They're an active part of what's happening: they help where they can, and we never change or dress them without their awareness.

- **Eating according to need**

We respect a child's hunger and fullness cues instead of pushing them to finish their plate. We offer mealtimes in a reliable rhythm, without pressure. For babies and toddlers, we follow the individual routines parents share with us.

- **Sleep and rest**

We create a calm, safe space and follow the sleep needs parents describe to us in advance. We're happy to continue familiar rituals: a favourite toy, a lullaby, a particular order of steps.

- **Getting dressed and undressed**

The same principle applies: announce, wait, involve. Where a child can already help, we give them the time to do so instead of rushing to finish faster ourselves.

- **Language as companionship**

We describe what we're doing and what comes next, even with children who can't talk yet. This gives a sense of orientation and safety, even if the child doesn't know us well yet.

Chapter 5: Free Movement & How We Set Up Spaces

Children develop their motor skills best through their own initiative, at their own pace, not through instruction or structured exercises.

- **No forced movement**

We never sit a child up who can't sit up on their own yet, and never stand a child up who can't stand yet. Every stage of motor development should come from the child's own strength and initiative.

- **Safe spaces instead of rigid rules**

Since we don't work from a fixed location, we check and childproof each environment on-site: hotel rooms, gardens, pool areas. Removing trip hazards, securing risks, and making sure there's enough open space to move freely.

- **Freedom to move instead of carrying and guiding**

Wherever possible, we let children walk, climb, and move under their own steam rather than carrying them or leading them by the hand. We only step in actively where safety requires it.

Chapter 6: Free Play & Learning Through Experience

Children learn the most about themselves and their surroundings through free play. Our role is to create the space for it, not to direct it.

- **Simple, open-ended materials**

We prefer simple, open-ended objects: cloths, natural materials, balls, containers over toys with one fixed purpose. That way, the child decides for themselves how to use them.

- **Uninterrupted play**

When a child is absorbed in play, we don't interrupt with suggestions, praise, or corrections. We only step in if the child reaches out to us or if there's a safety concern.

- **No entertaining, no set programme**

Unlike a typical kids' club, we don't fill the time with a packed schedule of activities. We offer gentle prompts, but it's entirely up to the child whether and how they pick them up.

- **Attentive presence**

We stay close and attentive even when we're not actively part of the play. This calm, reliable presence is what gives the child the confidence to play freely.

- **Room to repeat**

Children often repeat an action many times until they've mastered it. We respect that need instead of pushing them toward the next activity.

Chapter 7: Age Groups

Pikler's approach was originally developed for children aged 0–3. We carry over the underlying attitude: autonomy, observing rather than directing, no pressure. To every age group we care for, adapting how we put it into practice as children grow.

● 0–1 year (babies)

The focus is entirely on relationship-based care (Chapter 4) and free movement (Chapter 5). We closely follow the individual sleep and feeding rhythm parents describe. Physical closeness and a calm, reliable voice matter most here.

● 1–3 years (toddlers)

This is where Pikler's classic approach applies most directly: free play with simple materials, free movement, and relationship-based care alongside growing independence, for example, with getting dressed. Autonomy often shows up here as a first “no” or “I want to do it myself”. And we actively respect that.

● 3–6 years (kindergarten age)

Free play stays central, but we add simple opportunities for role play and creative activities that the child can take up or set aside as they choose. We support social moments as they come up — say, with siblings or other children — rather than stepping in or resolving conflicts too quickly. We actively encourage everyday independence (getting dressed, eating, tidying up) by giving children time instead of doing it for them.

- **6–8 years (school-age children)**

At this age, care matters less than involvement and having a say. We offer choices around activities instead of a fixed programme, and include children in decisions. Our role shifts more toward being a reliable, respectful companion than a caregiver in the traditional sense.

What All Age Groups Have in Common

Regardless of age: no pressure, observation before intervention, and genuine interest in each individual child rather than a rigid programme for everyone.

Chapter 8: Safety, Hygiene & First Aid

Safety is the foundation that makes free play and free movement possible: without it, there's no room for autonomy or trust.

● Caregiver ratio

Up to their first birthday, children are cared for one-on-one. From age one, one caregiver looks after up to three children at a time. This fixed ratio makes sure every child gets enough individual attention and that risks are spotted early.

● Caregiver qualifications

Every team member holds a current first-aid certification with a focus on emergencies in babies and young children, refreshed on a regular basis. This qualification is a requirement for the job, not an option.

● On-site safety checks

Since we don't work from a fixed location, we check every care environment: hotel room, garden, pool area, before we start, looking for sharp edges, unsecured outlets, chemicals, or fall risks. Where needed, we secure things temporarily or avoid the area altogether.

● Extra care around water

Since many of our sessions take place near pools, children are never left unsupervised near water, not even for a few seconds. Non-swimmers stay within arm's reach of their caregiver at all times. This rule applies regardless of swimming aids or a child's perceived swimming ability.

● Everyday hygiene

We're careful about handwashing for both caregivers and children: before meals, after nappy changes, after using the toilet and we clean any play materials we bring regularly.

● Handling illness

Children with contagious illnesses or a fever aren't cared for, to protect both other children and the caregiver. We're upfront with parents whenever we notice signs of illness in a child.

● Emergency preparedness

For every session, we have parents' emergency contacts on hand, along with information on allergies, existing conditions, and medication. In case of injury or an emergency, we inform parents immediately and arrange further medical help on-site if needed.

● Insurance

Our work is covered by professional liability insurance.

Chapter 9: Communicating with Parents

Trust in a short amount of time comes above all from clear, honest communication.

- **Getting to know each other beforehand**

Before the first session, we hold a free, no-obligation get-to-know call where we ask about the essentials (see Chapter 3) and agree together on booking times.

- **Daily handover**

At pick-up, we give a short, concrete update on mood, sleep, meals, and any special moments.

- **Openness about challenges**

If a child shows signs of being overwhelmed, homesick, or resistant, we address it directly and honestly with the parents rather than glossing over it.

- **Availability during care**

Parents can reach us at any time during care. If anything is unclear or something notable happens, we reach out to parents proactively.

- **Language as a bridge of trust**

We communicate in German or English.

Chapter 10: Quality Assurance: This Concept as Our Shared Foundation

This concept is the binding foundation for every Sunshine Kids Crete team member, regardless of individual personality, language, or working style.

- **Onboarding new team members**

Every new caregiver receives this concept before starting and goes through it in detail in a personal conversation with management. The goal is a shared understanding of our approach, not memorizing a list of rules.

- **Consistency with room to be yourself**

The core principles (Chapters 1–9) are binding for every team member. Within that shared foundation, each caregiver brings their own personality, language, and style. Children and parents do meet different people, but always the same reliable approach.

- **Regular professional exchange**

The team meets regularly to share observations, challenges, and good solutions.

- **Parent feedback as a quality signal**

Feedback from parents after every session actively feeds into how we develop the concept and our practice further.

- **An evolving concept**

This concept is reviewed regularly and adapted as a team, based on new experience, new locations, or new age groups.

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