

4 A day at kindergarten

How do children spend their day at kindergarten? For them, life at kindergarten varies day by day. Today is different from yesterday because of such factors as their mood, the weather, the introduction of new materials or activities, or a change of surroundings. Also, they experience a variety of events according to the changes of the seasons. So, no two days are the same at kindergarten. In this chapter, however, we would like to briefly introduce common daily activities at Japanese kindergartens.

■ Preparation: before children come

Before children come with their parents, teachers prepare for welcoming them by opening the gate, cleaning up the playground, ventilating the classroom and checking play tools and so on. They make these preparations so that children who have been looking forward to coming to kindergarten can make a good start to the day.





After that, teachers have a quick meeting in which they discuss the activities of the day, weather, and what should be considered about their classes and security, with the aim of sharing all views among all the staff.

9:00 Children come to kindergarten

When children come to kindergarten with their parents, teachers stand in front of their classrooms to meet and exchange greetings, 'Good morning.'

They communicate with children and their parents, paying attention to their mental and physical condition.

Children take off their shoes, put them in the shoe cupboard and enter the classroom.

After that, they first leave their bag and outdoor clothes in their locker, put away their towel and cup, and affix an attendance seal to their notebook.



Attendance book



Each child has his/her own notebook, and s/he affixes an 'attendance seal' on it every morning. This notebook is used to keep a record of attendance and to communicate with parents.

■ Activities at kindergarten

< Free play: children play as they want >

After finishing the daily routine, children play and develop their play according to their interests.

There are various play tools in the classroom. Some go outside and play with fixed playground equipment, for example in a sandbox. Or they might observe and/or take care of animals and plants in the playground.

Teachers expand children's activities by introducing new materials or creating a new environment for them. While they play voluntarily, teachers sometimes join the play or give assistance when necessary.

Here are some examples of children's play.

Example 1:
Pretend play



Example 2:
Blocks



Example 3:
Picture
books



Example4:
Artwork

Example 5:
Sandbox

Example 6:
Play tools



Example 7:
Animals



Example 8:
Plants



< **Supervised activities: all the children in a class do the same thing** >

In some cases, all the children in a class come together and do the same activities.

In addition to the greetings when they come to kindergarten in the morning, they get together and exchange greetings again or take charge of certain activities. Also, children draw pictures or produce something according to a theme given by a teacher, or do activities to music together.

A class teacher stands in front with children in charge and is starting to exchange greetings. Children check each other whether everyone sits on a chair.

Sometimes, they dance with teachers, discovering the rhythm of music.

Everyone is drawing. Each child tries to find his/her own way of expression.

■ 11:30 Clean up & Lunch

Around 11:30, we stop our activities for a while and put away toys and clean up the room.

All the children wash their hands, gargle, set the table, sit down to lunch, and then say 'Itadaki-masu' before having lunch. Teachers also sit down together with the children, for lunch, and talk with them.



After lunch, children brush their teeth using their own toothbrush. Teachers try to help children learn to maintain daily personal hygiene such as washing their hands and gargling before supper and brushing their teeth after eating.

After eating, children say 'Gochisou-sama', meaning 'I enjoyed my meal. Thank you.' It is a Japanese custom to say 'Itadaki-masu' before eating and 'Gochisou-sama' after eating to express our gratitude for the food.

■ **Activities in the afternoon**

After lunch, we start activities again. Children spend a full afternoon finding/developing a new play.

They usually spend a rather relaxed time, reading picture books or seeing picture-story shows, because teachers tell them not exercise hard just after having lunch.



■ Preparation for going home

Children put things away before leaving kindergarten. Then they change their clothes and pack a bag.

Some children make preparations so that they can bring back what they have found, made or drawn during the activities at kindergarten. We sometimes distribute a newsletter to the parents.

We often see children saying 'Let's play together later on!' or 'Shall we do *** tomorrow?' Teachers look back on the day with children, have a small chat about the next day, or read a picture-story so that children can have a relaxed time before going home.

■ 14:00 When kindergarten is over

Parents come to pick up their child around 14:00.

They wait in front of the classroom.

Teachers talk about what children have done or how they spent their time at kindergarten to their parents.

This is a good opportunity for parents to know how their child spends his/her day at kindergarten.

Then, children exchange greetings with their teachers saying 'Good-bye' and go back to their parents.

■ **After children go home**

Teachers clean up after children go home.

Then, they make a record of the day, talk with other staff about the children, and get everything ready for the next day by preparing teaching materials, checking play tools, and setting the environment.

In addition, they have a staff meeting once a week to discuss various matters such as their instruction plans, activities of the school year, and children and their family, with the aim of trying to improve care and education.

