

# A Toddler Group within a Kindergarten

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The following is an excerpt from the book *Trust and Wonder: A Waldorf Approach to Caring for Infants and Toddlers*, newly translated from the Norwegian and published by WECAN in 2011.

Here is an example of a day in the kindergarten [with toddlers], one way of doing it. The model is the toddler group in our kindergarten in Norway, with ten children ages one to three.

7:30	The children arrive and play freely
8:00	Breakfast
8:30	Free play
10:15	We wash our hands, and have singing and movement in a “ring”
10:30	Lunch
11:00–2:00	Care (changing diapers, preparing for sleep), followed by nap
on waking	Small fruit meal and drink when children wake up, followed by care
1:30–3:00	Free play, outside or inside, depending on season and weather. Some children go home between 2:00 and 3:00.
2:30	Meal for afternoon children
3:30	Free play, or a quiet time
4:15	Kindergarten closes

To provide one example from our kindergarten, we will follow two-year-old Pia during a regular day. Pia is the second of three siblings. An older sister is in another section of the kindergarten and the youngest brother is still at home.

It is eight o'clock and Pia arrives with her sister and mother. *A joyful Pia comes through the door and runs straight away to her place in the locker room, sits down and starts taking off her shoes. She wants to put on her slippers by herself and she tries, but needs a little help from her mother before they are on comfortably. Now Pia is ready to go in. The educator carefully opens the door to the main room where breakfast is being served. Mum stands in the doorway and says goodbye. Pia*

*first looks into the room before she turns around to her mother and says “cuddle.” Mum gets a cuddle and Pia runs to the table.*

At mealtimes, the children have their fixed places. They sit in high chairs around the table. The ones who are able to climb up have permission to do so. *Pia climbs up by herself, but needs a little help to get into the chair. Once most of the children are in place, we light the candle and everybody sings: “The soil nurtures the little seed; the sun ripens the grain to bread. Dear sun and dear earth, thank you for the gifts on our table. Bless the food.” We all hold hands (this is voluntary) and then we start eating. Pia wants crispbread, and with a little help from the adult, she gets butter and cheese on her piece and starts eating. Pia can manage two slices of crispbread or a slice of regular bread for breakfast. Pia enjoys her food, frequently puts a hand on her neighbor, and often has lots to say.*

After breakfast, while we tidy up, is the time for free play. *Pia climbs down from the chair, but needs a little help to get right down onto the floor. She runs to the adult and asks for a dishcloth; she wants to help clean the table. This takes a while and the dishcloth lands on the floor. Then she is in the corner with the dolls, where she has found a knotted doll that she carries around with her. She spots Jacob who has a little cat. Suddenly she really wants that cat. She lets go of the doll and takes the cat from Jacob. This results in screaming and objections. Pia looks impervious and holds on tight. The adults want to help. They find another cat, give it to Pia and together they return the cat to Jacob. It is not quite what Pia wanted, as she'd rather have the cat that Jacob had, so after a bit of coaxing Jacob accepts the new cat and Pia gets to keep the one she wanted. Big smile, and a few seconds pass before Pia returns the cat to Jacob. Now he has two cats and Pia has already moved on to something else. Free play among the little ones is constantly changing; sometimes it's not possible to follow all the details.*

When playtime is over, the adults tidy up before opening the door to the bathroom where everyone has

to wash hands. *Pia has found a bag that she has filled with blocks. She is sitting on the floor engrossed in emptying the bag. Then she realizes that the door is open. She leaves the bag and runs into the bathroom to wash her hands. Someone is already standing at the basin. She wants to push him away, but is stopped by the adult. She protests a bit, but accepts having to wait for her turn. At the basin, she lets the water run across her hands and wants to linger there, but there are others waiting behind her. She gets help with drying her hands, then runs into the room again and sits down on the carpet.*

One educator helps with the washing of hands and another sits down on the floor to gather the children for song and play, while the third makes sure we have all we need for the meal.

*Pia wants to sit close to one of the adults. If someone is already sitting there, she tries to sneak in between so that she is sitting alongside an adult or on the lap. Sometimes this works, but at other times she has to find another place. Most of the time Pia participates in singing, rhymes, and jingles, but at other times it is more fun to hide under the table or run around a bit.* Depending on the child and the situation, we bring the children back to the group, or we let them be and they come back when they are ready. Most of them participate in all the songs and enjoy the repetition. Often we sing the same songs throughout the year. The latest one is “We are traveling to Eating land” and all the children are mentioned by name in the song.

*Pia is one of the first to run to the table and sit down. She would prefer to climb up by herself, but needs a little helping hand.* When everyone is in place, an adult walks around and puts a drop of oil (lemon or lavender oil) in the children’s hands, while we recite a verse. We massage the oil into the hands; feeling the warmth and smelling the wonderful fragrance and sometimes touching each other’s hands. *Pia sits and waits for the oil; she loves the fragrance and warm hands of the adult. She would really like to massage the hands of Preben sitting next to her, but he will not allow it.*

The children are wearing large bibs. The candle on the table is lit. We sing the same song we sang at breakfast, “The soil nurtures the little seed.” Each child receives a plate of food according to the daily menu and we start eating. We try to keep a peaceful mood at the table, so the adults do not talk more than necessary. There is generally a little prattle going on, as someone is usually repeating and practicing new words just learned. *Pia loves to natter, even though she does not have all the words to express her meaning. However, through her body language and mimicry she*

*succeeds in expressing most things.*

Not everyone finishes eating at the same time, but we close off the meal with a verse that expresses, “Thank you for the food, it was very good and we are all satisfied.” The children who want to will hold hands. After the meal, they are all cared for before having a nap. This is the time of day where each child gets his or her own time with the adult. One by one, they are taken into the baby care room for a diaper change before a nap. The parents decide whether the child should sleep outside in a pram or inside in a bed.

We try to use as much time as we can for this part of the day. Rhymes, jingles, and songs are used when removing the socks and finding all the toes, or getting the arms through the pullover. If there is time, we use a little oil for massaging legs or arms, which helps foster a sense of well-being and calm before falling asleep. *Pia sleeps inside and she happily follows the adult to the care room to get a clean diaper before lying down. Again, she wants to climb onto the washbasin by herself, which she manages most of the time. With a little help, she gets ready and finds a clean diaper on the shelf. The diaper is changed, but before the long pants are put on, we play a little game with her toes, saying Tip, Tip, Tip every time we touch one of them. We could repeat that over and over again and she would never get tired of it, but now she must sleep.*

Each child has a favorite song, which we will sing at this time. Some want the same song twice; others want two different songs or maybe even three different ones. A children’s harp tuned to the pentatonic scale D–E–G–A–B–D–E will calm the children and help them sleep. The soft and tender tones of the harp are soporific. Some enjoy being tucked in, while others are happy with a touch on the cheek; others again need a bear hug before settling down. The needs of the individual children vary and as we get to know each and every one, we come to understand them. It is very important that the children bring their own familiar bedding from home, or at least a scarf from Mum or a T-shirt from Dad, especially in the beginning. The smell of home can create a feeling of safety and help to make sleep easier. *Pia has two songs that she wants to hear before going to sleep, “Hum to me, Mummy” and “My guardian angel.” Both songs are repeated a couple of times before she gets a cuddle and is then tucked in. She falls asleep easily. Sometimes we need to play on the harp a little, but as a rule, she falls asleep quickly.*

Waking up is just as important as falling asleep. Again, we need time for each of the children, in order that they enter peacefully into our world again. They

meet us in individual ways when they wake up. Some children are wide-awake straight away and stand up shouting; others stay under the covers and need a long time to waken. The way that we interact with them at this point will often determine the rest of the day. As adults, we feel very privileged to be part of this segment of the child's life, when they come from a deep sleep to an awakened state. Sometimes it is necessary to have children on our laps for a while, to give them enough time to wake up. A touch on the cheek or stroking the back makes it easier for them. One way of "waking" the child is through songs or fingerplays that are connected to rhymes and jingles. *Pia normally sleeps one to two hours every day and she wakes up as peacefully as she falls asleep. Happy as a little bird, she often stands up in the bed waiting to be picked up. She does not need much time before she is ready to be dressed.*

Most of the children need help to get dressed. As they grow, they become more independent and want to do it themselves. This can take time, but that is something we can provide. It does not matter if it takes a long time to put on a sock or trousers. Usually when given enough time the child will succeed, but we adults have the tendency to do it for them in order to speed up the process and, therefore we rob them of the chance to do it themselves. Later on, they might not want to dress themselves, although by then we expect them to, and they might need the help they did not want when they were younger. *Pia is a girl who wants to dress herself, but does not always get it right. With a little help from the adult, she has the impression that she*

*has managed by herself and is beaming with satisfaction when all the clothes are on and she can join the other children.*

The children also get a piece of fruit and something to drink at this time, before they go out to the others. The time outside depends on how long the child has been sleeping, but everybody gets some time outside before they are either picked up or return inside for the afternoon meal. Weather permitting, they are allowed outside again after the meal and do not return inside until the end of the day. *Pia loves being outside and the first thing she does is to look for her sister. Normally there is mutual joy when they see each other unless big sister Linda is busy with something special. Pia thrives outside in the sand pit, which is the most popular place. An adult is always present. She spends much time digging or filling the bucket with sand. In between, she walks around, but mostly with an adult or big sister. Pia is one of the children who stay until the very end of the day. If she has had a good sleep during the day, she is in a good humor throughout, but if she has had too little sleep, we notice that she is very weary in the afternoon. She is extremely happy when Mum or Dad comes to fetch her and her big sister. She waves goodbye to the educators smiling and happy, and sometimes she gives a hug to those close by.*

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