

# Denmark's childcare system is one of the world's cheapest, most progressive and accessible. How does it compare to Australia? <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

### Excerpts

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And thus was my introduction to Denmark's childcare system, lauded as one of the world's cheapest, most progressive and accessible (if you have a CPR number, the Danish equivalent of social security but so much more, that is. Without it, you literally cannot access anything, including healthcare, something we learnt the hard way as we waded through the bureaucratic nightmare of trying to obtain one for two months).

Once you're in though, it's great. For Danish nationals, every child is guaranteed an affordable nursery place from the age of one to when school starts at six. We were told we have two options: part time care for 25 hours a week, or full time for 50. We opted for full time but, as in Australia, this doesn't mean she spends 50 hours away from home.

What's struck me the most is the freedom and autonomy afforded very small children, especially compared to Australia. Kids as young as two (if not younger) are expected to take off their own shoes, jumpers and snow suits.

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Good nutrition is also a bedrock of Danish society, and again this practice is reflected in the childcare setting. While I have no complaints about the food Australian nurseries offer children, I am deeply impressed by what kids are given here. Pea soup with prawns, fish or meat with potatoes and vegetables and, my favourite, the Friday smorgasbord of rye bread, pickles, salmon, cheese, chicken, various vegetables, mackerel, beetroot and leverpostej (pâté).

I hear from generations past (in Australia) that childcare has come a long way. Perhaps the biggest difference between Denmark and Australia is the idea that children – even tiny ones – should be encouraged to act responsibly at a much earlier age.

This reflects Scandinavia's general approach to children: their names are often included on apartments, and their voices have just as much right to be heard as those of adults. They are babied much less (but not hugged less – affection flows freely in childcare) and in many ways, that's a positive.

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These communities approach child rearing quite differently. Children are given tasks to complete alongside parents (such as cooking a meal), which Doucleff argues ultimately makes them feel more competent and proud of their contribution to the family; and formal, structured play and toys are not part of daily life. Parents don't entertain their kids; they include them in daily work, encouraging them to learn how to live in the adult world.

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Educators are less worried about safety (the playgrounds here are more adventures than those back home) and less inclined to interfere in children's creative play.

Parents are also not really told what the child did all day – I've only found out recently that my child has been going on weekly excursions to lakes and forests, something which in Australia requires the signing of several forms per trip (I just signed one form at the beginning of term here) and a full debrief post-adventure.

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**Related link:** [Learning across borders: What can Canada learn from Danish early childhood education and care?](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

**Region:** International <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** children's rights <sup>[5]</sup>

culture <sup>[6]</sup>

quality <sup>[7]</sup>

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