

# Questions Frequently Asked by Foreign Parents

## About Enrollment in Daycare Centers (*Hoikuen*)

### What are differences between certified daycare centers (*ninka hoikuen*) and non-certified daycare centers (*ninka-gai hoikuen*)?

To enroll your child in a certified daycare center, you must apply to the City of Sapporo (the Health & Children Affairs Section of the local ward office, inside the local health center); to enroll your child in a non-certified daycare center, you must apply directly to the daycare center where you wish to enroll your child.

To apply to enroll your child in a certified daycare center, you must have a reason for requiring childcare, such as work or school, but childcare fees at certified daycare centers are relatively low because they are determined by your household income.

Some non-certified daycare centers place a premium on English education, using English in daily conversation.

Note: This document focuses mainly on certified daycare centers.

### What are the requirements for applying to enroll our child in *hoikuen*?

To apply to enroll children in a *hoikuen*, both parents or guardians must have a reason for requiring childcare, such as being at work for at least 64 hours per month, being busy seeking employment, or attending school (incl. Japanese language school) for at least 64 hours per month. Although both parents or guardians must have such a reason, applications are also accepted when either parent or guardian lives in their home country.

### Is it possible to enroll our child only for several months until we return to our country?

Yes, if both parents or guardians have an adequate reason for requiring childcare and the enrollment period is at least a month. Temporary daycare services are available if you need childcare for a period less than a month.

### We want to enroll our child right away, but if we can't, we want to apply to enroll the child in the April class next year. In this case, do we need to submit separate application forms?

Application documents (such as a certificate of employment) issued in April or later will remain valid in the next fiscal year. Applicants who apply with documents issued prior to September will later receive a written request to submit updated documents.

### How many *hoikuen* can we apply to at a time?

Five.

### What is the minimum age for entering *hoikuen*?

That varies by facility, but many *hoikuen* in Sapporo accept children who are at least 57 days old or who are at least five months old. For more information, ask the Health & Children Affairs Section of the local ward office

(Health Center).

### **Do they use cloth diapers, or paper diapers?**

Diaper policy varies by facility. Some daycare centers use cloth diapers, and others paper diapers. Some daycare centers have the parents or guardians take dirty diapers home at the end of the day, and other daycares take care of the dirty diapers themselves. Check with the facility during your visit.

### **Do *hoikuen* accept children who are on breast milk?**

Some daycare centers store frozen breast milk from mothers. In this case, the mother needs a sanitary place to pump breast milk. (Lactation in places such as restrooms is not permitted.) For more information, please contact the facility directly.

## **About Enrollment in Kindergartens (*Yochien*)**

### **What are the requirements for applying to enroll our child in a *yochien*?**

There are no specific entry criteria other than the child being at least three years old. A reason for application may be that you want your child to interact with Japanese children. For more information, including vacancies, please contact the facility directly.

### **What is the minimum age for entering *yochien*?**

Some kindergartens take three-year-olds and up (i.e., after their third birthdays), and others only take children who have already turned three years old by the beginning of April (after spring school holidays). There are also kindergartens that take children before their third birthdays or that offer pre-school programs several days a week. For more information, please contact the facility directly.

## **Matters Common to *Hoikuen* and *Yochien***

### **How can we select a *hoikuen* or *yochien*?**

Policies and equipment vary by facility. Be sure to visit the facility in which you wish to apply to enroll your child and ask questions before submitting your application.

Many parents and guardians want to enroll their child in one near their home, workplace or school.

### **What is the lunch policy? How flexible is it?**

Please contact the facility directly. Many daycare centers ask that children bring boxed lunches if there are any ingredients or foods that they cannot consume for religious reasons.

### **Do different daycare centers embrace different religions?**

Many daycare centers have no religious affiliation, but there are private Buddhist and Catholic daycare centers. If you want to know for sure, please ask the facility before submitting your application.

## Application Screening

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### Will all applications be accepted?

Not all applications are accepted, because certified daycare centers in Sapporo have high enrollments, with many children on the waiting lists.

### We received a Certificate of Approved Classification after we applied to enroll our child in *hoikuen*. What is it for?

The document certifies that your requirement for childcare has been approved. Since the certificate is necessary for you to use daycare services, please keep it in a safe place. Please note that the certificate does not guarantee enrollment in a *hoikuen*.

### How is the priority for enrollment determined?

The ward offices screen applications for Childcare Allowance Certificates and give scores to each household depending on the reason that childcare is required: the greater the need for daycare, the higher the score. Applications are accepted in descending order of total score.

Applications may be submitted any time, but the largest numbers of children are admitted on April 1, when the school year begins in Japan.

### How is notification made of screening results?

For enrollment on April 1, successful applicants are notified of the screening results in writing in late January and applicants who are placed on the waiting list are notified of the screening results by-early March.

For enrollment other than on April 1, both successful applicants and those placed on waiting lists are notified of the screening results in writing. The ward offices will then contact those on waiting lists by telephone or other means when enrollment becomes possible and will determine the date of enrollment before coordinating with the *hoikuen* and sending them formal notifications in writing.

### How long do we have to wait until enrollment?

We cannot say for sure. Children are not admitted in order of application: Children who applied later may be admitted before those who applied earlier.

## Matters after Admission

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### What are childcare hours?

*Hoikuen* hours are clearly laid out. Please note that an extra fee applies if you are late for the regular closing time, even by just a minute.

### What is the *narashi hoiku* (“adjustment period”)? Is it possible to have my child kept for an entire day without a *narashi hoiku* from Day 1?

At the beginning of *hoikuen* enrollment, there is a *narashi hoiku* (“adjustment period”), during which parents and

guardians are asked to pick up their child earlier than usual. The period is gradually extended on a daily basis so that your child will smoothly get used to the new environment.

#### **What happens if our child does not feel well?**

A *hoikuen* or *yochien* cannot accept a feverish child. If your child runs a fever during childcare hours, you will be asked to pick him/her up as soon as possible.

*Hoikuen* and *yochien* staff do not give medicine to children. Children who have contracted the flu or another contagious disease require doctor's permission to return to class. For more information on how to handle the situation, please contact the facility directly.

#### **How should we pay fees for daycare center services?**

You should pay *hoikuen* fees to the City of Sapporo every month. You may pay by bank transfer each month, but automatic bank transfer payment is the most convenient method. To set up that service, use the automatic bank transfer application form which you will receive together with your screening results.

Fees for the Center for Early Childhood Education and Care (*Nintei Kodomoen*) and Small-Scale Local Child Care Facilities (*Chiikigata Hoiku Jigyo*) should be paid directly to those facilities. For information about payment methods, please contact the facility directly.

In addition to the monthly childcare fee, costs of lunch, diapers, mattress cleaning and the like must be paid directly to the facility. For more information on the costs and payment methods, please contact the facility directly.

#### **Is it possible for my child to be absent from *hoikuen* for an extended period while we are temporarily back in our home country?**

As a general rule, children who do not attend their class for more than a month will be removed because of the long waiting lists. Contact the Health & Children Affairs Section of the local ward office for more information, because the maximum period for which children may absent themselves may differ depending on the reason for the absence.