Some 90 percent of children spend their early years living with both parents.

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:**

**GROWING UP IN SWEDEN**

Of the 9.6 million people living in Sweden, 2 million are under the age of 18. Most of them take for granted the fact that they can enjoy free schooling, an active social life, as well as easy access to nature and the internet.

Swedish law ensures that children are well protected and their rights are defended. There are also various organizations dedicated to the wellbeing of young people. In 1979, Sweden became the first country in the world to make beating or spanking children a criminal offence.

In 1993, the Swedish Government appointed an ombudsman to protect children’s rights and look after their interests. The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden is obliged to follow the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and enforce it in Swedish society. Sweden was one of the first countries to sign up.

**Help and support**

There are many organizations that young people in Sweden can turn to if they need help. Children’s Rights in Society (BRIS) offers support services such as telephone helplines, chat and e-mail counseling. In 2010 BRIS had a total of 115,335 contacts with children and teenagers. Friends is an organization dedicated to stamping out bullying, mainly in schools but also outside – during organized sports activities, for example. Since being set up in 1997, Friends has cooperated with about 1,500 schools. Save the Children Sweden is another organization that defends the rights of children. It has more than 80,000 members.

www.bris.se
www.friends.se
www.savethechildren.se

**Family life**

Some 90 percent of children in Sweden start off living with their mother and father, who may or may not be married, and tend to have one or two children on average. But separation is not unusual. Today 74 percent of children under 18 live with both their birth parents, while 27 percent have a stepfather or stepmother. About one in five children in Sweden has a family with roots in another country. Most children living in Sweden who were born abroad, or whose parents were born abroad, come from Iraq, Somalia, Poland or Thailand. About 14,000 of these children were adopted from another country. Almost 60 percent of children live in detached houses, 28 percent live in apartment blocks and 12 percent live in row houses.

**Working parents**

Eighty-one percent of all children have a mother who goes out to work, and 92 percent have fathers with jobs. Each
In mid-August, the start of the school year begins and all children move up a grade. More than half of Sweden is woodland, and it’s popular to go mushroom and berry picking at this time of year. In late October/early November, children have a week off school. On 13 October Halloween – a new tradition in Sweden – is celebrated with fancy dress and pumpkins. The next day, All Saints Day, many people light candles at family graves and in memorial parks.

Children and young people

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THE SCHOOL YEAR

FALL

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Lucia

On 13 December Swedes celebrate Lucia. In every school and daycare there is a Lucia procession. Dressed in white and wearing a crown of candles, a girl chosen to be Lucia leads a choir singing carols and wearing a crown of candles on her head.

Christmas

School ends just before Christmas Eve (24 December) and stays shut until the beginning of January.

Winter Sports

The spring semester starts in the second week of January. In late February or early March there’s a week-long winter sports break. Many families head to the mountains in the north of Sweden for cross-country or downhill skiing and snowboarding. With many lakes frozen over, ice-skating is a popular pastime.

The school year is divided into two semesters. The fall semester begins around mid-August and runs until the end of December, with a one-week break in the middle. The spring semester starts in the second week of January and runs until the second week of June. A normal school week is five days long: Monday to Friday. Children aged between six and 12 are offered day care before and after school.

In 2012, a new grading system has been introduced for children in Swedish schools, from sixth grade on. They are now being graded from A–F.

Hobbies and pastimes

Like most children the world over, Swedish children enjoy listening to music and hanging out with friends. They are also encouraged to focus on their interests. Singing and playing a musical instrument are popular extra-curricular activities. Twenty-nine percent of girls and 26 percent of boys aged 13–15 play an instrument in their spare time. Everyone is encouraged to take up sport, and 68 percent of 13- to 15-year-olds are members of a sports club. Soccer is the most popular sport among both girls and boys. Then comes horse riding for girls. Boys prefer floorball, followed by swimming and ice hockey. The sports interest goes all the way to the top; Sweden is number seven on the Olympic medal score list.

Internet and TV

Young Swedes surf the internet as much as they watch TV. Almost a third of all 13- to 15-year-olds watch TV at least three hours a day. Just as many 12- to 16-year-olds spend as much time surfing the internet. Half of all four-year-olds have browsed the internet. Online TV sites and YouTube are among the most popular, but what children do online depends on their age and gender. Doing school work, blogging, chatting and using social-networking sites and smartphone applications are the most common pastimes among older children. Younger children are more into games.
THE SCHOOL YEAR

EASTER

In March or April school children have another week off for Easter. Depending on where you are in Sweden, this means either enjoying the first signs of spring, or the last of the snow.

SUMMER VACATION

The summer vacation is 10 weeks long and starts mid-June. Some families go abroad, often to the Mediterranean. Others go and stay in their country cottages. Many children spend time at summer camp. Summer for most children definitely means swimming in a lake or the sea. There are thousands of lakes and Sweden’s coastline is 2,700 kilometers long. In Sweden, school rules say that all 11-year-olds must be able to swim 200 meters — 50 of these on their back — and must be able to cope with emergencies in the water.

DID YOU KNOW?

Proportionately, there are fewer children in Sweden today. At the beginning of the 1970s, children made up 25 percent of the population. That figure has now decreased to 20 percent. However, the numbers of children born in Sweden have been increasing fairly steadily since the late 1990s.
NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

PLENTY OF SPACE

Sweden has a small population for its size: just over 23 people per square kilometer. (The EU average is more than 116 people per square kilometer.) This means that most people have nature on their doorstep, and enjoying it is a big part of growing up. The right of public access allows everyone to explore the countryside freely, but consideration must be shown for nature, wildlife and other people.

JOINING A CLUB

Many clubs and associations – such as the Swedish Guide and Scout Organization – arrange outdoor activities for children. Skogsmulle, for example, is a type of nature school named after a fictional character who was brought up in the woods. Since the establishment of the first Skogsmulle School in 1957, the organization has helped about 2 million children to appreciate and care for nature. This focus on nature contributes significantly to cultivating a caring attitude towards the environment in children.

RECYCLING

Swedish children are taught to recycle at an early age, and Swedes recycle nearly 90 percent of all aluminum cans and polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles. Every spring, when the snow has melted, the Keep Sweden Tidy Foundation organizes a special day for school children to pick up litter and clean up their surroundings.

OUT AND ABOUT

Children spend part of every school day outdoors, whatever the weather. Some preschools and other institutions are even based on the concept of learning outdoors: I Ur och Skur.

TOMORROW’S GENIUSES

Swedish schools are working with a variety of organizations to encourage young people’s interest in technology and entrepreneurship. Here are two examples:

Finn upp
A teaching method designed to awaken a desire for knowledge in school children, Finn upp encourages them to invent things to help them learn. A Finn upp competition is held every three years for young inventors in grades six to nine. The event aims to inspire a new generation of inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs, and release the power of fresh ideas. Finn upp was founded in 1979 by the Swedish Society of Engineers (Ingenjörsamfundet).

Snilleblixtarna
The Flashes of Genius (Snilleblixtarna), a non-profit association, is geared to children from preschool age to fifth grade. The aim is to encourage children’s interest in technology, the natural sciences and entrepreneurship. Snilleblixtarna provides teachers and educators with tools and a working model to stimulate children’s curiosity, desire to learn and ability to think critically.

USEFUL LINKS

www.bris.se Children’s Rights in Society
www.friends.se Friends
www.bo.se The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden
www.savethechildren.se Save the Children Sweden
www.unicef.org United Nations Children’s Fund
www.skogsmulllestiftelsen.org The Skogsmulle Foundation
www.scout.se The Swedish Guide and Scout Council
www.naturvardsverket.se The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
www.tomtit.se Tom Titt Experiment, a science center for children
www.kungahuset.se The Swedish royal court’s official website

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