

Finding a Good Preschool

You may be getting ready for your child to take the first step in education outside your home. That means you are likely getting recommendations from friends about good preschools and making visits to observe and interview directors.

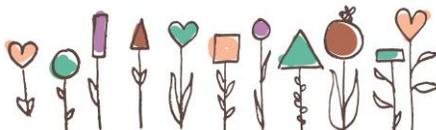
This process can be very confusing. Good preschools often don't look like the memories many parents have of "school." And with all the pressures on education at higher levels, parents may feel they should be selecting a school that offers heavy academic emphasis. But that would be wrong.

Let's consider what you will find in a developmentally appropriate preschool program, one where decisions and curriculum are based on what we know about the developmental abilities of young children and how they learn best.

- ♥ Children construct their own knowledge. Rather than learning just by being told or shown, good preschools offer children ways for them to "teach" themselves with firsthand experiences.
- ♥ Children learn through their senses. Good preschools offer abundant, real, three-dimensional objects for children to manipulate and explore. Some of the materials may be gloriously messy, like sand, water, paint, and clay.
- ♥ Children constantly make associations with previous knowledge. Familiar materials are provided, and they are available over a period of time so that children can repeat experiences and deepen their understanding.
- ♥ Children are frustrated easily. A good preschool provides an environment and materials that are accessible and easy for children to manage themselves. Materials in a classroom will range from simple to more complex, so that individuals can find their level of success.
- ♥ Children learn what they want to know. Teachers observe and listen to children and design curriculum that provides ways for them to follow their interests. Motivation is from the child's inner drive to learn, not from a need to learn what pleases the adult.
- ♥ Children learn from making mistakes. Knowledgeable teachers allow mistakes to happen, though of course they are mindful of safety. Figuring out what went wrong provides lasting lessons.
- ♥ Children learn from accomplishing hard tasks. Teachers encourage and support children's efforts, without rushing in with solutions. Children's self esteem grows as they master the tasks they set for themselves.
- ♥ Children need time to organize their thinking. Good preschools provide long periods of uninterrupted time for children to explore and interact. The classroom is child-centered, rather than adult-driven.
- ♥ Children have different attention spans. Good preschools provide flexible schedules so children can move at their own pace, getting as much or as little help as they require. Opportunities to develop self-help skills are valued as part of the curriculum.
- ♥ Children learn everything they need to learn in the preschool years through the medium of play. Play allows children to use their imaginations, their bodies and language, while developing social skills – all the foundations of learning.

When you find a preschool that follows these ideas, you may be sure that your child will thrive there happily.

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