



# Early Childhood Center

## Key Questions for Choosing the Right Preschool for Your Child

Picking a preschool can be a daunting task for parents. As you narrow down your search process and you schedule tours, here are some key questions to consider when you visit a school:

- 1) **What is the student-teacher ratio and the class size?** Look for preschools with low student-teacher ratios and small class sizes. A low student-teacher ratio allows the teacher to focus on the individual needs of each child and promote positive interaction between classmates. The small class sizes also help to facilitate observations and effective assessment of each child.
- 2) **What curriculum is used in the school?** Class activities should promote learning and encourage independence through purposeful play and exploration. A quality curriculum supports social-emotional skills, literacy, mathematics, language development, science, writing, the arts, and fine and gross motor skills. Social-emotional skill development is crucial to a preschooler's experience. Ask how this skill is incorporated into daily learning. Teachers should be able to gear the curriculum to children's areas of needs and planned activities should reflect areas where a child might need additional support or challenge.
- 3) **What does the classroom environment reflect?** In the classroom, children should be able to explore the components of the curriculum in a variety of interest areas including science, literacy, art, construction and dramatic play. Classroom materials should be labeled, organized into interest areas and easy accessible by the children so they can engage in activities independently. Dedicated space for dramatic play and construction areas, for example, encourages play that helps strengthen children's language, cognitive and social emotional skills. Also, observe the artwork on the walls. Do they proudly display children's work? Does all the work look the same or is individuality encouraged?
- 4) **What are teacher qualifications and experience?** Experienced teachers offer years of insight to a preschool classroom. They have developed discipline strategies for promoting successful interactions with children and making the most of learning opportunities as they arise during the day. Also, you can ask whether the lead teachers have advanced degrees in early childhood education.
- 5) **What is a typical, daily schedule for the class?** For preschoolers, daily schedules provide important structure and routine. Look for scheduled time for outdoor play, social interaction and independent learning. For example, "free choice" time offers opportunities to choose activities that interest the child. Snack and lunch time support independent learning and social skills. Outdoor time allows children to develop their gross motor skills and imaginative play.

(Please turn over for more questions.)

- 6) **What is the balance between student choice and teacher driven activities?** In a preschool classroom, children should have opportunities to choose activities during the day. Offering children the freedom to choose activities within a structured framework helps develop a child's decision-making skills as well as independence and self-confidence. Observing the child's choice and how s/he makes the choice provides the teacher with valuable insight into the child's preferences and mindset.
- 7) **What is the discipline policy?** The school's practices and environment should provide a safe and constructive learning environment for all children. Behavior policies should reflect positive social values including respect for others and self-control. Daily interactions ought to strengthen social-emotion development by encouraging healthy self-esteem and expression. Teachers should model appropriate behavior and guide interactions among children and adults. Proper classroom management plays an important role in minimizing potential challenges before they develop.
- 8) **What are the opportunities for parent/teacher communication?** The parent/teacher relationship is very important for a successful preschool experience. Find out about the mix and frequency of formal versus informal communication with teachers; and how teachers inform parents about daily activities in the classroom.

Visiting schools and asking the right questions during visits can make the process of choosing the right preschool much easier. Observe the classroom activities and ask lots of questions. Remember, you know your child best, so trust your instinct!



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