

How to choose a preschool
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January 17, 2012
Charlotte Observer

It's time to start making decisions on your child's first steps into preschool for the fall. To select the best match for your child, plan to attend open houses, study school mission statements and talk to other parents about their recommendations. As you visit classrooms, what is your gut instinct about how your child would fit in? If possible, observe how children play and how the teachers and children interact.

"Preschoolers and kindergarteners need time for imaginative and interactive play so they learn how to share and handle frustrations," says an elementary school teacher in Raleigh. A play-based preschool allows children the freedom to select from several choices, including dramatic-play areas, building stations, reading corners, sand tables and art centers. Some of the choices are spontaneous, while others are more teacher-directed. The goals of high-quality, play-based preschools include the children listening and following directions, having strong self-help skills and developing gross and fine motor skills. Instead of rote counting or worksheets, for example, a child might visualize the number 4 by working with four objects.

A child gains a love of learning and gets a chance to figure out how things work using real objects - even simple things such as using two triangular blocks to make a square, or pouring water through a funnel.

In addition to weighing basics such as tuition, schedule and location, seek out answers to these questions:

What are the class sizes, teacher qualifications and staff stability?

Is there a set daily routine but enough flexibility that each child's individual needs can be met?

Do children have a chance to work things out appropriately?

Are there multiple sets of materials for children to choose from?

Is the art based on the process of doing, or a teacher-directed process during which everything the children make looks the same?

Are there behaviors such as hitting or biting that will get the child kicked out of the preschool?

Readiness checklist

Are the preschoolers working toward building skills for kindergarten? In "Kindergarten Success" (Jossey-Bass, 2006), author Amy James says children are ready to enter kindergarten if they are able to:

Verbally communicate needs and wants.

Use complete sentences to recount an event.

Ask questions.

Take care of their own bathroom needs.

Share and take turns.

Separate easily from parents.

Approach new activities with curiosity.

Follow two- and three-step directions.

Run, hop, walk, skip and throw a ball.

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Read more here: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2012/01/17/2925410/how-to-choose-a-preschool.html#storylink=cpy>