

# Selecting the "Right" Preschool for Your Child

## THE BASICS

- 1) What is preschool?
  - a. Organized early childhood education program to help develop children's physical growth/motor, social/personal, cognitive/language and emotional/feeling skills
  - b. Preparation for Kindergarten (and later school years)
    - i. Kindergarten as we knew it is no more
    - ii. Cut-off dates to enter K programs vary by district
  - c. Two types of programs
    - i. Childcare Centers
    - ii. "Traditional" Preschools
  
- 2) What are the benefits of attending a high-quality preschool?
  - a. "Children who attend high-quality preschool enter kindergarten with better pre-reading skills, richer vocabularies, and stronger basic math skills than those who do not," says NIEER director W. Steven Barnett, PhD.
  - b. Children learn good social & behavior-management skills (a.k.a. good student skills) in a group setting (how to raise hands, compromise, be respectful of others, take turns, share teacher's attention, separate from parents)
  - c. Gain a sense of "self" and function independently
  - d. "Quality preschools help children find answers through exploration, experimentation, and conversation." Angela Capone (senior program manager at Southwest Human Development's Arizona Institute for Childhood Development)
  
- 3) Who can attend preschool?
  - a. Preschools offer programs for 2½'s, 3's, 4's and/or young 5's (potty training 3+)
  - b. Usually 2 - 2½ hour/session, 1 - 5 days/week (most without parents)
  - c. Most children attend preschool (1-3 years)
  
- 4) How will I know if my child is ready for preschool?
  - a. Child's temperament/maturity
  - b. Discuss any developmental concerns with your pediatrician
  
- 5) What makes a "good" preschool?
  - a. Most preschools are state-licensed (meet basic health/safety standards)
  - b. Ohio's "Step Up to Quality" (Ohio's Voluntary Quality-Rating System)
  - c. National Association for the Education of Young Children (accreditation based upon quality - only 8% of preschools are accredited - [www.rightchoiceforkids.org](http://www.rightchoiceforkids.org))
  - d. A "good" preschool program will meet YOUR child's needs and help them to grow

## THE "TO-DO" LIST

- 1) **Research and Reflection (Now)**
  - a. What are you looking for in a preschool?
  - b. What is important to you?
  - c. What does "quality" mean to you?
  - d. What do you want your child to get out of their experience?
  - e. What are your "must haves" and "no no's"
  
- 2) **Identify preschools that offer classes your child is eligible to attend (by end January)**
  - a. Identify potential schools (phone book, websites, other parents)
  - b. Call schools & request information; ask general questions
  - c. Make sure that your child meets registration guidelines for desired class(es)
  - d. Review each school's information
  - e. Select schools want to learn more about and schedule visits
  - f. Create a list of questions to ask school administrator and/or teacher(s)
  
- 3) **Visit Schools (by end of February - earlier if registration dates are in February)**
  - a. Ask lots of questions - write down your answers
  - b. Observe how your child interacts with teachers, in classroom & during activities
  - c. Observe all of the spaces in which your child would spend time
  - d. If possible, observe the teachers/classes in which your child could be placed
  - e. Stay as long as possible and observe the different daily activities
  - f. Ask current parents what they think about the school
  
- 4) **Compare Schools (by end of February - earlier if registration dates are in February)**
  - a. Develop list of "pros" and "cons" for each school
  - b. Compare and contrast schools
  - c. Select your top choices
  
- 5) **Registration/Admissions Process (most are in February & March)**
  - a. Most schools have tiered registration process - determine with which group your child will register and when this will take place
  - b. Familiarize yourself with the "unwritten rules" of the registration process
  - c. Submit registration materials and fee(s) to school(s) - find out if registration fees are refundable OR attend registration sign-ups
  - d. *Have back-up plan if top choice falls through OR if top-choice does not have earliest registration date*

**FACTORS TO CONSIDER**

- 1) **Safety** (facility clean/safe, doors locked, CPR/FA training, allergy considerations...)
- 2) **Curriculum/Learning Philosophy** (what will your child learn and how will they learn it?)
  - a. “[Children] learn best through doing the kinds of activities they find interesting - storytime, talking to their teachers about stars, playing with blocks.” Linda Smith (Executive Director of the NACCRRRA)\*
  - b. Classrooms should offer a variety of activity areas, with age appropriate materials
  - c. Things are at kid-level (whenever possible)
  - d. Can you tell *your* child's artwork from everyone else's?
- 3) **Teacher Experience/Education**
  - a. Ideally, head teachers should have a minimum of an associate's degree and formal training in early-childhood education.
  - b. Good teachers will meet each child where they are at and take them further
- 4) **Parent/Teacher Communication** (frequency & type)
- 5) **Teacher:Student Ratios\* \*\***

	Ohio Minimum Licensing Req.	Ohio Step Up 1	Ohio Step Up 2	Ohio Step Up 3	NAEYC Rec's
Children 30-36 Months	1:8	1:8	1:7	1:6	1:6
Children 36-48 Months	1:12	1:12	1:10	1:9	1:6
Children 48-60 Months	1:14	1:14	1:10	1:10	1:8-10

- 6) **Discipline Policy/Philosophy**
- 7) **Personal/Religious beliefs**
- 8) **Diversity**
- 9) **Cost** (registration fee, monthly tuition, additional costs - if any)
- 10) **Location** (distance from home/work, potential for carpooling, local classmates)
- 11) **Availability of Before/After Care**
- 12) **Type of Classes Offered** (am/pm, length of program day, # days/week, types of classes offered at the same time, 8-9 v. 12 months, family schedule)
- 13) **Potential for Continuity** (sequencing, continuity, sibling needs)
- 14) **Placement** (grouped by age, can request teacher/class or random assignment)
- 15) **Specials** (music, gym, art, field trips, on-site visitors, computer classes - free/cost)
- 16) **Potty Training Requirements** (child must be fully potty-trained in most 3+ programs)
- 17) **Resources** (education nights, fundraising responsibilities, parent board, parent resources)
- 18) **Parent Involvement** (opportunity to assist with projects or help with class)

## Top Ten Things to Remember When Selecting Your Child's Preschool

1. It's Preschool (take time to make an informed decision but don't drive yourself crazy!)
2. There is no "perfect" preschool - will always be things you will like/dislike
3. Ask questions
4. You, as a parent, will ALWAYS be your child's FIRST and BEST teacher
5. Special Concerns - talk to your child's pediatrician now
6. Only a child once - preschool should be a positive/fun experience
7. Look for potential in building positive parent/child/teacher relationships
8. OBSERVE and see for yourself (don't make a decision based upon what others think)
9. Make a decision that meets your family's and child's needs (remember that what may be best for your family/child may not be best for another family/child)
10. Pay attention to your "gut" - visiting different schools will help you to know what "feels" right for you and your child. "You want to be confident that once you drop off your child, he'll be happy and well taken care of," says Mark Ginsberg, PhD, NAEYC executive director.