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*Dedicated to helping children with emotional and behavioral problems,
by developing stronger more positive family relationships*

Choosing a Preschool

That first preschool experience is extremely important for you and your child. Choosing the right preschool takes some time and effort on your part. Making the extra effort to choose the school that meets both your needs and your child's needs will have lasting, long term effects on your child's life.

One of the first steps is to compile a list of schools in your area. You can start by asking your friends what preschool their child attends and what they like and don't like about the school.

It is important to consider if the school is accredited. You can contact the National Association for Early Childhood Education (NAEYC), which is a nonprofit organization. NAEYC maintains a regularly updated online listing of accredited preschools. You may want to also check with your state government to see if licensure is required.

Preschool programs can either be half day or full day. You need to know your own child's needs. Can he/she handle a full day of preschool, or would a half-day be better. Some children need quiet time at home after a full morning of activities.

The location of the preschool can be another consideration. If you work far from your home, you may consider a location closer to work rather than one closer to home. The advantage to one closer to home, is that often the child can make friends with other children who live close by and can then extend their time together away from the preschool. One of the advantages of choosing a preschool closer to work



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means your child may not have to spend as many hours away from you. This also helps you be more available if needed.

When interviewing the preschool you are considering, you want to determine what their philosophy is and if it meets with your needs. The preschool administrator should be able to advise you about their schools philosophy and teaching methods. Consider how your child will react to this type of environment. Will your child need more or less structure in their day? Will your child need more or less social interaction with peers? Match the school to your child and avoid a lot of problems.

Be sure to visit to the school at different times during the day. It is best if you visit during activities as well as during free playtime. Another time to consider visiting is the beginning of the day. Are the children excited about getting to the classroom or do they seem unhappy about being there?

Some questions to consider when interviewing the preschool are:

1. The state mandates child to adult ratios for each age group. Be sure to check if the preschool follows these mandates. Some schools offer smaller class sizes than is required, which can be an advantage to your child.
2. Are children given choices about what they learn and when, or is the schedule always structured? You will need to know what works best for your own child.
3. How often do the children choose their own activities or are they always teacher directed?
4. Does the school consider social and emotional development in the curriculum or only educational development?
5. What is the age group in each class? Does it meet with your child's needs?



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6. How involved are the parents and how involved does the school want you to be?
7. How does the school communicate your child's progress or other issues that may arise?
8. Are snacks and/or lunches provided by the preschool or are you responsible for providing them?
9. Ask what the sick child policy is.

Once you feel comfortable with a school, ask if your child can have a trial day. This will give you an opportunity to see how your child reacts and handles the day.

If you feel uncomfortable in any way during the selection process, move on to another preschool. It is important for you and your child to be completely comfortable with the teachers, the classroom, and the activities provided. You want to have a good relationship with the administration and frequent communication with each other. ■

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