

Five Tips on Choosing a Preschool



A high-quality preschool program can help children in many ways, including getting ready for kindergarten. Cost and convenience are essential, but what else is important? These tips can help you choose a preschool that can help prepare your child for school.

Ask about the teachers.

What educational backgrounds do they have? Are they trained to work with this age group? Is the staff stable, or does it change constantly? How many children are there for each teacher?

Illinois will soon require all preschool teachers to have a bachelor's degree. High staff turnover may negatively affect your child. Illinois law says that two staff members should attend no more than 20 preschoolers.

Do the teachers show warmth, respect, and interest in each child?

The children should seem comfortable with the teachers. The teachers should be approachable as well as firm, when necessary. Teachers should interact with children individually, in small groups, and as a class.

Ask about the program.

Does it allow time for individual and group activities and offer a variety of activities and materials? Are there intellectually stimulating activities as well as enjoyable ones? Is there time for outdoor as well as indoor play?

Children should be involved and absorbed in interesting activities much of the time. They should not have to sit and listen to the teacher for a long time. Every day should include time for teachers to read to individuals, small groups, and the entire class.

Look at the classroom.

Are all areas, indoors and outdoors, clearly safe? Are there distinct areas for reading, playing, and participating in group activities? Does the room look inviting? Is the noise level generally pleasing? Is there a comfortable, enclosed space where a child can calm down away from the crowd?

There should be building blocks, toys, other objects for pretend play, art materials, print materials, puzzles, and games. The children's work should be carefully displayed on walls and bulletin boards.

Observe the children.

Do most of the children seem happy and truly absorbed in their activities most of the time? Are the classroom rules fair and consistently applied? Does the teacher help misbehaving children reflect on how to act next time, saying clearly what behavior she expects?

Listen for *positive* discipline words. "Remember to walk in our classroom" rather than "Stop running!" "I want you to use your indoor voices" rather than "Stop shouting!"

Find out whether the school encourages parent involvement.

Does the teacher discuss the child's progress with parents at scheduled times as well as informal times?

Listen for such statements as "Here's a book we read today that your son really enjoyed. Would you like to take it home to read with him?"

Start looking for a preschool early. Check to see if your local public school offers preschool. And talk with other parents. You can find out more about local programs from the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (877-20-CHILD; TTY: 800-649-1884) or the National Association for the Education of Young Children (800-424-2460).



29 Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Telephone: 217-333-1386 • Fax: 217-244-7732
Toll-free: 877-275-3227 (Voice/TTY)
Email: iel@uiuc.edu
Internet: <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>

Illinois State Board of Education

For more tip sheets on other topics, please go to <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>