

Selecting a Preschool for Your Child Worksheet

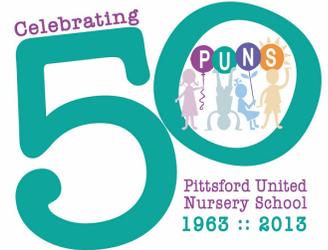
Helpful tips & important questions to ask as you look for an exemplary preschool for your child!

Important questions parents should ask themselves when searching for a preschool:

A) Why is it important for me as a parent to do research when selecting a preschool?

There are many things to consider when selecting a preschool such as:

- the school's hours/program length & duration
- proximity to your home or work
- cost & financial aid options
- class size
- staff/child ratio
- teacher credentials
- school's philosophy and educational approach



B) Do friends or family have recommendations and should I let this influence my decision?

C) What are the different types of preschools in my area?

D) What is a cooperative preschool?

- A cooperative preschool offers programs for children ages two through five, with active parent involvement both in and out of the classrooms and in partnership with the teachers to ensure the success and growth of each child.
- Certified teachers (under supervision of an Education Director) develop the curriculum for programs offered.
- Cooperative preschools, are typically guided by a volunteer parent board made up of various committees and the Executive Board that governs the school is also made up of parent volunteers. The Executive Board (Co-Chairs, Education Director, Registrar, Secretary, and Treasurer) oversees all financial aspects of the school, and is responsible for managing the routine business of the school.
- Parent volunteers assist teachers in the classroom monthly, and on these days are able to gain first-hand knowledge about their child's abilities, willingness to follow instructions, peer compatibility and more.
- Cooperative preschools are usually less expensive than other schools because of the high level of parent involvement.

E) When do I need to start thinking about preschools?

Parents should start investigating the various options 9 to 12 months before they expect to enroll their child. Most of the preschool Open House events and the opening (and often times the completion!) of registration and enrollment occurs in January for the following school year.

F) What if we don't get in? Are there typically waiting lists?

G) What is the educational philosophy of the preschool?

H) What is the educational background and experience of the teachers and staff?

I) Are there active play opportunities to develop gross and fine motor skills?

J) Are snacks provided?

K) Is the school accommodating to children with health concerns such as food & environmental allergies?

L) Is potty training required?

M) How is discipline handled?

Important topics parents should address with school education directors when searching for a preschool:

A) Ask about educational philosophy

What is the school's educational philosophy? Is it developmental, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Waldorf, academic, faith-based or something else? How does the philosophy shape the daily curriculum and activities? How does it affect class size? Does it support more group activities or individual learning? How is learning encouraged? What types of activities will my child be engaged in daily?

B) Ask about teachers' qualifications, turnover and training (especially CPR/First Aid)

Teachers and preschool directors who have been at a school for a long time are likely happy with their environment and this satisfaction filters down to the children.

C) Ask about discipline

Is the way the school handles discipline compatible with the way you as the parent discipline your child? How are parents notified of problems?

D) Ask about community involvement

How does the school communicate with parents about their child and school happenings? Are there parent-teacher conferences? Is there a newsletter? Are there opportunities for parents to be involved? Can parents visit at any time? Do you get e-mail updates? Can you e-mail the teachers with questions? Is there a website?

E) Ask about extracurricular activities

Does the school go on field trips? Are they involved in community outreach or service (food collections for pantries) Are there music, art, physical education or foreign languages programs offered? Does the school schedule guest speakers (such as a dentist, firefighter)? Are there supplemental health screenings (auditory, visual)? Does the school provide opportunity for parent workshops for things like kindergarten readiness?

F) Ask for references

G) Ask about special needs and financial needs

Does the preschool accept children with special needs?
Are scholarships available for those who cannot afford full tuition?

H) Ask about security

Does the preschool have only one entrance and exit? Is the play area fenced in to keep young kids from wandering away during recess? What security measures are in place?

I) Ask about the school's accreditation

Public schools need to meet state and district requirements. Private schools and daycare centers get additional accreditation from organizations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Independent Schools. Be aware that accreditation standards vary from state to state, and that some centers may meet standards without being accredited by outside organizations. Ask the school how it addresses this issue.

J) Ask about the school's illness policy

Can kids come to school with a cold but not a fever? How long do they need to be fever-free before coming back to school?

Important things to consider during a tour of a prospective preschool:

- Are the teachers getting down to the children's level to talk with them?
- Do the teachers seem like they enjoy teaching here? Would your child be happy here? Would you?
- Are the rooms organized and show children's recent artwork? Is the work placed at eye level so young children can see it?
- Are there different activity stations?
- How do you and your child feel when you walk into the school building?
- Do the children seem happy and busily engaged? Are they having positive interactions with each other, the staff, and the teachers?
- What kinds of activities are children doing? What is happening in the art corner and the block area? --- Are children working cooperatively, individually, or both?
- Are the projects controlled or open-ended, enabling children to do many different things with the same materials?
- Are there opportunities for dramatic and fantasy play?
- Do children have lots of free time to run around?
- What is the look and feel of the school? Does it feel warm and inviting? Or is it cold and institutional?
- Is the school clean? Are the facilities old or new?

- Do they have a gym or play yard? How often do they use it?
- What is the focus on reading and teaching early literacy skills and at what age? Does this approach seem right for you and your child?
- Are individual interests being accommodated?
- Will your child's learning style be suited well to this school's approach?
- How do children decide what to do, when they want to do it, and with whom?
- How much do the children play?
- What is the typical day structured like? Is this the right fit for your child's intellectual, emotional and physical needs?
- Is the day broken up into many different classes or does one activity flow into the next?

Pay attention to your child's body language, interactions with others, and comfort level as clues to whether the school provides an environment that will support his/her growth and development.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed 10 standards for quality programs for children. This list, based on the NAEYC standards, can be a starting point as you evaluate local programs.

Positive Relationships

- Teachers make children feel welcome
- Teachers help children learn to resolve conflicts in positive ways

Curriculum

- The program addresses children’s social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive development and builds foundations for school success in reading, math, science and the arts

Effective Teaching

- Teachers carefully supervise all children
- Children’s work is displayed in the classroom
- Teachers provide time for group and individual attention

Ongoing Assessment of Child Progress

- Teachers and families create learning goals for children
- Parents are provided with information about program activities
- Teachers meet regularly with parents to discuss their child’s progress

Health, Nutrition and Safety

- Children have regular opportunities to run and play
- Nutritious food is prepared, served and stored safely

Qualified Teaching Staff

- Teachers have necessary qualifications
- Teachers complete an orientation program before working with children
- The program provides continuing education opportunities for teachers

Family Engagement

- Families are welcome to visit the program
- Program staff and families plan events together

Community Relationships

- The program visits playgrounds, museums, libraries and other community resources
- The program invites local musicians, artists and others to interact
- The program helps families connect with support services

Safe and Healthy Physical Environment

- Toys and materials are clean and in good repair
- First-aid kits, fire extinguishers, fire alarms and other safety equipment are available and installed
- Outdoor play areas have fences or natural boundaries to them

Leadership and Management

- The director has necessary qualifications, such as a 4-year college degree with expertise in child development
- The program is licensed by the applicable state agency
- Written policies for health, safety and discipline are in place

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) suggests you look for these 10 signs to make sure your child is in a good classroom (for children 3-6 yrs. attending a childcare center, preschool, or kindergarten program)

1. Children spend most of their time playing and working with materials or other children. They do not wander aimlessly and are not expected to sit quietly for long periods of time.
2. Children have access to various activities throughout the day. Look for assorted building blocks and other construction materials; props for pretend play; picture books; paints and other art materials; and table toys such as matching games, pegboards, and puzzles. Children should not all be doing the same thing at the same time.
3. Teachers work with individual children, small groups, and the whole group at different times during the day. They do not spend all their time with the whole group.
4. The classroom is decorated with children's original artwork, their own writing with invented spelling, and stories dictated by children to teachers.
5. Children learn numbers and the alphabet in the context of their everyday experiences. The natural world of plants and animals and meaningful activities like cooking, taking attendance, or serving snack provide the basis for learning activities.
6. Children work on projects and have long periods of time (at least one hour) to play and explore. Worksheets are used little if at all.
7. Children have an opportunity to play outside every day. Outdoor play is never sacrificed for more instructional time.
8. Teachers read books to children individually or in small groups throughout the day, not just at group story time.
9. Curriculum is adapted for those who are ahead as well as those who need additional help. Teachers recognize that children's different background and experiences mean that they do not learn the same things at the same time in the same way.
10. Children and their parents look forward to school. Parents feel secure about sending their child to the program. Children are happy to attend; they do not cry regularly or complain of feeling sick.