

HOW TO CHOOSE A PRESCHOOL THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD

By The Testing Mom

1. Ask yourself, "Is my child ready for preschool?"

- a. **Age** - Early childhood development experts agree that children under 2 who are developing normally and have loving, supportive families don't need to be in school.
- b. If you are engaged with your child, talking to him about the things you do together, visiting parks, exploring the world, reading to him, and bringing him up in a stimulating environment, school is not necessary at this young age.
- c. You may have your own reasons for putting a child under 2 in school, and that's fine. Just know that it isn't necessary.
- d. Three-years-old is an ideal time to send your child to school because most children are more independent at that age, they're able to separate, and handle the physical demands of going to school. Three is the most common entry point for most kids starting nursery school. By then, a normally developing child will have:

2. Try to Stay in the Neighborhood – It's very hard to schlep a little one far from home. Plus, if you stay in your neighborhood, your child will make friends with kids who live nearby.

3. Choose a convenient time – Length of programs and morning, afternoon or all-day availability varies. What fits your work schedule best? Does your child still nap? If so, you may not want to put him in the afternoon program. If you work and have a babysitter, afternoons might be better because you won't be rushed in the morning. On the other hand, if a nursery school is particularly competitive and you are willing to take a less popular time, your child may have a better chance to be admitted. You can usually switch the time next year.

4. **Find a director you click with** – Do you like her? She really sets the tone for the school. Do you sense she'll be easy to work with? If you need her to help you get your child into an in-demand kindergarten, what is her track record? Talk to friends and trust your gut.
5. **Assess the quality of the teachers** – Do they degrees in early childhood education? Are there assistant teachers? What is the turnover like?
6. **Is the school affiliated with a church or temple** – if so, how much religious instruction do they offer? Are you comfortable with that?
7. **Are you comfortable with the class size?** – Size of classes is usually licensed by the state. For example, the state may mandate that in a classroom of 3 and 4-year-olds, there can be 15 students with 2 teachers (a head and an assistant teacher). Some schools will even smaller classes than the law allows.
8. **Assess the quality of the classroom.** The room should be light, clean, bright, and cheerful looking. You don't want it to be so neat that children are inhibited from expressing themselves. It should be arranged in a way that children can move around and retrieve materials themselves. Do you see this as a space your child would be happy going to each day? It is important that you see all the classrooms the school offers. I remember considering one school for my daughter that had beautiful classrooms for the youngest children, but the older ones were located in a dark, unattractive basement.
9. **Are you comfortable with the outdoor space?** Ideally it will be located right next to the school. One school I considered for my daughter used a local park as their playground. Children took a van to get there. Although it wasn't far, I was very uncomfortable with that arrangement. Make sure that the play area is well designed, safe, and clean.

- 10. How much does the school cost?** Can you afford it? If it isn't expensive, are they cutting corners that you aren't comfortable with?
- 11. The parent body** – Do they encourage parent participation? Is it a socially conscious community, a wealthy one, a community where most moms work? If most moms stay at home and you work, will you be comfortable. In nursery school, if you feel at home with a community, your child will too.
- 12. How hard is the school to get into?** Some schools are in high demand. You don't want to apply only to those schools. Make sure you apply to a few that you really like that your child has a great chance to get into.
- 13.** And finally, the feeling you get from the children, teachers, director, the activities you see taking place – **your gut reaction** to the school.