

# Choosing Care for Your Children

## Preschool or Nursery School

Distributed by  
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## **What Is a Preschool?**

Preschools or nursery schools are educational programs available on a part-time basis, usually for 2 to 3 hours, morning or afternoon, from 2 to 5 days a week. They do not attempt to provide comprehensive child care for parents who cannot spend working days with their children.

Preschools provide programs that usually concentrate on social, emotional, and intellectual development and assume that parents or other providers will be able to provide for the child's health, nutrition, and other needs.

Meals are not provided at preschool. Snacks are either provided or brought from home. Some day care centers provide a half day preschool program for 3 to 5 year olds. Some parents who require regular full day care arrange for their children to attend preschool for part of the day and a child care center or family day care home for the remainder of the day. This can be difficult to arrange.

Preschools are housed in a variety of places. Occasionally they have their own buildings. Often they operate in a church or other community facilities. They may also be located in basements or additions to private homes. Wherever they exist they must be licensed by the Department of Social Services. Be certain to check for the license. This ensures that the facility is safe, provides adequate space for the children, has an adequate number of adults and is providing a planned program for the children.

## **How Do I Find a Preschool?**

Because they must be licensed, the local office of the Department of Social Services will have a listing. You may also see ads in newspapers, community billboards or hear about them from friends and neighbors.

You should be aware that neither a license nor a

good recommendation necessarily mean that a specific preschool is providing a program that you would like for your child or that will meet your child's needs.

Before you start looking for a preschool, it might be helpful to spend some time determining why you feel your child would benefit from preschool. Perhaps there are few opportunities for your child to play with children of the same age. Perhaps your child is very shy, or very dependent on you and you feel your child would benefit from a preschool program emphasizing emotional and social development before entering kindergarten. Perhaps your child is bored or not receiving enough stimulation at home and you feel a preschool program with a variety of activities would be beneficial. It is important to know what you expect of the preschool for meeting your child's needs before you visit. This will help you make a choice.

If choices are limited and you are not satisfied you may seek other alternatives, like organizing a play group. (See "Choosing Care for Your Children: Play Groups," Pm-796-e.)

## **What Should I Look For?**

Most preschools close for the summer. Plan to visit the preschools in the spring and observe the children and the program and visit with the director. Find out the philosophy, goals and objectives of the program. Do these fit your child's needs?

- Is the facility clean and safe?
- Is there adequate space for equipment and children?
- Is there an outdoor play space?
- Are field trips, excursions, and visits planned?
- Is there a balance of active and quiet activities?

- Is there opportunity for large group, small group, and individual activity?
- Is there an opportunity for play and creative expression?
- Is there too much emphasis on ready-for-school skills?
- Do the children seem happy and relaxed?
- Do the teachers enjoy their work?
- What is the attitude toward discipline?
- Are you comfortable with the program?

## **Preparing the Child**

Once you have made a choice, arrange to visit the preschool with your child while the children are there. This will help your child see that preschool is fun. Plan to visit with the teacher so they can meet. Over the summer talk to your child about preschool. Talk about games and songs and stories that the child is familiar with that are part of preschool. Arranging to go along with a friend can be helpful. The first little while may be difficult as any transition is. Bringing the child to preschool and being there to pick up the child is important at the beginning. If you cannot do this, arrange for someone whom the child knows and trusts to do this.

## **Preparing Yourself**

If this is the first regular experience away from you for your child, it may very well be difficult for you. Talking to other parents in the same situation can be helpful. Perhaps you can arrange to do something special with another parent while your children are at preschool. Once the first weeks have passed and your child seems happy, you will feel more comfortable that this is an enriching experience for your child, you, and the rest of the family.

## **You and Your Child**

If you are at home when your child is not at preschool, both of you can enjoy some special times together. Plan special activities with your child and plan activities as a family. The preschool experience can be a valuable enhancement of family life. If your child is in child care when not at preschool, plan to spend some special time together without diversions. The number of hours together may not be many but the time you DO spend together will be especially valuable and enjoyable.

## **Younger Children in the Family**

Younger children who remain at home while older children go off to school or preschool may require special attention. Plan special activities for them when the others are at school.

## **Other publications available in this series include:**

Family Day Care Homes, Pm-796a

Day Care Centers, Pm-796b

A Babysitter in Your Home, Pm-796d

Setting Up Play Groups, Pm-796e

Babysitting Cooperatives, Pm-796f

For more information about young children, contact your local county extension office.

File: 2

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