



10 good reasons your child should attend preschool

"But my child is so small!" Yes, they're still wee tykes, but a high-quality preschool is designed to set up young scholars up for future academic, emotional, and social success.

by: [GreatSchools Staff](#) | March 18, 2016

Preschool provides a foundation for learning both socially and academically that will help your child succeed in elementary school.

1. Preschool is an opportunity for growth

For many children, preschool is their first experience in a structured setting with teachers and groups of children. It's an opportunity to learn to share, follow instructions, and begin the foundation for learning that will occur in elementary school.

2. Preschool prepares children for kindergarten

As kindergarten becomes more academic, many parents look to preschool to launch their child on the path to success in school. At the same time, parents may worry that the current trend to focus on pre-math and pre-literacy skills in preschool cuts into important play time and pushes a child to grow up too fast. It's a confusing issue, especially with friends and family offering different opinions and advice.

Fortunately, in selecting a preschool, parents aren't forced to choose between protecting a child's play time and making sure she's ready for kindergarten. A high-quality early childhood education program will offer children both. But how do high-quality preschools benefit children's learning and development? And what features should parents look for in a preschool program? One answer to these questions is that the staff at high-quality preschools and child care programs understand the particular ways that young children develop and learn. And they organize space, time and activities to be in sync with children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical abilities.

3. Preschool promotes social and emotional development

In order to learn, a young child needs to feel cared for and secure with a teacher or caregiver. A 3-year-old child is able to spend time away from parents and build trusting relationships with adults outside the family. High-quality preschool programs nurture warm relationships among children, teachers and parents. And teachers build a close personal connection with each child in their care.

Children thrive when there is consistency in care between home and school. In high-quality preschools, teachers value parents as the experts on their children. Parents get daily reports on their child's activities and regular meetings are scheduled for more in-depth conferences with staff. Teachers strive to understand and respect parents' child-rearing goals and values.

Young children learn social skills and emotional self-control in "real time." Three- and 4-year-olds learn through their experiences and good teachers make time for those "teachable moments" when they can help children learn to manage frustrations or anger. They don't automatically step in to resolve children's conflicts for them; they have a well-honed sense of when to let children work out their own problems and when to intervene. Without shaming a child, they encourage her to notice the impact of her aggressive or hurtful behavior on another child.

4. The preschool environment is structured, although it may not appear that way

A highly structured environment helps young children learn to make friends and play well with others. This doesn't mean there are lots of rules or that adults constantly direct children's activities. On the contrary, the structure of a high-quality preschool classroom is largely invisible to children. Classroom space is organized to encourage social interaction, and minimize congestion and conflicts.

5. Children get to make choices

Children have several choices of activities; a child who is wandering aimlessly is encouraged to choose one that interests him. Teachers are alert to a child who can't figure out how to enter other children's play and may offer him suggestions on ways to join the group.

6. Children learn to take care of themselves and others

Children's sense of competence and self-worth grow as they learn to take care of themselves and help others.

Teachers appeal to a young child's desire to engage in "real work" by offering him chances to help out in the classroom, for example, by setting the table at snack time or feeding the classroom hamster. Children are expected to wash their hands before snack time, keep personal belongings in their "cubby," and put away toys before moving to a new activity.

Teachers also encourage a child to view herself as a resource for other children. For example, a teacher might ask a child who's more competent at pouring water to help a child who is learning. Or she might ask a "veteran" preschooler to show a newcomer where the sand toys are kept.

Throughout their school years, much of children's learning will take place in the company of their peers. In a high-quality preschool program, children are introduced to the behaviors required to function successfully in a kindergarten

classroom. For example, during group activities such as “circle time,” children learn to focus attention on the teacher, listen while others are speaking, and wait their turn to talk.

7. Preschool promotes language and cognitive skills

Preschool-age children’s language skills are nurtured in a “language-rich” environment. Between the ages of 3 and 5, a child’s vocabulary grows from 900 to 2,500 words, and her sentences become longer and more complex. In a conversational manner, and without dominating the discussion, teachers help children stretch their language skills by asking thought-provoking questions and introducing new vocabulary during science, art, snack time, and other activities. Children have many opportunities to sing, talk about favorite read-aloud books, and act out stories. A young child’s cognitive skills are strengthened by engaging in a wide range of hands-on activities that challenge her to observe closely, ask questions, test her ideas or solve a problem. However, teachers understand that preschool children are not logical in the adult sense of the word; their explanations of what makes a plant grow or why people get old, may not involve cause and effect. For example, “people get old because they have birthdays.” They may rely on their senses and “magical thinking” rather than on reason to explain why wood floats in water and rocks sink – “The rock likes to be on the bottom because it’s cooler.”

8. Preschool teachers nurture a child’s curiosity

Teachers observe, ask questions and listen to children’s ideas during these activities — “correct” answers are not the goal. To nurture their curiosity and motivation to learn, teachers use children’s interests and ideas to create activities. And even a simple, chance event – such as a child’s discovery of a snail in the outdoor play area — can be turned into an exciting opportunity to learn.

Preschool-age children have active imaginations and learn through make-believe play. Teachers know that the line between reality and fantasy is often not clear to a young child. Sometimes this results in fears of monsters under the bed. But imagination also fuels learning. For example, when a group of children creates a make-believe pet store, they will practice many social and cognitive skills as they assign roles to each child, figure out categories of pet supplies and how to organize them, make signs to label products; help their “customers” select the right shampoo or cat toy; and take “money” for merchandize.

The imaginary play area in a high-quality preschool is well-stocked with costumes, “props,” and child-size household items such as stoves, sinks and cupboards. It’s often in this activity area that preschool-age children progress steadily from solitary play, to one-on-one play, to complicated group play.

9. Preschool activities boost pre-math and literacy skills

Young children show growing interest in pre-math and pre-literacy skills. They are curious and observant, and they want to be competent in the skills that their families and society value — such as reading the instructions for assembling a toy, or selecting the correct bills or coins to pay for a purchase. To prepare children for the academic demands of kindergarten, teachers offer a wide variety of games and activities that help children acquire the pre-math and literacy skills.

Singing an alphabet song while following along in a picture book builds a child’s awareness of the connections between alphabet letters and word sounds. Learning rhymes and chants helps them to notice the distinct sounds within words. Engaging children in a discussion about an exciting read-aloud story encourages their listening, comprehension, and expressive language skills. Playing with magnetic alphabet letters may inspire a child to ask a teacher to help her write the first letter of her name.

Matching games, sorting games, counting games, and board games build children’s understanding of number, categories and sequence, which supports later math learning. Putting together puzzles encourages children to notice patterns, plan ahead and problem-solve.

To sustain children’s excitement and motivation for learning, high-quality preschool and child care programs introduce early literacy and math skills not as isolated exercises, but in the context of activities that are interesting and meaningful to children.

10. Preschool helps develop motor skills

Physical coordination improves, allowing the child to explore her environment — and to challenge herself-in new ways. Young children are in motion for a good part of the day. High-quality preschool programs provide several opportunities daily for children to run, climb, and play active games. Activities are offered to help children develop fine motor skills, such as threading beads or cutting with scissors. And children are challenged through a variety of activities to build their hand-eye coordination and balance.

When you choose a high-quality program that suits your child and family, you can feel assured that your child is well cared for, is enjoying activities and making friends — and is building the knowledge, skills, and confidence to do well in kindergarten.