



MAKING HEALTHY CHILDCARE AND PRE-SCHOOL CHOICES FOR YOUR CHILD

In my encounters with parents I am frequently asked whether there is a "need" for toddlers to be enrolled in childcare, even if Mom or Dad is in the home full-time.

Often parents say that they feel pressured by family and friends to enroll their toddler in childcare in order to prepare him or her for kindergarten. They wonder whether home-based care can provide the experiences their young child needs to prepare them for success in school. In response, I ask the parent how he or she spends the day with the child. I am especially interested in things like daily routines, play, and opportunities the child has to interact with age mates. I may also inquire about how much time the child spends in solitary play or watching T.V.

If it seems that the home and structure of daily routines is consistent with what children need to thrive intellectually and socially I then talk to Mom or Dad about their feelings as a full-time parent. I ask (usually Mom) whether she feels overwhelmed or even bored to death as the caregiver. I ask if she needs a break or would feel more fulfilled if she had extra time for herself and her career, or other interests. Frequently mothers say they have no desire for the toddler to be enrolled in daycare. In fact, many mothers have made

substantial economic and career sacrifices to be a "stay at home" parent.

When the parent is content and the child is enjoying an enriched home experience, my response is: keep the child at home. There are no clear-cut advantages for a child to be in an out of home placement. On the other hand, if the home is nurturing and stimulating, but the parent is unhappy or overwhelmed (or underwhelmed) it may be better for the child to be enrolled in at least a part-time program to allow Mom or Dad to have a break or pursue other interests or duties. A happy parent is usually nicer to be around - for everyone.



Obviously, choosing whether or not to place a child in daycare is a privilege. Most parents have no choice at all. In any case, if a child is placed in daycare, it is imperative that parents choose a setting wisely. Choosing a childcare placement is every bit as important as choosing a high school or college! In fact it may be more important. Children can thrive even in full-time care if the setting is of high quality. As long as the childcare setting includes elements of a nurturing home environment, there is no reason to believe

that the toddler will be at any disadvantage socially, emotionally or intellectually compared to "homecare" age mates. Remember, children are adaptable and can flourish in a variety of environments as long as they receive sensitive care.

TIPS TO HELP YOU PREPARE YOUR INFANT OR TODDLER FOR SCHOOL

Make sure your child is surrounded by warm and nurturing caregivers who listen to him. (Relationships are key to healthy intellectual and social development).

Your child should not spend more than one-third of his waking hours on solitary play, according to specialists B. Brazelton and S. Greenspan.

Provide a consistent (not rigid) daily routine with the initiation of reasonable limits on behavior.

Give your child choices of healthy food and adequate rest.

Set aside time for your child to play with toys and sensory materials with a reasonable variety of materials and experiences. Play should be kid-directed, not adult-directed. Adequate movement should be part of the routine.

Make sure that your child has plenty of opportunities to play with age mates (play dates, play groups or playground experiences are fine). Programs such as Wee Wonders, Kinder Music, or Infancy to Independence are examples.

Tips to Help You Prepare Your Infant or Toddler for School (continued)

Minimize screen time (T.V. or computers) to no more than half an hour per day for your toddler or preschooler.

Someone who carefully observes the child to understand his or her learning style is a bonus feature!

GUIDELINES FOR FINDING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM FOR YOUR CHILD

Make sure the program is state licensed. This means that the school has passed health and safety requirements (LAEYC accredited)

The number of children per adult should not exceed more than three times the child's age. For example, for every three 1-year olds, there should be 1 adult.

Look for an uncluttered, clean environment. Children should be able to move easily from one activity to another. Look for consistent routines.

There should be interest areas, such as a block center, reading center, dramatic play (dress up) center, music center with instruments, carpentry corner, science corner or arts center including easels for painting, tables and a variety of media.

The playground should contain large, safe climbing apparatus, swings, slides, sandboxes and/or paved tracks for tricycles. The play area should be fully enclosed

The materials in use should be age-appropriate. Be wary of schools that teach through workbooks and group drills. Children learn by doing.

A good structure for preschool

activities involves show and tell, interest areas, snack, small group activities with the teacher, large group activities such as reading, singing and games, and finally , a nap for full-day programs



SUMMER FUN JUST MOMMY AND ME!

Here are some fun ideas that your infant and toddler are sure to love!

Homemade Bubbles

Make your own bubbles and have some fun!

- 1 Cup Water
- 2 Tblsp Light Karo Syrup or
- 2 Tblsp Glycerin
- 4 Tablespoons baby shampoo or baby wash

**make a large bubble wand using some string and three straws **



Outdoor Adventure



Take a trip to a nature walk. Try to find different creatures and then count how many of each kind you were able to spot. Talk about the different characteristics each one has.

Let's Paint

Give your child a paint brush and some water. Have him paint the sidewalk or an exterior wall.



Play Dough Creations

Let their imagination soar! Try making your own fantastic colors. Here's how:

- 2 Cups Flour, 1 Cup Salt, 2 T Alum,
- 1 Cup Water, 2 T Oil, Liquid Food Coloring

**Pour dry ingredients into large pan. Stir together to mix. Stir oil and food coloring into the water. Pour liquid into the dry ingredients while mixing,

squeezing and kneading the dough.

In the Kitchen

Try baking some fingerprint cookies with your child. Get already made sugar cookie dough or you can use your favorite recipe. Roll the cookie dough in medium size balls. Have your toddler push his thumb print into each cookie. Bake and let cool. As a finishing touch fill the finger print with a jelly preserve.



Water Play

Swimming is a great way to beat the heat and introduce your infant or toddler to the water. Remember to apply the sun screen and never leave your child unattended in water.



Easy to Make Suncatchers

Cut some colored tissue paper into small 1 x 1 inch squares (or other shapes). Cut 2 other squares (size is up to you) of clear contact paper. Place 1 square of contact paper sticky side up on the table. Allow your child to drop, place, pat or throw the tissue paper onto the contact paper. Take the second piece of contact paper and press evenly to the second piece. If desired cut the sealed pieces into any desire shape. Punch a hole in the edge and thread a piece of yarn or curl ribbon through for hanging. Hang in a sunny window.



Web Corner

For more fun summer activities to do with your infant or toddler go to:

www.babyparenting.about.com

We Suggest:

www.zerotothree.org