

# PICKING A PRESCHOOL

## Choosing the Right Learning Environment for Your Child



*When beginning your search for the perfect preschool, start by asking friends, families, and colleagues for recommendations, then visit each school and ask lots of questions.*

Every child is unique, which can sometimes make finding the right childcare program or school for your family a challenge. However, it is one of the most important decisions you will make so it's worth checking out several options. Start by asking friends, families, and colleagues for recommendations. Next, visit each center or school and ask lots of questions. The following five will help you find the right setting for your keiki.

Does the curriculum take into consideration the different learning styles, cultures, disabilities, and languages of your child? Visit the provider or program and look for a posted lesson plan. If you don't see

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one, ask for a copy so you can talk about it with a staff member. No lesson plan can be a red flag! Look to see if children can choose from a variety of learning centers throughout the day (math, science, art, dramatic play/dress up, for example). Inquire how lessons are modified to meet the needs learning and/or physical disabilities of children. Find out how culture and language diversity are supported. This discussion should help you determine if the curriculum meets your expectations and your child's needs.

### DOES THE CURRICULUM PROVIDE CHILDREN WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE TOPICS IN MULTIPLE WAYS?

During your visit, see if the children are able to explore a subject in different ways. For example, the topic of food can be explored in multiple centers. The dramatic play area may inspire the children to open a grocery store, run a farm, or use toy foods to prepare a pretend meal. Children can examine different foods in the science area, while books allow teachers to read aloud about the subject. An outdoor environment can provide an opportunity to rake, dig, grow and water plants, to see how vegetables and fruits grow. A program that provides multiple learning opportunities taps into the different ways that kids learn.

### ARE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES PROVIDED THROUGHOUT THE DAY?

Children need a variety of indoor and outdoor learning activities because learning happens everywhere - not just inside. Outdoor activities provide young children with opportunities to use and strengthen their large muscles needed to walk, run, jump, skip and climb (large motor skills). Look for climbing structures, leg-powered toys such as tricycles, cars, balls and hoops. Ask if equipment is changed monthly to provide children with a variety of stimulating challenges that encourage their physical growth and development. If outdoor space is limited, ask if children have an opportunity to visit a nearby park and how often they do so.

### HOW ARE MISBEHAVIOR AND CONFLICTS BETWEEN CHILDREN HANDLED?

When young children are enrolled in a program, they are just beginning to learn

how to get along with others and self regulate their feelings and emotions. As they are developing these skills, it is not uncommon for incidents, such as pushing, biting or difficulty sharing, to occur, so it's important to ask how misbehaviors or conflicts are resolved. Then observe how "outbursts" are handled. Determine if what you see and what you are told align with your family's philosophy for discipline or guidance.

### IS THE PROVIDER/PROGRAM ACCREDITED BY A NATIONAL, REGIONAL, OR STATE ACCREDITATION ENTITY?

Accreditation is a voluntary process that providers/programs go through to show that they support program quality and have gone above and beyond state licensing. Accredited homes and centers voluntarily meet standards of quality that have been established by national child-care organizations. When your child is enrolled in an accredited program, you know the home or center has gone beyond minimum licensing standards and has made a commitment to provide the kind of care, attention, and stimulating activities that you and your children need. To learn more about accredited family childcare programs, visit [www.nafcc.com](http://www.nafcc.com). To learn about accredited preschools visit NAEYC's website on accreditation at [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org). Each website provides information on what a program requires to become accredited, and indicators of quality you should look for in non-accredited programs.

The time you invest in making an informed, sound decision about where to enroll your child will not only bring comfort and joy to your child, but bring you peace of mind. 🌈