



## Tips for Parents: Preschool Options

*Today, many preschool options are available to families. Making a decision that best suits your child's learning and your family's concerns is important. In this Tips for Parents, you'll learn about the most common preschool choices available.*

### Private Preschools

Private preschools vary widely in the types of curriculum and programs they offer, and the cost of tuition can be very low to very high. Here are a few of the most common types:

#### Preschool Options: Co-ops

Co-op preschools are typically non-profit organizations that are managed by the members, or parents. Parents are required to help with a variety of activities on a regular basis: assist with teaching, clean, prepare activities, clean up, fundraise and more.

Curriculum and teaching methods will differ from school to school, based on the mission of the school and the decisions made by parents and administrators.

#### Benefits:

- Tuition is typically lower than other preschool options because parents help.
- Parents often receive education on early childhood they can apply in the classroom and at home.
- The parent/child bond is strengthened because of time spent together.
- Kids get the message that school is important because they see their parents investing time in it.
- Co-ops are often close-knit communities.
- Parents get to help in making decisions about how the school is run.

#### Drawbacks:

- Parents that work outside the home or those with other responsibilities may find it challenging to help as much as the school requires.
- Because decisions are made democratically, administration meetings may become heated as differences in opinion arise.

To learn more about Co-op or Parent Participation preschools, visit the [California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools website](#).

### Preschool Options: Montessori

Many schools call themselves “Montessori,” but the methodology for teaching may vary widely. Generally, Montessori schools provide a variety of learning areas that contain materials children can choose to interact with as they freely move about. These materials are designed to stimulate an interest in learning through practical application and the teacher encourages the child to learn at his or her own pace. Advocates of Montessori believe that the method encourages self-discipline and discovery.

#### Benefits:

- Montessori appeals to many parents who disapprove of “teaching to the test.”
- Children may find the Montessori Method more interesting and therefore their incentive to learn and grow will be greater than classrooms that provide a lot of worksheets and tests. However, because classrooms, teachers and children’s learning styles differ, the level of interest varies from class to class and from child to child.
- Parents who are “realists” may prefer the practical-over-fantasy emphasis that many Montessori classrooms embrace.
- Parents are not required to be involved in the day to day operation of the school, which may appeal to those that must work outside of the home or who have other responsibilities that make regular participation difficult.
- Montessori offers a variety of other benefits such as respect for others, multi-age classes, and individualized attention.

#### Drawbacks:

- The open and free nature of many Montessori classrooms may make parents concerned that their child isn’t really learning.
- The lack of written assignments, homework and tests common to Montessori may make parents used to traditional teaching uneasy: “Is my child progressing?”
- Parents typically aren’t encouraged to participate in the classroom.
- Because Montessori is most often offered by private schools, tuition can be higher than some other preschool options.
- Some parents of Montessori students are concerned that children aren’t encouraged to read as much as they should be.
- Some parents of Montessori students are concerned that a child’s interest in make-believe is discouraged.

To learn more about Montessori, visit [The International Montessori Index](#).

### **Preschool Choices: Waldorf**

Waldorf education places a heavy emphasis on the arts and humanities as well as a focus on the development of the individual child. Waldorf teachers seek to encourage in students a lifetime love of learning.

#### Benefits:

- Waldorf education focuses on the development and needs of each individual student.
- The environment is typically comfortable and home-like.

- Children’s imaginative play is encouraged.
- Natural, healthy materials are used throughout the classroom.
- Classroom learning usually goes beyond academic to character education.

Drawbacks:

- Some parents may be concerned that reading isn’t typically introduced until 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, unless the child shows a strong interest of their own.
- Children transferring from Waldorf schools to a traditional public school may need to catch up on some subjects.
- Waldorf schools are typically private, and will be more costly than public preschool options, which are typically free if your income level qualifies.
- Some parents may find the avoidance of TV, videos, radio, and computers to be a missed opportunity to learn or impractical in today’s society.
- Children are usually assigned to a teacher for as many as eight years. If a parent doesn’t care for a teacher, it may be difficult to get the school to reassign.
- Parents used to a traditional classroom may find the lack of competition and tests confusing as they seek to understand their child’s progress.

To learn more about Waldorf Education, visit [Why Waldorf Works](#).

### **Preschool Options: Nonspecific Center or Childcare Based**

The common or “just regular” center or childcare based preschool program typically offers supervised activities designed to keep preschoolers busy, out of trouble, and to introduce them to books, crafts, music, movement and group activities, imaginative play and orderly classroom behavior.

The education and experience of the teachers can vary quite a bit, as does the certification required by each state. Some programs are more of an introduction to school and builds early academic skills; for others, the primary focus is childcare. Length and frequency of classes can vary from 1-2 hour classes 2-3 times a week in a school/early skill building program to as many as 8-10 hours a day 5 or 6 days a week in a childcare based program.

Tuition for this preschool option varies widely based on:

- The education level of teachers and administrators.
- How frequently the child attends and how long they stay.
- The prestige, or lack thereof, of the school.
- The area you live in.
- Whether or not the center is national or a franchise, and how much advertising they do.
- Extracurricular activities or programs you can opt for your child to participate in such as swimming or hot lunches.

When looking into these types of preschools, we recommend that you look for one that espouses a developmentally appropriate early childhood education focus. These types

of programs typically are run by educated administrators and teachers and offer your child much more than babysitting:

- Activities based on the way young children learn—by doing
- Individualized attention and curriculum
- Social and emotional development
- Assessment of your child’s skills and interests with activities tailored to strengthen weaknesses and support existing skills and interests
- Physical and cognitive development
- A greater understanding of who the child is and where he or she comes from based on family, culture and community origins.
- Assessment of your child’s progress using “[authentic assessment](http://www.thelearningcommunity.us/resources-by-format/tips-for-parents/authentic-assessment.aspx)” see <http://www.thelearningcommunity.us/resources-by-format/tips-for-parents/authentic-assessment.aspx> for more information.

For more information:

Free streaming parenting video: [Developmentally Appropriate Early Education](#)

North Central Regional Educational Library’s [Developmentally Appropriate Practices](#)

## Public Preschool

### Preschool Options: Head Start

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, [Office of Head Start’s website](#), “The Head Start program provides grants to local public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies to provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school.

Head Start programs promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families. They engage parents in their children's learning and help them in making progress toward their educational, literacy and employment goals. Significant emphasis is placed on the involvement of parents in the administration of local Head Start programs.”

“Children from birth to age five from families with income below the poverty line are eligible for Head Start (preschool age children) and Early Head Start services (birth to age three and pregnant women). Children from families receiving public assistance (TANF or SSI) are also eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start services regardless of family income. Foster children are also Head Start and Early Head Start eligible regardless of their foster family’s income. (Programs may, however, enroll up to 10% of their children from families that do not meet the above requirements.)

Use the [Head Start Locator](#) to find a program near you.

Visit [Inside Head Start](#) to view a list of frequently asked questions in both English and Spanish.

### **Preschool Options: State Funded Public Preschool**

Some states have started offering publicly funded preschool programs. Many of these programs are targeted to low-income families, but some states, such as Georgia, Oklahoma and New York offer universal preschool to all children within the required age group.

To find out what programs are offered in your state, call your local school district.

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