

Preschool and Early Education Experiences

A child's early life is filled with learning opportunities that are important to their future.

More than half of children younger than 5 years regularly attend some type of out-of-home care or early childhood program (eg, nursery school, learning centers, preschool). These programs have many different sponsors, including churches, schools, colleges, social service agencies, Head Start, as well as independent businesses.

There are several ways in which high-quality preschools can benefit children. First, children have the opportunity to interact with caring adults. Teachers in an early childhood education program help children learn by listening to them, answering their questions, and providing a safe and supportive environment for learning. Second, as preschoolers play, they develop skills that help them think, question, and explore the world. They learn to interact with others and solve problems in different situations.

Third, early childhood education can benefit children's social development. It is in these settings that children can begin to learn to regulate their emotions and express their feelings. Children learn to solve problems by themselves and with others. These experiences can be very useful when they arrive at school.

Fourth, early childhood education allows children to connect new ideas and skills to what they already know and can do. Teachers help preschoolers build knowledge that connect to a child's interests, such as bugs or airplanes.

When teachers build learning experiences on what children know, they provide experiences that children find challenging but can do with a little help. This provides experiences that are "developmentally appropriate," which are an important part of having early high-quality childhood experiences that lead to positive outcomes.

Research studies have found several key factors that contribute to positive outcomes, including a preschool setting that is developmentally appropriate, emotionally supportive, and a healthy and safe environment. High-quality preschool experiences have been shown to predict positive adjustment to kindergarten and improved learning outcomes and can also improve cognitive abilities, including better math and language skills.

What Parents Can Do

It can be challenging to find and evaluate early childhood centers for health and safety, as well as a quality learning environment. The American Academy of Pediatrics provides a list of questions parents can use when evaluating a potential early childhood education center. Examples of questions are listed below.

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Qualifications and Training

What education, training, or qualifications do child care professionals have? What type of additional training have the staff had during the past year? Do outside experts provide training? How long have the staff worked at the center? How much experience do they have with children of your child's age?

Visiting Policy

Can you visit the center before your child is enrolled? If your child is enrolled, can you visit the center anytime it is open? Can you see all the areas that your child will use? Are visitors screened or is their identification checked so that only approved adults can visit the center and pick up children?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The full list of questions and other linked resources are available here:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/Choosing-a-Childcare-Center.aspx>

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