

What Do Children Learn in a High-Quality Preschool Program?

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Development

Your child continues to develop in many ways—physically, socially, emotionally, in language and literacy, and in thinking (cognitive) skills. Teachers support her in all of these areas.

Physical development is the way your child moves her arms and legs (large motor skills) and her fingers and hands (small motor skills). Teachers help children learn these skills by offering different physical activities and equipment. Children run, jump, climb, throw, and catch. Using their hands, they explore materials like paints, playdough, puzzles, sand, and things to write with. By using their bodies actively both indoors and outdoors, children build healthy bones and muscles.

Social development helps your child get along with others. Teachers work with children on respecting others and working together. By playing and learning together, children build their social skills, language skills, and self-control. With support from teachers, children learn to resolve conflicts that may come up during play.

Emotional development lets your child understand his feelings and the feelings of others. Teachers help children recognize and manage their own feelings and behavior. They also teach children to show concern for others. To build your child's self-esteem, teachers encourage him to try new things and keep working at hard tasks.

Language and literacy development helps your child understand and communicate through listening, talking, reading, and writing. These skills are all connected. Teachers help your child use her growing communication skills to learn new concepts.

Thinking, or cognitive, skills develop as children learn to think more complexly, make decisions, and solve problems. As young children explore, ask questions, and create, they improve their thinking skills. Reflecting on and using information lets your child understand

the world around him. The way children approach learning is also an important part of their thinking skills. For example, being able to focus or handle frustration helps him learn more easily.

Teachers help preschoolers develop their thinking skills by

- Providing interesting materials to use and plenty of time to explore them
- Offering suggestions that encourage more complex play and thinking
- Asking questions that stretch your child's thinking

Early Learning Standards

Every state has early learning standards that describe what children need to know and be able to do at a certain age. Teachers use these standards to balance what children need to learn with their knowledge of how children learn best.

Subject Areas

In high-quality preschools, teachers focus on all areas of learning. They pay attention to what children are interested in, and they plan themes or projects that help children expand their knowledge and skills in different areas. Children get a deeper understanding of a subject when they can make connections across several content areas. For example, as your child works with a friend to make a birdfeeder, they use both math and science to measure and combine materials and make the feeder stable, language to describe their ideas and decide how to solve the problem, and reading (with an adult's help) to find out what kind of seed different birds like. This kind of deeper, interconnected learning helps prepare children for kindergarten.

Speaking and listening (language). Your preschooler's language skills develop when she has lots of opportunities to listen to and speak with others. Teachers talk with children throughout the day—while they play, at group times, and one-to-one. They encourage children to share information, ideas, and feelings with each other.

Teachers support children's language skills by

- Using your child's interests to introduce new words and concepts

- Encouraging your child to use longer, more detailed sentences by adding to what he says in conversation
- Asking questions that encourage thinking and require more than a yes-or-no answer
- Using rich vocabulary—unusual or difficult words that are new to children
- Labeling shelves and bins in English and other languages children speak

Early reading. Most preschoolers learn to understand what reading is for and what rhyming sounds are. They listen to and talk about stories. Many preschoolers can read their own names and some simple words.

Teachers help preschoolers develop early reading skills by

- Talking about the story's characters, setting, and plot, and connecting stories to what's going on in school or at home
- Providing materials for children's play that encourage writing or show examples of writing
- Helping children hear the differences in sounds and understand that letters stand for sounds
- Playing rhyming games, singing songs, and reading books with fun language
- Pointing out letters and words in books and other places
- Helping children learn the alphabet

Early writing. Children's writing begins as scribbles and becomes shapes that look like letters. Over time, their shapes look more like actual letters, and they write words using their own spelling.

Teachers support children's writing development by

- Giving children different kinds of paper and writing tools, like crayons, markers, and pencils
- Encouraging children to write as part of their everyday activities

- Showing children how writing works as they write down children's words about their creations or a story they make up
- Encouraging children to spell words based on what they hear and what letters and sounds they know

Math. Children explore math concepts they will use later in school. For example, your child sorts materials in the makerspace area into things he can build with and things he can decorate with (classifying). He explores shapes and textures while making art (comparing, understanding attributes). He claps out the beats to a song (counting).

Teachers encourage math learning by

- Providing materials—blocks, buttons, acorns—to count, sort, compare, and make patterns
- Talking about math and pointing out numbers when children play, during snack time, and while exploring outside
- Asking your child to explain what she noticed or how she solved a problem
- Encouraging children to measure and compare objects
- Providing tools for children to record data

Science. Most preschoolers ask a lot of questions about the world. Teachers encourage children to be curious, make discoveries, and think scientifically. Children observe, ask questions, and predict what might happen. Then they experiment and explain what they've found out.

Teachers support science learning by

- Setting out materials for children to experiment with
- Researching topics with children by reading books, looking up information online, taking field trips, and having experts visit the class
- Asking your child to think about what is happening and why
- Using new science words many times and in different situations
- Encouraging children to record and share their learning

Social studies. As children learn to get along, make friends, and help with decisions, they are learning social studies. In preschool, your child also learns about himself and how he fits into his family, his class, and his community. Social studies also includes learning about the languages and cultures of other children in the class. Your child's teacher might ask if you want to share recipes, music, and traditions that your family enjoys.

Creative arts. Children express their feelings and ideas in unique ways. It could be through painting, dancing, and pretending. But creativity supports every area of learning and can be expressed in many ways, from writing stories to figuring out how to keep the snow in the water table from melting so fast. Teachers design an environment that supports your preschooler's creative abilities, and they provide a variety of open-ended materials (playdough, seashells, chalk) to challenge your child's ability to create.

Technology. Teachers use technology with preschoolers in many ways. Your preschooler might create art on a tablet, look at an ebook with another child, or watch videos of places the class is learning about. Using technology together encourages children to talk, cooperate, and help each other.

Preschool teachers think carefully about what technology can help children learn, and how. If your child is learning both English and his home language, his teacher might help him find music and stories in his language. A child who has special needs might use devices that help her play and learn. Teachers might use a smartphone, digital camera, or other device to record what your child is doing and learning and share it with you.

Audience: *Family*

Age: *Preschool*

Topics: *Other Topics, Educational Settings*

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