

# The

# PRESCHOOL

# Detective

## How to Find the Best Sugar Land Preschool for Your Child

Written by Camisha Ferguson  
Photography by Suzi Issa and Lisa Mangos

**W**hile most little ones would be happy with a bright colored playground, some fun toys and a few friends, Sugar Land parents know there's much more involved in choosing a preschool. In some communities preschool choices are sparse, but not in Sugar Land. For the Sugar Land parent, the number of quality, attractive, and convenient preschools is abundant. For most area parents, the main dilemma is finding the best preschool fit for their family and most importantly, their child.

With all the differences among preschools, there's a lot to consider. Depending on the needs of each child, certain centers will be better for some families than others. So how do parents even begin to find their ideal preschool?

### Know Your Child

Readiness for preschool is more of a social and emotional prerequisite than anything else. If your child is the eager beaver, ready to explore without you, then she's probably ready to start preschool with little-to-no preparation or weaning. Tamika Ewing, a Fort Bend middle school teacher, sent both of her girls to preschool before they reached the age of three. While one of her daughters was not comfortable in a small group setting yet, the other one was ready and eager to get out and meet new friends. "I knew she was not the type of child that would need to stay home; she needed to socialize with her peers," said Ewing.

Separation from a parent is tough. If you know that your child will have difficulty being without you, weaning her off before enrolling her would definitely make it easier on both of you when she does become a preschooler.



Preschool teaches the importance of sharing and taking turns

### How to Find the Best Fit

The human factor is one of the most important considerations in finding a great preschool, but sometimes it's also the most overlooked. Who will teach your child? When you're considering a school, find out if the teachers are certified, better yet, if they are degreed. The most common certification for preschool teachers is the Child Development Associate, or the CDA. The best way to find out if the school is the right fit for your child is to visit the school in person. Try to schedule time with the school's director to ask specific questions about their policies, practices, and their people. See if their philosophy with respect to discipline, learning, and playing matches your own. While you're there, ask to take a tour of the facility. Seeing the students in action may help you determine if it's the right place for your child.

### Ask About Teacher Turnover

Improvements are being made. But in the past, preschools have reported high employee turn-over rates. When considering a preschool, ask about its turn-over rate. There can be many reasons for a high turn-over rate, but no matter what they are, the result



is not a good one for your child. Ask to see which class your child would be placed in and find out how long the core teacher has been with those students.

Austin Parkway's La Petite Academy has been open since 1989. JoAnn Jones, a 17-year employee and CDA certified teacher, is but one of La Petite's many long time staff members. According to the school's director, Ms. Caressa Lander, "A happy staff means happy kids. All our teachers receive a minimum of 15 hours of training per year and we offer degreed teachers."

## Check the Curriculum

Preschools are becoming more holistic, servicing not only intellectual, but emotional and social development as well. Ivy Kids, in Missouri City, was founded by Mr. and Mrs. Bandali and centers around Harvard doctor Howard Gardner's theory of the Seven Types of Intelligence. Gardner's research defines the seven types of intelligence as linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Ivy Kids was specially designed to service each of these seven types of intellects. Most preschools will provide or post specific information about their curriculum at the center.

The Balanced Learning Curriculum and the teaching techniques of the American Montessori Society are types of instructional formats also available in Sugar Land area preschools. With the wide array of options, parents can choose a preschool with a curriculum and teaching style that best suits their child's individual needs.



Preschoolers learn about structure and routine

## Safety and Facilities

Before considering a preschool, be sure that you know how the school addresses the issue of safety. What measures has the center put in place to protect its students? Are there locks on outside gates? Where does the center keep its cleaning chemicals? Are they out of the reach of the children? How does it maintain its restrooms and its kitchen? Does the center have a fire drill policy and a sprinkler system? Are background checks conducted before new employees start? Is the center child-allergy conscious? Safety encompasses more than a visitor sign-in policy.



Your child's behavior will reflect his feelings about preschool.

At Ivy Kids, Bandali points out each of the center's inviting, colorful, and carefully thought-out learning rooms. But what he doesn't have to point out are the cameras sitting overhead in the center of each room. "Our parents can watch their child anytime from any internet connected computer."

## Trust Your Instincts

Separation anxiety can be a normal process for preschoolers, but it should subside within 2-3 weeks. If your child is still dreading going to preschool after that time, you should investigate the cause. First, drop by unannounced and see if your child is having a good time and if the kids appear to be happy and well adjusted. Schedule a time to speak to the teacher and the director and see if they can give you insight into her daily routine at school.

Most importantly, talk to your child and ask specific questions about her day. Ask about her teachers, friends and activities. Ask about her most favorite and least favorite parts of the day. If you still feel something is amiss, trust your judgment and try another program. The bottom line is not every preschool setting is the best fit for every preschooler so do your research and observe as many programs as you can. **SLM**

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*CAMISHA FERGUSON is a writer and educator. She resides in Missouri City with her husband of 14 years and her three boys, all of whom attend Fort Bend schools.*



Lasting friendships can be formed at preschool



Preschool should be fun and educational



Many children love preschool



For a comprehensive listing of Sugar Land area preschools visit: [SugarLandMagazine.com](http://SugarLandMagazine.com)

You can also check out our Resource Guide on Page 85 of this issue.



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## Do Your Detective Work

**Be Prepared** - Print out a list of questions to ask before you call or visit.

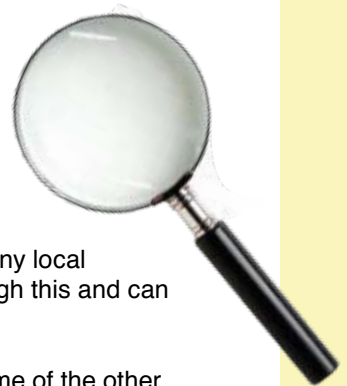
**Weed Out the No's** - Ask questions over phone and eliminate the schools that don't meet your needs before scheduling visits.

**Know What You Want** - Determine what kind of program you want; larger class, small group, Montessori, play-based, etc.

**Start Early** - Start researching preschools long before you want to enroll in case they have a long waiting list.

**Ask Friends for Referrals** - Many local parents have already been through this and can give you some great referrals.

**Check References** - Talk to some of the other parents at the school you're considering about the program.



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# 10 SIGNS OF A GREAT PRESCHOOL

Experts recommend looking for these signs of a good preschool program.

1. Children spend most of their playing and working with materials or other children. They do not wander aimlessly and they are not expected to sit quietly for long periods of time.
2. Children have access to various activities throughout the day. Look for assorted building blocks and other construction materials, props for pretend play, picture books, paints and other art materials, and table toys such as matching games, pegboards, and puzzles. Children should not all be doing the same thing at the same time.
3. Teachers work with individual children, small groups, and the whole group at different times during the day. They do not spend all their time with the whole group.
4. The classroom is decorated with children's original art work, their own writing with invented spelling, and stories dictated by children to teachers.
5. Children learn numbers and the alphabet in the context of their everyday experiences. The natural world of plants and animals and meaningful activities like cooking, taking attendance, or serving snack provide the basis for learning activities.
6. Children work on projects and have long periods of time (at least one hour) to play and explore. Worksheets are used little if at all.
7. Children have an opportunity to play outside every day. Outdoor play is never sacrificed for more instructional time.
8. Teachers read books to children individually or in small groups throughout the day, not just at group story time.
9. Curriculum is adapted for those who are ahead as well as those who need additional help. Teachers recognize that children's different background and experiences mean that they do not learn the same things at the same time in the same way.
10. Children and their parents look forward to school. Parents feel secure about sending their child to the program. Children are happy to attend; they do not cry regularly or complain of feeling sick.

Source: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)



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