

# Choosing The Best Preschool For Your Child And Family



Workshop with  
**Stephanie Agnew, BA.**



## Stephanie Agnew, BA.

Stephanie has served as the Parent Education Coordinator of Parents Place in San Mateo since 2007, and has worked with Parents Place since 2002. She has an extensive background in Early Childhood Education with 25 years of teaching experience. She trained at Bing Nursery School, owned her own preschool for five years, and worked as a parent educator at The Children's Health Council for six years, where she was also the director of the Parent Education Program. Her specialties include young child behavior management, Kindergarten readiness, school choices and preschool teacher training and support.

**Stephanie is available for individual consultation on this and many other topics. She can be reached at 650-931-1841 or [StephanieA@jfcs.org](mailto:StephanieA@jfcs.org).**



## Exploring Your Family's Needs



- **Child care vs. preschool**
- **Location: home/work**
- **Cost**
- **Teaching philosophy**
- **Your Child's Temperament**
- **Community**



# Different Types of Programs

## Family Day Care Homes (FDCH)

- A. Great for under 3 years or as a supplement to preschool/child care
- B. Must be licensed and follow student-teacher ratio requirements
- C. PROS: small, nurturing, home-like, low cost, flexible, local
- D. CONS: variety of quality, education of caregiver, lack of curriculum

## Traditional Preschools

- A. Part-time programs – not geared toward working parents
- B. Available in all philosophies, varied group sizes, mixed and single ages
- C. PROS: teacher training/turn-over, family involvement, kids “grow into more time”, social continuity, clear philosophies, school year schedule
- D. CONS: cost, rigid schedule, hard for working parents, wait lists

## Day Care Centers

- A. Designed to support working parents (5 full days, full year)
- B. Infant – pre-K or K, single ages, varied philosophies
- C. PROS: Quality control, teacher training, longer/flexible schedules, all ages, good facilities
- D. CONS: group sizes/ratios, lack of family involvement/community, social continuity, teacher turn-over, institutional feel



## Different Types of Programs (continued)

### Cooperative Preschools

- A. Two kinds: run by parents (teacher supervises parents) OR run by teachers (parents help out)
- B. Usually play-based – some very loose
- C. PROS: great for new parents, social, community, parent ed, low cost
- D. CONS: hard on some kids – separation, consistency, work & parent ed requirements

### Outdoor/Nature Programs

- A. All about being outside – nature science
- B. Great for under 3 years or as a supplement to preschool
- C. PROS: small, open ended, include parents (some), physical, outdoors, see new places
- D. CONS: not as much social interaction, groups inconsistent (sometimes), lack of small motor activities/structure





## Developmental/Play Based Programs

- Learn best from their own play
- Stages of development at particular ages
- Play implements the curriculum
- Choice of activities – can play alone or in groups
- Teacher prepares the environment
- Emphasis on social development
- Philosophy of many preschools





## Academic/Structured Programs



Focus on early fundamentals of literacy and math



Some play allowed, with more formal lessons in group format



Firm schedule for curriculum



Teacher directs and instructs



## International/Language Focused Programs

- Easily learn languages when younger
- More academic
- Teachers speak in a foreign language
- Language classes
- Culture of a country is showcased







# Montessori Programs



- Child centred – self directed
- Focuses on five areas
- Culturally literate /self disciplined children
- Use special materials – task completion is important
- Teacher observes and guides
- Practical life experience with academic lessons
- Class sizes larger
- Individual or small groups
- Many “flavors” of Montessori





## Waldorf



- Educate the head (thinking/logic), heart (art/spirit), and hands (craft/ practical work)
- Whole child
- Emphasis on nature, natural materials, rejection of commercial influences



# Reggio Emilia Programs

- Focuses on natural development
- Four key principles
  - 1) Children have control over their learning
  - 2) Senses play a large part
  - 3) Interaction and friendship
  - 4) Self-expression
- Strong belief in collaboration and group work
- Ideas presented in multiple formats
- Teacher is a co-learner, guide and researcher
- Teachers document what happens
- Parental involvement





## The Process

### Where to Look and When

- Ask friends and neighbors
- Attend a Preschool Fair in your area
- Start at least a year before your ideal start date
- General guidelines for when to start:
  - Age 0-18 mo.: at home or family day care home (FDCH)
  - Age 18 mo.-2.5 years: small groups, FDCH ideal
  - Age 2.5-3.5 years: ready for 2-3 days a week in group setting
  - Age 3.5-5 years: group setting at least two days per week



## The Process (continued)

### **First questions to ask**

- ❑ Location, hours and cost, group size, ratios
- ❑ Philosophy, discipline, separation, toilet training
- ❑ Staff training, turn-over, emergencies, illness, licensing
- ❑ Parent involvement and communication



## The Process (continued)

# Visiting/Evaluating

- **Go without your child first, then with child**
- **Stay as long as possible to get a good feel for the program**
- **Staff/director should clearly articulate philosophy, be engaged, feel warm**
- **Facility should be safe, clean, with adequate space and variety of toys and materials**
- **Environment should be cheerful, engaging, age appropriate**
- **Outdoor space is safe, spacious, and fun**
- **Parent involvement/communication is welcomed**
- **NAEYC accreditation**



## Additional Thoughts



- **Group size: 12-18 is best, 20-24 OK, 24+ is not ideal**
- **Mixed age programs: pros/cons**
- **Ramp up schedule over time**
  - Add on time: 3-5 hours per day
  - Ramp up to 2, 3, 5 days as children get older
- **Children can cope well with full-time child care as long as there is attention to individual needs**
- **Fixed hours and schedule for social continuity**
- **Developmental – balanced curriculum**
  - Learn through play
  - Social focus – conflict resolution
  - Structure with flexibility for individual needs
  - Choices, some themes, some teacher direction



## Additional Thoughts (continued)

### Signs of readiness

- Enjoys being with other children
- Likes to try new things – meet new people
- Shows interest in projects
- Physically comfortable
- Beginning to talk
- Can attend for short time

### Reasons to wait

- Family pattern of “late bloomers”
- Pre-maturity or health problems
- Developmental/language delays
- “Slow to warm” or “highly sensitive”
- Parents anxious/ not ready
- Try for 2 months – if still hard try again later
- Trust your judgment







Parents Place has additional resources on choosing a preschool, preparing for the transition, and expert Q&A

## Resources

- "How to Choose the Best Preschool for Your Child" by Jenifer Wana - [www.preschoolprimer.com](http://www.preschoolprimer.com)
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children - [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)
- Parent Clubs on Board - [www.yourparentclubs.com](http://www.yourparentclubs.com)
- Kidfully - [www.kidfully.com](http://www.kidfully.com)
- The Savvy Source for Parents - [www.savvysource.com](http://www.savvysource.com)
- Great Schools - [www.greatschools.org](http://www.greatschools.org)
- The American Montessori Society - [www.amshq.org](http://www.amshq.org)
- The North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) - [www.reggioalliance.org](http://www.reggioalliance.org)
- The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America - [www.whywaldrofworks.org](http://www.whywaldrofworks.org)
- The California Association of Parent Participation Nursery Schools - [ww.ccppns.org](http://ww.ccppns.org)
- Your local county's child care coordinating council – The 4C's of San Mateo or Santa Clara County.



## Conclusion



- Consider the needs of your both child and family.
- Take the time to evaluate your choices.
- It is ok to make a mid-course correction if your initial choice is not working.
- If you are unsure of your decision, a consultation with a parenting coach may be helpful.

Thanks for coming!!! 😊



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