

CHOOSING PRESCHOOL INSTEAD OF A NANNY

By *Annette Gendler*, NPN member since 2008

Don't get me wrong: Nannies are wonderful. My children had two great nannies. Nothing can beat the one-on-one attention a nanny can give, especially in the early years, when you need someone who can hold a child in the rocking chair for hours. But there comes a point when parents wonder whether it's time for preschool.

"Preschool is all about socialization," said Carla Goldberg, preschool director at Akiba-Schechter Jewish Day School. "It offers children a chance to bond with others and broadens their horizons." Preschool offers children (and parents!) many opportunities:

Learning to bond with other adults. "Success in life often involves getting along with others," commented Goldberg. "Learning to trust other adults and accepting guidance from them is an important step in learning to navigate the world." My son, now in 7th grade, cited one of his preschool teachers in a recent Social Studies project when he had to list a mentor other than a family member. "Arun taught me to respect others," he wrote.

Benefiting from what preschool teachers offer. One preschool teacher might be into song and dance, the next might be a chef, while another might be a gardener. Everyone has something different to offer, and there are more people at preschool to introduce children to fascinating pursuits.

Socializing with a diverse group of children. Preschool is a natural setting for your child to engage with different children he might not encounter on the playground. Learning to get along in a group, or talking with someone he hasn't played with yet, are important prerequisites for school.

Experimenting with different art materials. How about a puffy paint mixture of glue and shaving cream to create a snowman on a table when there is no snow outside? Preschool classrooms feature recycle centers, writing stations, house corners, water tables, light boxes—all kinds of equipment that encourage exploration and build skills from the earliest age.

Exploring a topic in depth. A preschool class might do a unit on the rain forest or build a model solar system. Your child might present his findings on butterflies to his classmates. Such projects teach vital skills like categorizing information, comparing and contrasting, taking a survey and charting the results, making a hypothesis and drawing conclusions. Such in-depth and systemic learning cannot be accomplished only by visiting a museum.

EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING DIFFERENT TO OFFER, AND THERE ARE MORE PEOPLE AT PRESCHOOL TO INTRODUCE CHILDREN TO FASCINATING PURSUITS.

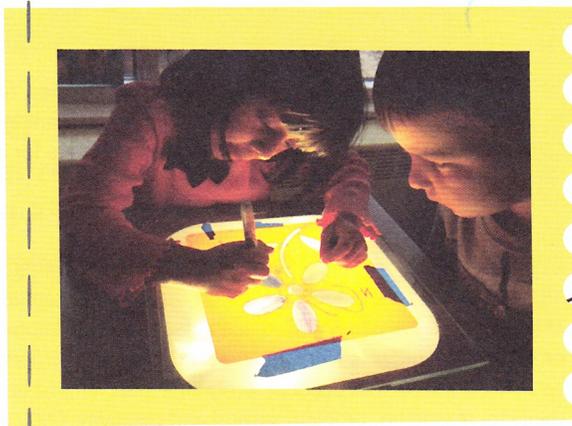


Photo courtesy Annette Gendler.

Acquiring self-help skills. The regimen of a group environment fosters such skills as stashing hat and mittens in a cubby, putting on a coat alone, managing a lunch box and having lunch with others. Peer pressure also helps. Many a child has balked at using the potty at home, but when she sees classmates doing so, it's a whole different thing.

Preschool also offers parents another resource in raising their child. I always found it helpful to see how my children functioned in relation to others and to have a preschool teacher's insight into them. A preschool teacher can, for example, offer professional evaluation of your child that a nanny wouldn't necessarily provide. A nanny is your employee, whereas a preschool teacher is independent and has worked with many children in your child's age group. She can assess your child's developmental progress and recommend next steps if needed.

"Preschool is the next step after life at home," said Goldberg. "First grade teachers often say they can tell which kids went to preschool. They've mastered managing their clothes and supplies, and a classroom is a second home to them. With all that down, they are ready for the next step: school."

.....

Annette Gendler is a nonfiction writer and lives in Hyde Park with her husband and three children. Visit her at annettegendler.com