



CONNECTICUT
BIRTH TO THREE SYSTEM

PRESCHOOL SPECIAL
EDUCATION

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

BIRTH through 5 NEWS

Information for Families and Professionals • VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1

Educators, parents and early intervention providers speak about environments – natural environments and environments implementing best practices. Great emphasis is placed on the appropriateness of environments for young children. Those working with young children and their families hope that the home and school environments will produce successful outcomes. Parents share the very same desires. In order to understand what constitutes a successful environment, we must first understand what constitutes an environment.

Environments are comprised of physical space, material things, people, and something referred to as the emotional climate. For an environment to be one that has a success orientation, these things need to be taken into consideration. The same considerations made for school programs need to be made for home environments.

Environments for success are child-focused and appropriate for child use. One need not make everything in an environment accessible to the child but the successful environment should contain many accessible items. The space needs to reflect that a child lives and plays in that environment. Actual physical space has great impact on those within it. Too much space may be overwhelming. Too little space may be frustrating. A child with physical disabilities needs space that takes into consideration the pathways, levels and surfaces within it. In order to encourage a child with a physical disability to move around in a



Environments for Success

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room and to explore and learn from the environment, the space must be inviting, feel comfortable, be safe and accessible. The child should feel comfortable on the floor, on a couch or chair. Sturdy furniture will encourage the child to get up

and explore. This exploration will promote growth across domains of development.

An environment that promotes success is one that changes to meet the changing needs of the child. As a child moves from infancy to the toddler period, the physical environment needs to reflect the changes in the child's mobility and growing independence. The growing independence and mobility creates new parameters for satisfying curiosity. To be an environment for success at this point, safety plays an even greater role. A child who is safe and can explore and move about will continue to grow and develop, adding to the success quotient of the environment.

Environments for success contain materials that promote development in a safe and child-focused manner. Children do not need elaborate toys to be engaged in activity. Safe household items such as plastic containers, spoons, plastic cups, etc. are very appropriate toys. They can be washed, do not add to the environment and allow a child to use the same materials as are being used by others. This inclusion in activity with familiar materials promotes success. If we remember back to the favorite toys of our childhood, we might recall using small watering cans, mixing pretend meals, washing plastic cups, drying items and similar activities. These activities promoted our own success.

Environments for success have items with some or all of the following: are safe, make sounds, are attractive, feel good, react to light pressure, are clean, have many parts or are very simple.

This article is translated into Spanish on page 2. Ver la versión española de este artículo en la página 2.

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University of
Connecticut

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

As an early childhood educator who has promoted the practice of inclusion for more than 20 years, I have seen and implemented classroom environments for success. These environments have many variables in common. Most importantly, the environment for young children needs to have caring, patient, supportive, encouraging and consistent people within that environment. This is true whether we are talking about a

classroom or a home environment. At home, these adults are parents, grandparents, and early intervention support personnel, as well as, older siblings, caregivers, extended family members and neighbors. These individuals are in a position to support, promote, encourage and applaud the successes that take place right before their very eyes.

Success for a young child comes in

small increments. The expression “taking baby steps” really creates the visual image of what change looks like in the life of a young child. Success is comprised of a continuing series of baby steps taken in an environment that encourages this change and growth. Success breeds success. We can all contribute to environments for success for young children through our efforts and our time. Success takes time – our time!

Ambientes ganadores

Regina Miller, PhD, Profesora auxiliar, Presidenta, División de Educación, Facultad de Educación, Enfermería y Profesiones de la Sanidad, Universidad de Hartford.

Éducadores, padres y proveedores de la intervención temprana hablan de ambientes – de ambientes naturales, y de ambientes en que se implementan las mejores prácticas. Hacen gran énfasis en que el ambiente sea apropiado para los niños. Quienes trabajan con niños y con sus familias esperan que el ambiente del hogar y el de la escuela sean capaces de producir resultados satisfactorios. Los padres comparten los mismos deseos. Para entender qué constituye un ambiente exitoso, tenemos primero que entender qué constituye un ambiente.

Los ambientes se componen de espacio físico, de cosas materiales, de gente, y de algo que se llama clima emocional. Sólo tomando en consideración todos estos factores se puede calificar un ambiente de ganador, y las mismas consideraciones aplicables a los programas escolares deben hacerse para los ambientes del hogar.

Para que favorezcan el éxito los ambientes deben estar orientados al niño y ser apropiados para el uso del niño. No todo en tales ambientes tiene que estar accesible al niño, pero muchas cosas deberán estarlo. El espacio deberá reflejar que allí vive y juega un niño. El espacio físico real tiene gran impacto; si es excesivo puede ser aplastante, y si es escaso puede ser causa de frustración. El niño con incapacidad física necesita un espacio que tenga en consideración

pasillos, niveles y superficies. Para estimular al niño minusválido a desplazarse en una estancia y a explorar y a aprender del ambiente, el espacio debe ser invitador, confortable, seguro y accesible. El niño deberá sentirse cómodo lo mismo en el suelo que en un sofá o en una silla. El mobiliario recio anima al niño a levantarse y explorar. Esta exploración promueve el crecimiento a través de los ámbitos del desarrollo.

Es promovedor de éxito el ambiente que cambia para llenar las necesidades cambiantes del niño. Según progresa el niño desde que nace hasta que camina, el ambiente físico necesita reflejar los cambios en su movilidad y creciente independencia. Su creciente independencia y movilidad crean nuevos parámetros para satisfacer su curiosidad. Para que el ambiente sea de éxito en este punto, la seguridad tiene que jugar un papel mayor. Un niño que está seguro puede explorar y desplazarse, seguir creciendo y desarrollándose, con lo que se acrecienta el cociente de éxito del ambiente.

Los ambientes exitosos incluyen objetos que promueven el desarrollo de una manera segura y orientada al niño. Los niños no necesitan juguetes elaborados

para estar activos. Cosas del hogar que sean seguras como envases plásticos, cucharas, vasos de plástico, etc., resultan juguetes muy apropiados. Pueden lavarse, no añaden al ambiente y permiten que unos niños utilicen los mismos materiales usados por otros. La utilización de estos objetos caseros es de por sí un factor promotor del éxito. Si hacemos memoria de nuestros juguetes favoritos en nuestra propia niñez, nos encontraremos utilizando pequeñas regaderas y cubos, mezclando comidas imaginarias, lavando tazas de plástico, secando objetos, y efectuando actividades similares. Estas actividades promovieron nuestro propio éxito.

Los ambientes triunfadores incluyen cosas con características como ser atractivas a la vista, tener un componente sonoro, invitar al tacto, ser seguras, reaccionar a presión leve y estar limpias, lo mismo consten de componentes múltiples o sean muy simples.

Como educadora de la tierna infancia que ha promovido la práctica de inclusión por más de 20 años, he visto y he implementado ambientes escolares ganadores. Estos ambientes tienen muchas variables comunes. Lo más importante es que los adultos que son parte del ambiente sean solícitos, pacientes, capaces de dar apoyo y



ánimo a los niños, todo de forma sostenida. Ello es verdad lo mismo en la aula que en el hogar. En el hogar los adultos son los padres, los abuelos y el personal de apoyo de intervención temprana, y también los hermanos mayores, los cuidadores, los parientes y los vecinos. Individuos todos que están en

posición de apoyar, promover, animar y aplaudir los éxitos que tienen lugar antes sus propios ojos.

Para el niño de corta edad el éxito viene con incrementos pequeños. La expresión "pasos de bebé" produce la imagen visual de los cambios en el niño de tier-

na edad. El éxito es una serie continua de pasos de bebé en un ambiente que promueve esos cambios y crecimiento. El éxito engendra más éxito. Todos podemos contribuir a crear ambientes ganadores para los niños tiernos con nuestro esfuerzo y nuestro tiempo. ¡El éxito precisa tiempo – nuestro tiempo!

Program Updates

BIRTH TO THREE

By Linda Goodman, (860) 418-6147

I have sometimes had families ask what we do to make sure that Birth to Three programs are serving children and families appropriately. One of the obligations of the Birth to Three System, under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is to provide public supervision for early intervention services. We have, since 1996, had an annual process to ensure that our programs were in compliance with IDEA. We also spent three years (1997-2000) interviewing families from each of the programs to find out how well their needs were being met. But over the past year, we have been working to develop a comprehensive way of monitoring all of our programs (there are now 42 of them) to ensure that they not only meet the requirements of the law, but that they, like the Birth to Three System as a whole, are continuously working to improve the quality of the services and supports that they offer. We started by looking at the nine categories below and writing the following standards for all Birth to Three programs:

Choice: Families have sufficient information to make choices and decisions about early intervention services and supports.

Outcomes: Families determine appropriate outcomes for their child and family and early intervention services and supports assist families and children to attain those outcomes.

Rights: Families' and children's rights are protected.

Respect: Families and children are

accorded respect and dignity by early intervention staff and their programs.

Health and Safety: Programs help to ensure that children access health care and that their safety is protected.



Relationships: Early intervention services and supports assist families and children to maintain and expand social relationships with others and within their community.

Security: Early intervention services and supports assist families to have security and continuity.

Satisfaction: The services and supports families receive meet their needs and expectations.

Organizational: Birth to Three programs are operated in compliance with Federal and State laws and regulations and reflect the use of fundamental management practices in the provision of early intervention services and supports.

We have further identified up to seven outcomes for each of these standards

and up to twelve indicators that will tell us whether the outcome is being achieved. We will be asking each program to first assess themselves against these outcomes and indicators. We then

will be spending up to one week visiting each program to observe and interview their staff, interview families and administrators, review all types of records and data in an effort to validate the results of their self-assessment. As a result, where programs or the Birth to Three System have identified some need for improvement, programs will develop improvement plans. Any areas of non-compliance with the law will have to be addressed immediately.

Our hope is that this process will gradually shape our System to be one where continuous improvement is everyone's responsibility.

PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION

By Maria Synodi, (806) 807-2054

Welcome to the 2001-2002 school year. This year is filled with professional development opportunities for early childhood special education personnel and parents. Here are some opportunities you may want to begin planning for:

The Preschool Special Education Program, in collaboration with the Bureau of Special Education, the Special Education Resource Center (SERC) and Birth to Three will be providing a series of training opportunities. Topic areas include: working with children with autism spectrum disorder-

der, programming in the least restrictive environment, challenging behaviors, language and literacy development, assistive technology and more. Look for the SERC calendar of events for the specific dates and times of the various opportunities.

Save the date: The *Together We Will* Conference has been scheduled for May 3, 2002 at the Sheraton in Waterbury, CT. The keynote speaker will be Mark Wolery from Vanderbilt University. A *Call for Proposals* to solicit presenters for the event has been issued. If you are interested in presenting, please let us know.

The Department of Education's Preschool Special Education Program and the Birth To Three System are continuing a number of collaborative activities. A major activity this year is the development and eventual dissemination of joint "transition guidelines" for Birth to Three program and school district personnel. Comments and suggestions on transition and transition-related issues can be directed to **Lynn Johnson** at (203) 294-5170 or **Maria Synodi** at (860) 807-2054.

Last, please note that the topic of this newsletter is devoted to environments. The focus is intended to remind early

childhood and early childhood special education personnel of the critical importance of shaping the physical space for young children to promote learning. One key predictor of program quality is the environment. As we shape our classroom environment for the children we will serve this year, take the time to critically analyze the organization, climate and overall function of your indoor and outdoor environment. Create a goal to ensure that your program provides a warm, caring space that ensures individual attention, keeps children engaged and promotes learning and social development. Have a great year!

State ICC Update

By Ann Gionet

Members of the Interagency Coordinating Council participated in a full day retreat on June 11, 2001 at Manchester Community College. The retreat, facilitated by Peg Hayden, presented the opportu-

nity for members of the ICC to come together and share ideas regarding topics to be reviewed in the coming year. The council identified four topical areas: family participation, natural environments, legislative linkages and, as part of our future vision, expanding Birth to Three to "Birth to Five." Over the next year each of these areas will be addressed by members of the ICC, and

we invite comment by parents and providers in person at an ICC meeting, by fax at (860) 418-6003, attention ICC or e-mail to Birth to Three Infoline via the web site at www.birth23.org. The ICC will meet October 15 and December 10 at Infoline in Rocky Hill. Directions can be found on the web site.

LOCAL COUNCILS ARE A GREAT PLACE TO LEARN!!

By Eileen McMurrer, Birth to Three System Coordinator, (860) 418-6134

Do you want to know more about the resources in your community? Are you looking for practical answers to your questions? When you contact your Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC) you connect with the parents, providers, school personnel and other community folks who have knowledge and experience that can benefit you and your family in a variety of ways. Check in with one of the contact people listed here to:

- Learn if they have a Family Fun Night or speaker on an interesting topic coming up in the near future. LICC events are open to everyone, even if you do not live in that part of Connecticut.
- Ask for the names of other LICC parents who have agreed to speak about their experiences. LICCs also have information on parent support groups that they are happy to share.
- Get suggestions of community resour-

ces and activities in your area that your child and family might enjoy.

If you have experiences that you want to share, or you want to help others make meaningful connections, your LICC needs your ideas and energy. Join them for a meeting, or call to learn more!

Bridgeport

Elizabeth MacKenzie (203) 365-8835

Danbury

Muriel Hoczela (203) 775-5606

Ruth Cantor (203) 743-3933

Greater Hartford

Elaine Cannon (860) 722-8900

Brenda Sullivan (860) 657-4361

Lower Fairfield

Lolli Ross (203) 531-1880
x 132

Lower Naugatuck Valley

Dianne Guillett (203) 924-9548

Peg Marlowe (203) 924-9548

Ellen Steinbrick (203) 881-0129



Meriden

Stephanie Kelsey-Reynolds

(203) 237-1448

Patricia Sullivan (203) 630-4245

Middlesex County

Lisa Wiernasz (860) 344-6717

Cindy Cohen (860) 344-8014

New Haven

Mary Humphrey (203) 294-5085

Jaime Uribe (203) 318-3692

Suffield/Enfield

Karen Boscarino (860) 668-3039

Southeast

Jesse Sargent (860) 447-2931

Cele Brown (860) 447-2931

Mary Littel (860) 859-5528

Torrington

Patty Wescott (203) 806-8753

Carole McGuire (860) 824-5639

Waterbury

Joy Liebeskind (203) 272-9058

Tom Melesky (203) 575-0707

**PARENT MENTOR
TRAININGS SCHEDULED
FOR FALL**

By Karen Cubbellotti

PATH/Parent to Parent of Connecticut announces plans to offer regional fall trainings for parents who are interested in becoming better advocates for their children by

strengthening their knowledge, skills and confidence. Through this training, parents will also be afforded an opportunity to learn about, actively participate in and help to shape the Connecticut Birth to Three System. Parent Mentor 'graduates,' once comfortable, would share information with other parents and encourage their

involvement in Birth to Three System activities. Fall training dates and locations have not yet been determined as they will be tailored, wherever possible, to parent availability and locale.

For more information about Parent Mentor Fall Trainings, please call Karen at PATH/Parent to Parent of Connecticut, (800) 399-7284.

Resources and Learning Opportunities

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

For Service Providers Only:

- **Service Coordination**
October 2, 11, 19 and 23, 2001
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
DMR Waterbury office
- **Carolina Curriculum**
Monday, October 15, 2001
8:45 AM – 12 noon
Waterbury Sheraton Hotel
- **Hawaii Early Learning Profile**
Monday, October 15, 2001
12:45 PM – 4:00 PM
Waterbury Sheraton Hotel
- **Family-centered Services and Supports Seminar**
November 6, 19 and 28, 2001
December 6 and 17, 2001
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Rensselaer, Hartford

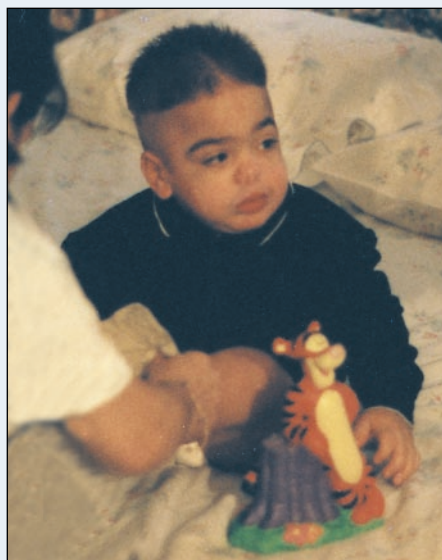
For Families and Service Providers:

- **Orientation to the Connecticut Birth to Three System**
Tuesday, October 2, 2001 or
Monday, January 7, 2002
9:00 AM – 12 noon
DMR Waterbury Office

Contact Kathy Granata at (860) 418-6146 or kathy.granata@po.state.ct.us or register by using the registration form in the 2000/2001 Birth to Three training calendar. No registration fees.

Autism in Young Children Series:

- The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)



October 10 and 11, 2001
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Rensselaer, Hartford

- The PECS follow-up for those who attended the 2000/2001 workshop:
Friday, October 12, 2001
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Rensselaer, Hartford
- A Developmental Relationship focused Intervention for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Severe Behavior Issues
Friday, October 26, 2001
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Holiday Inn, Cromwell

Contact Carissa D'Amico at the Special Education Resource Center at (860) 632-1485, ext. 269. Registration fees will be charged for most sessions.

Others

- **National Organization for Rare Disorders Annual Conference**
Friday, Saturday, Sunday,
October 5, 6 and 7, 2001
Washington, D.C.
- **Stone Soup Conference: Skills and Strategies for Working with Children and Families**
Wednesday, October 10, 2001
Sheraton Waterbury Hotel

Sponsored by the Connecticut Family Resource Alliance and Friends. For more information, call (860) 807-2055.

- **Family Fun Night**
Sponsored by Torrington LICC
Family Resource Center at Vogel-Wetmore Middle School

For more information, call Pat Wescott at (203) 806-8753.

- **Transition Forum for Families Exiting Birth to Three**
Sponsored by Waterbury LICC
Tuesday evening, November 13, 2001

For more information, call Joy Liebeskind at (203) 272-9058.

- **Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference 2001**
Saturday, October 13, 2001
Mitchell College, New London

For more information, contact

Kim Dole at (860) 848-8413 or wild27flower@aol.com or
Ronna Stuller at (860) 447-9823
or rstuller@snet.net

- **Connecticut Down Syndrome Congress Annual Conference**
Saturday, October 13, 2001
Manchester Community College

For more information, contact (888) 486-8537 or www.ctdownsyndrome.org

- **Stop Headaches for Moms and Dads**
Sponsored by the Greater Suffield LICC
Wednesday evening, October 3, 2001
Spaulding School, West Suffield
Child care is provided.

For more information, contact
Karen Boscarino at (860) 668-3039.

- **Coping With Sibling Rivalry**
Sponsored by the Greater Suffield LICC
Thursday, November 1, 2001
Spaulding School, West Suffield
Child care is provided.

For more information, contact
Karen Boscarino at (860) 668-3039.

WEB RESOURCES

The new Infoline web site www.infoline.org allows you to search the entire Infoline database under the "Gateway to Connecticut's Health and Human Services Agencies."

Check out the National Association for the Education of Young Children at www.NAEYC.org, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System

at www.nectas.unc.edu and Birth to Three at www.birth23.org

Check out the new State Library web site at www.greatkidsct.org

The web sites listed here are not endorsed or warranted in any way by the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System or by the collaborators of this newsletter. As with all information obtained from any source, web sites should be used with caution. There is no control over the posting of incorrect material on the Internet. Be aware that not all web sites list their information sources, and do not accept information as "fact" just because it appears on a web site.

"SNIPPETS" The Parent Perspective

By **Victoria Moore and Ellen Steinbrick**

As told to Eileen McMurrer

Families have discovered that creative control of their child's environment can make a great difference in their child's learning success. "Olivia reached some major motor milestones in the bathtub first, within the comfort of the warm water, before she was willing to try the movements on dry land," says her mom, Victoria Moore. "When she is relaxed and comfortable, she is much more successful. For instance, she loves her 'Yoga for Special Kids' class, where the quiet setting, low lighting and calm, gentle encouragement from the teacher really helps."

"We have found that mounting a large, wide mirror close to the floor in Olivia's bedroom is a great motivator. She will spend hours watching herself trying new things there that are far less interesting to her away from the mirror.

Another way to help ensure that Olivia will want to get involved in something is to try to get rid of the surrounding clutter. When there are too many things out, she doesn't get as much done. The act of putting things away also helps with transitions between activities. "Cleaning up" signals that an activity is over, and at the same time, it reduces the possibility for distractions. Other times, we'll play music to help with transitions, particularly when I need to head out briefly and she is being cared for by a babysitter. Her favorite music helps to soothe her and makes it easier to part for a while. Music and other sounds have also improved her motivation for learning. For example, Olivia

loves her books that have buttons to press that make music or say words. It has been wonderful discovering how Olivia's surroundings can help to improve her success!"

Alex's mom, Ellen Steinbrick, has also used music to help her son learn. "When we were working on having Alex control his breathing, I gave him a harmonica. He loved the fact that he could make music by breathing in or out, which ultimately helped him to be successful in drinking from a straw." Alex is a charmer who loves to be around other people, but his appearance has sometimes made others uncertain about approaching him.

Ellen uses colorful fabric paint to decorate and personalize Alex's equipment and belongings for home, preschool and around town. "Making his things prettier and less 'therapeutic-looking' makes him more approachable and makes using the equipment less scary and more fun for everyone. He likes learning new things with other kids around, and learning is easier when it's fun!"

Whether you turn it up or tone it down, have fun using sounds, lighting, friends or other features of your child's environment in new ways to make learning connections more successful!



The Provider Perspective

ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS:

A Brief Shopper's Guide

By **Walter S. Gilliam, PhD, Associate Research Scientist, Yale University Child Study Center**

Mountains of research over the past four decades all lead to one clear conclusion – early childhood care and education programs can have an huge impact on children's readiness for school. Furthermore, this increase in school readiness can lead to improved school achievement, increased likelihood to complete high school and attend college, and even the surprising findings that preschool graduates tend to earn more as adults and commit fewer crimes. The massive growth in the amount of state and federal support for preschool over the past decade alone stands as evidence of all of our belief in the importance of preschool education. However, there is one string attached – only high-quality preschool programs are likely to provide real benefits to children. In fact, very poor quality programs might even be detrimental to children's development.

Licensure and accreditation are two mechanisms of assuring at least a certain minimum level of quality. Programs that are licensed have been examined to verify that minimal health, safety and sanitary practices are being followed. Accreditation, however, is quite different. There are currently several agencies that accredit preschool and infant-toddler programs, and there is substantial evidence that accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a good indicator that a classroom-based program is of sufficient quality to support the overall development of young children. However, some very good programs may not be accredited for a variety of reasons. Accreditation



may be a useful indicator of quality, but it is not perfect.

Although asking about licensure and accreditation may be a useful way to start shopping for a program, the single best way to tell whether a program is "high-quality" is to go take a look for yourself. Visit the program, talk to the staff and parents, watch the children, inspect the facilities and equipment (inside and outside), and stay as long as it takes to feel comfortable that you understand what this classroom has to offer your child and family. If you do not feel comfortable visiting the program, it is likely that your child may not either. Good programs welcome parents to visit and ask questions when they are shopping. Remember, your child will likely be spending a significant number of his or her waking hours in this program each day. If you have any doubts, keep looking.

While you are visiting programs, consider using the following questions to organize your observations. What is the quality of the physical space? Indoors, is there enough space for the number of children and staff? Are lighting and ventilation adequate? Is the furniture in good repair and of the correct size for the children? Are there some soft, cozy places for children to relax and "take a break" from the busier parts of the classroom? Are shelves and walls used to create smaller areas for children to work and play in

small, manageable groups? Does the room look like it "belongs to the children" – are children's own artwork displayed at the children's eye level, are there specific places for each child to store his or her possessions, and are there photographs of the children on display? Is the room inviting, and would you want to spend six, eight or

BIRTH through 5 NEWS

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more hours in this room each day? Outdoors, is the playground specifically designed for safe play by toddlers and preschoolers? Is the playground fenced and safely accessible from the classroom? Is there adequate padding under play equipment? Try getting on your knees and looking around, to see what the classroom might look like from your child's view.

Are basic health, safety and sanitary procedures followed? Do staff and children wash their hands before eating and after toileting? What do the restrooms and food preparation areas look like? Are evacuation plans and emergency telephone numbers easily accessible? Do you see a fire extinguisher and fire/smoke detectors? Are all exits useable in case of emergency? Does the program require updated immunizations for all children and staff? Does the classroom have first-aid supplies and someone trained in first-aid? Does the program have health and mental health consultants who regularly visit?

Will this be an enriching environment for your child? Is there a large selection of books easily accessible by children, and do the teachers rotate the books to provide variety? Do teachers read to children, both in groups and individually? Are there materials available to support children's fine motor, artistic, musical, and counting/number development?

Do children and staff sing and dance? Are there blocks, living things (animals and/or plants), sand and/or water tables for sensory play, and dramatic (pretend play) equipment?

What are the social interactions like? Is there a lot of language in the classroom? Do teachers talk to the children frequently, especially one-on-one? Do the teachers interact with the children in a way that shows both affection and respect? Do staff members speak to children with warmth in the voices and gestures, smiles on their faces, and kindness in their hearts? Do staff members bend or kneel to make eye contact with children, do they say "please" and "thank you" to the children? Do teachers appear to enjoy spending time with the children, or do they seem like they would rather spend their time wiping tables or chatting with each other?

What are the teachers and director like? Are the teachers well-trained and experienced in early childhood education? Is there enough staff for the number of children? Expect at least two staff members at all times. Also, there should be at



the very least one staff member for every ten four-year-olds, one for every eight three-year-olds, one for every five toddlers, and one for every three infants. Is the director well-trained, experienced, and easily accessible to the teachers. Are the teachers and director happy to talk to you, answer your ques-

tions, and get you in contact with current or past parents? How long have the teachers taught in this program? Are the teachers paid what they are worth? If not, they likely will not last long.

When shopping, expect to see a comfortable and stimulating classroom and playground. Expect to observe highly competent professionals who enjoy working with children and welcome your presence in the classroom. Expect to hear from delighted parents who speak of the staff as if they were close family friends. And above all, expect to see happy, smiling boys and girls who are comfortable in their program, enjoy their teachers and peers, and are being exposed to many wonderful learning opportunities. Remember, this may be the most important purchase you ever make. Expect the best.

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