

THE 'RIGHT' CHOICE

SIX THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN PICKING A PRESCHOOL.

With more than 1,900 preschools to choose from in Singapore, how do parents pick the one that best suits their child? Apart from cost and accessibility, it is also important to think about how the child's experience will be shaped by the educators as well as the preschool's environment, programmes and curriculum.

1 LOCATION
A preschool's proximity to one's home or office, or the home of the child's grandparents, allows for convenient drop-offs and pick-ups. That said, it is worth looking beyond the distance, as our well-connected public transport network can offer manageable commuting times to preschools that are further away.

“My children are enrolled in a preschool near my workplace so that I can quickly respond to teachers' calls, like when they feel unwell. It's also more convenient if I need to work late.”

LIN HUI, mother to Lucas, 6, and Lewis, 2



2 TYPES OF PRESCHOOLS AND FEES
There are three main types of preschools:

- Privately-run preschools
- Ministry of Education (MOE) Kindergartens
- Government-funded Anchor Operator (AOP) and Partner Operator (POP) centres

Eligible families can defray part of the preschool fees with the help of a Basic Subsidy, a means-tested Additional Subsidy, the Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme, and other forms of financial assistance. The subsidy type and amount depend on the service selected (i.e., infant care, child care or kindergarten), the parent's employment status, and household income.

3 PRESCHOOL HOURS
If both parents work, they can consider infant and child care centres with full-day programmes that cater to the holistic development of children. Parents who prefer non-full-day programmes can consider kindergartens or half-day care programmes for their children.

	Infant/Child Care	Kindergarten
Age group	Infant care: Between 2 and 18 months Child care: Between 18 months and below 7 years <i>Larger preschools often provide both infant and child care.</i>	Between 18 months and below 7 years <i>MOE Kindergartens cater only to K1s and K2s (ages 5 and 6).</i>
Programme length	Full-day (7am to 7pm on weekdays) <i>Some centres also offer half-day and/or flexible options (at least 12 hours a week, 3 hours per session).</i>	Half-day (morning or afternoon session on weekdays) <i>Full-day service is available, including at MOE Kindergartens.</i>



4 POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND CURRICULUM
There are different types of quality early childhood curriculum. Some learning approaches include HighScope, Montessori and Reggio Emilia. Parents should select a preschool whose philosophy and learning approach resonate with their personal beliefs and expectations.
Consider the child's specific needs, as well as how the centre's programmes and activities cater to their holistic development including the physical, cognitive, language and social-emotional domains. Find out how the preschool assesses and tracks children's learning and development (e.g., learning stories, portfolios, observations), and what programmes it offers to engage parents.

Talk to the centre about the policies and strategies it has in place to guide young children's behaviour. Positive behaviour management practices provide children with a supportive environment to thrive socially and emotionally. "Regular conversations between parents and educators help build a consistent environment to support children's emotional well-being and nurture sound values," says Ms Wan Hill Kuan, a preschool principal, who stresses the importance of strong home-preschool partnership and its positive impact on a child's preschool years, particularly in the transition to formal schooling.

“Enrolling Harisa in full-day child care benefits both of us. She gets to interact with other children as well as trained educators who stimulate her learning and development. I can focus on my career and professional development without interruptions during working hours.”

NURASHRIKIN BINTE KARIM, mother to Harisa, 5



5 FACILITIES AND ENVIRONMENT
Look at the centre's equipment, materials, spaces and surroundings. Are they safe and developmentally appropriate? Is the classroom well stocked with books, art supplies and educational resources? Are gardens, parks and other community places easily accessible for educators to conduct outdoor learning activities?
"The learning environment must be safe and well-designed with a variety of learning materials and resources for children to engage in small- and large-group activities comfortably, without distractions from surrounding high noise levels," says Dr Karuna Marthenis, Senior Lecturer, Early Childhood Education Programme, Singapore University of Social Sciences.

6 TEACHER-CHILD RATIO
The Early Childhood Development Centres Regulations (2018) stipulate a staff-child ratio of at least one teacher to five children in infant care, and one teacher to 25 children at the K2 level. Smaller class sizes mean that educators can spend more time and attention on each child, tailor their teaching approach, and spot any learning challenges.

“I actively looked for a preschool with more outdoor play opportunities for my son. At his age, I want him to get more exercise, develop motor skills, and be exposed to more sunshine.”

JONATHAN KAY, father to Eli, 2

