



Radio Stations : **All Community Radio Stations**  
Subject : **Early Childhood Development**  
Audience : **Parents, caregivers and educators**  
Program topic : **Choosing a Playgroup or Pre-School (LOVE)**

#### **Guidelines to the presenter**

- Presenter – please familiarize yourself with the brief and the use the facts effectively by referring to them from time to time during the show.
- You should be seen as a peer rather than an authority.
- Offer guidance or opinion rather than telling people what to do.
- Encourage people to seek further information
- Always keep the objectives and outcomes in mind and drive these.

#### **Topic:**

Choosing a playgroup or pre-school

#### **Objectives:**

- Further the knowledge around choosing good ECD programmes for children.
- Create awareness of the different types of programmes available for care of children.
- Grow understanding of which programmes are best.
- Highlight that it is best for the children if they are mainly cared for at home or in small groups before the age of 2.
- Promote the support of children to make good transitions to preschool/playgroups

## Introduction

On this show, we celebrate the fact that you are the most important person in your child's life. You have the power to give your child the best possible start in life and it doesn't have to cost you a cent.

We know from all our previous discussions that as caregivers we need to focus on our children's learning and development from very early – from when they are born! And that most important place for learning is **the home**. This week however we are going to start talking about learning outside the home.

All children have to start school in the year that they turn 6 (to attend Grade R). There is pressure to find a pre-school and pay the fees that go along with it. But is it important that they attend a learning program like pre-school before starting school? And what should parents look out for?

| Questions   | Facts/Information  |
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| <p>1. <i>Is it absolutely important for children to attend preschool?</i></p>               | <p>No, your child doesn't <i>have</i> to go to preschool, but it definitely should be something you consider. Research shows that it is very beneficial for school readiness. There are certain experiences that even the brightest or most advantaged children don't necessarily have exposure to at home, and it can be beneficial for the child to have a year of functioning in a large-group learning setting before attending formal school.</p> |
| <p>2. <i>What are the different kinds of group learning options that are available?</i></p> | <p>There are a number of different out of home learning opportunities for children. In many communities there are day-mother care programmes which are small groups of young children (no more than six), playgroup programmes and preschools/ECD centres. Playgroups are informal learning</p>  |

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| <p>3. <i>So you say that children should only start attending a preschool at the age of 2?</i></p> <p>4. <i>What should parents do if they need to return to work but cannot afford one-on-one care for their child?</i></p> | <p>groups that often take place in people’s home, where the children meet a few times a week for a few hours. An ECD centre should be registered with the department of Social development, have its own site and it often runs for a full day. Playgroups are great for younger children, and are often attended by caregivers (such as moms and tots). ECD centres are more appropriate for older children – anytime from 2 but ideally from the age of 3.</p> <p><b>If you have the option, wait until your child is 2 or older before starting in a group programme.</b> Before the age of 2, being in the care of one dedicated carer is better for the child than attending group programmes. However for many, preschool equals childcare. But if you're in the lucky category of families who can choose, it is best to wait until your child is at least 2 before enrolling it in a school, even until she's 3 or 4. Starting at the age of 2, and attending a good preschools can provide the child with things that parents cannot give, such as a large community of same-age peers and by age 2, kids can benefit from the additional experiences that preschools offer.</p> <p>Some families make use of family members to help care for their children if they need to return to work. However, if this is not possible, finding a day-mother (someone who looks after no more than 6 children) is an option. Remember that the same criteria that applies when choosing a preschool – quality, safety and health - apply when</p> |
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5. *How do you find a learning programme for your child?*

finding a person to care for your child. If possible avoid larger groups before the child is 2. If this is not possible, make sure that the centre you take your child to has a good infant programme – there are special requirements like staff ratio, baby programme etc, and centres should be offering these.

More and more, research tells us that our children's healthy development depends on safe and positive experiences during the first few years of life. If you are a parent who works during these early years, choosing good child care is one of the most important decisions you will ever make for your child, and therefore make sure you research properly.

You can follow these steps:

**Start Early** Start looking as far in advance as you can. No matter what type of care you are considering - a child care center or care in someone else's home - finding the right child care option can take some time.

**Make a Call** Begin your search by calling your local experts - your Child Care forum or Department of Social development.

**Visit and Ask Questions** Visit the child care options you are considering. You might want to visit several different child care programs, either centers or family child care homes, before you decide which one is best for your family. Call each child care program and schedule an appointment for your visit. Once you are there, stay for at least an hour to watch activities, check the surroundings, and ask questions.

6. *What kind of questions should you be asking yourself in trying to find an ECD centre? Are there standard ways to assess the programmes on offer?*

**Make a Choice** Think about what you saw at each visit, and make the best choice for your child and family.

**Stay Involved** The work isn't over when you find good care for your child. You and your child's caregiver are partners now.

Yes some of the basic items that you need to look at when assessing a centre are:

**Adult to Child Ratio.** Ask how many children there are for each adult. The fewer the children for each adult, the better for your child. You want your child to get plenty of attention. The younger your child, the more important this is. Babies need an adult to child ratio of no more than 1:4 (one adult for four infants), while four-year-olds can do well with a bigger ratio.

**Group Size.** Find out how many children are in the group. The smaller the group, the better. Imagine a group of 25 two-year olds with five adults, compared to a group of 10 with two adults. Both groups have the same adult to child ratio. Which would be calmer and safer? Which would be more like a family?

**Caregiver Qualifications.** Ask about the caregivers' training and education. Caregivers with qualifications and/or special training in working with children will be better able to help your child learn. Are the caregivers involved in activities to improve their skills? Do they attend classes and workshops?

**Turnover.** Check how long caregivers have been at the center or providing care in their homes. It's best if children stay with the

7. *And then if all those items are met, what else should you look for?*

same caregiver at least a year. Caregivers who come and go make it hard on your child. Getting used to new caregivers takes time and energy that could be spent learning new things.

**Accreditation.** Find out if the child care provider has been registered by the Department of Social development. Providers that are registered have met standards for child care that help ensure your child's safety and that a quality programme is provided.

**Safety.**

Once the basics are met, many of the requirements of the centre are dependent on what you as a family and your particular child needs. Some of the questions you can ask yourself are:

**What is the look and feel of the school?**

Does it feel warm and inviting? Or is it cold and institutional? Is it clean and organized, or messy and chaotic? What kind of work is up on the walls? Do you see original art, or posters and worksheets? Is the work placed at eye level so young children can see it?

Are the facilities old or new? Do they have a gym or play yard? How often do they use it?

**Is the atmosphere exciting?** Do students seem happy? Do they look busy or bored? Are they having positive interactions with each other, the staff, and the teachers? Do the teachers seem like they enjoy teaching here? Would your child be happy here? Would you?

**What kinds of activities are children doing?**

What is happening in the art corner and the block area? Are children working

cooperatively, individually, or both? Are the projects controlled or open-ended, enabling children to do many different things with the same materials? Are there opportunities for dramatic and fantasy play? Do children have lots of free time to run around?

**What is the focus on reading?** If this is a preschool, ask if it focuses on teaching early literacy skills and at what age. A good preschool program should make all children feel successful. Remember that if children are pushed too soon, they can get turned off to reading — and this attitude could stay with them for years.

**How much do the children play?** Both boys and girls need room to run around and time to do it. And both need plenty of opportunity for active and imaginative play. When you visit a preschool, look carefully at what kinds of play are allowed and encouraged. Children need to be able to explore their interests through play — in a dramatic play area, in a block area, and using materials like sand and water. They also need time to complete an activity before they are directed into another experience.

8. *Starting preschool is often quite challenging for parents and children. What fun ways can you use to help children get ready?*

There's a lot you can do in the weeks before to get ready for the big day. But try to keep your efforts low-key. If you make too big a deal out of this, your child may end up being more worried than excited. Here are some ideas to keep the focus on fun.

**Use pretend play to explore the idea of preschool.** Take turns being the parent, child and teacher. Act out common daily

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| <p>9. <i>What happens if your child says they are worried about going to preschool?</i></p> | <p>routines. Reassure your child that preschool is a good place where he will have fun and learn. Answer his questions patiently.</p> <p><b>Read books about preschool.</b> There are many books about going to preschool available from the public library in your area. Choose several to share with your child before school starts. Talk about the story and how the characters are feeling. Ask how your child is feeling.</p> <p><b>Make a game out of practicing self-help skills</b> like: unzipping her coat, hanging her coat on a hook, putting on her backpack, fastening her shoes. For example, you might want to have a "race" with your child to see how quickly she can put on her shoes. If your child will be bringing lunch, pack it up one day before school starts and have a picnic together. This will give her the chance to practice unzipping her lunch box and unwrapping her sandwich—important skills for the first day!</p> <p><b>Play at your new preschool.</b> Visit your child’s preschool together. These visits increase your child’s comfort with and confidence in this new setting.</p> <p><b>Listen to your child’s worries.</b> Although it’s tempting to quickly reassure your child and move on, it’s important to let your child know that his worries have been heard. Let your child know it’s normal to feel happy, sad, excited, scared, or worried. Explain that starting something new can feel scary and that lots of people feel that way. It can be helpful to share a time when you started something new and how you felt. Makes</p> |
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|  | <p>sure you <b>notice nonverbal messages</b>. As much as 3-year-olds may talk, most are not yet able to fully explain how they are feeling or what they are worried about. Your child may “act out” his worry by clinging, becoming withdrawn, or by being more aggressive. Another common reaction as children take a big move forward is to actually move backward in other areas. For example, if your child is fully potty trained, he may start have toileting accidents. Remember that your child is facing—and managing—a big change in his life. He may need more support, nurturing, and patience from you while he makes this transition.</p> |
| <p><i>10. What can you do in the days before you start to help prepare them?</i></p> | <p>To prepare for preschool you probably need to buy a backpack for your child – go together with your child and if possible, let your child choose it himself. Figure out how your child will get to school and how she will come home. Talk to your child about the morning and afternoon routine so that she understands that she will be safe, okay, and cared for.</p>   |
| <p><i>11. What about the first day?</i></p>  | <p><b>On the Night before</b> spend some time answering any last-minute questions from your child. Let your child choose (weather- and school-appropriate) clothes for her first day. Make sure that your child goes to bed on time and on the first day wake up early enough so that you and your child don’t have to rush to get to preschool. Make breakfast for your child and, if possible, sit down to eat together—or at least talk with her as she eats and you get ready. Pack your</p>  |

*12. I know for some parents, saying goodbye on that first day can be quite difficult?*

child's backpack together. If your child is bringing lunch, select foods that you know are his favorites. You can chat about the day's routine to help your child know what to expect. It can also be useful to let your child choose a special stuffed animal or blanket to bring to school with her. These "loveys" can help children make the transition from home to school, and can also make naptime easier, too

These strategies can ease the jitters of separating on your child's first day at preschool.

**Plan to stay a little while.** Staying for 15/30 minutes on that first morning can help ease the transition. Together, the two of you can explore the classroom, meet some other children, play with a few toys. When you see that your child is comfortable, it is time to leave. If he is having a harder time getting engaged, you may want to ask your child's teacher to stay with your child as you say good-bye so that when you leave, he can turn to another caring adult for support.

**Keep your tone positive and upbeat.** Children pick up on the reactions of the trusted adults in their lives. So try not to look worried or sad. Say a quick, upbeat good-bye and reassure your child that all will be well.

**Think about creating a special good-bye routine.** For example, you can give your child a kiss on his or her palm to "hold" all day long. Good-bye routines are comforting to children and help them understand and prepare for what will happen next.

**Resist the rescue.** Try not to run back in the

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| <p><i>13. What happens if your child is very sad and cries when dropped off?</i></p><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><p><i>14. How can you stay involved in the preschool or playgroup programme that your child attends?</i></p> | <p>classroom if you hear your child crying, as upsetting as this can be. This is a big change and your child may, quite understandably, feel sad and a little scared. But if you run back in, it sends the message that he is only okay if you are there and it is likely to prolong your child's distress and make it harder for him to adapt. Rest assured, teachers have many years of experience with helping families make the shift to preschool. Instead, you can wait outside the classroom for a few minutes to ensure that all is well, or call the school later in the morning to check-in.</p> <p>It's important that parents choose a place/ ECD centre where the teachers deal well with separation anxiety. Moms want to drop off, knowing their child is going to be well-taken care of. If your kid is crying when you try to leave, take comfort in the fact that the tears don't last long. "For the children who cry the longest and hardest, this is always MUCH harder for the parents than it is for the children. It may seem like your child is getting their arm sawed off, but in truth, they are okay. It is <i>very, very</i> rare to have a child react to separation that strongly for more than a week or two.</p> <p>Here are some ways to be involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have parent-caregiver meetings regularly, and ask questions.</li><li>• Offer to volunteer time when needed, like participating in clean up days, fixing broken toys.</li><li>• Be there for your child's birthday</li></ul> |
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|  | <p>party.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit your child at child care and read a book aloud.</li> <li>• Join in special events, like field trips</li> <li>• Even if you can't get time off from work during the day, you can still check in at drop-off and pick-up times. Ask the caregiver how things are going, and how your child is doing.</li> <li>• Visiting and participating in events at your child's provider sends a strong message. It tells your child and your child's caregiver that you think what your child is doing and learning is important.</li> </ul> |
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| <b>Conclusion</b>  |
| <p>Make sure you have checked out any ECD programme properly before sending your child to a preschool. Remember that the ECD programme should be registered. Talking about school and spending time helping your child prepare are important for the emotional well-being and enjoyment of school. Children benefit from group out of home early learning experiences – but if possible this should only be from 2 years of age.</p> |
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## Learning outcomes

After listening to this show the audience should:

- Be aware of criteria for choosing good quality ECD programmes for their children.
- Be aware of the different types of programmes available for care of children, and which of these are best for their children
- Understand that it is best if the children are mainly cared for at home or in small groups before the age of 2.
- Understand that children need to be supported/prepared to make a good transition to preschool/ playgroups.