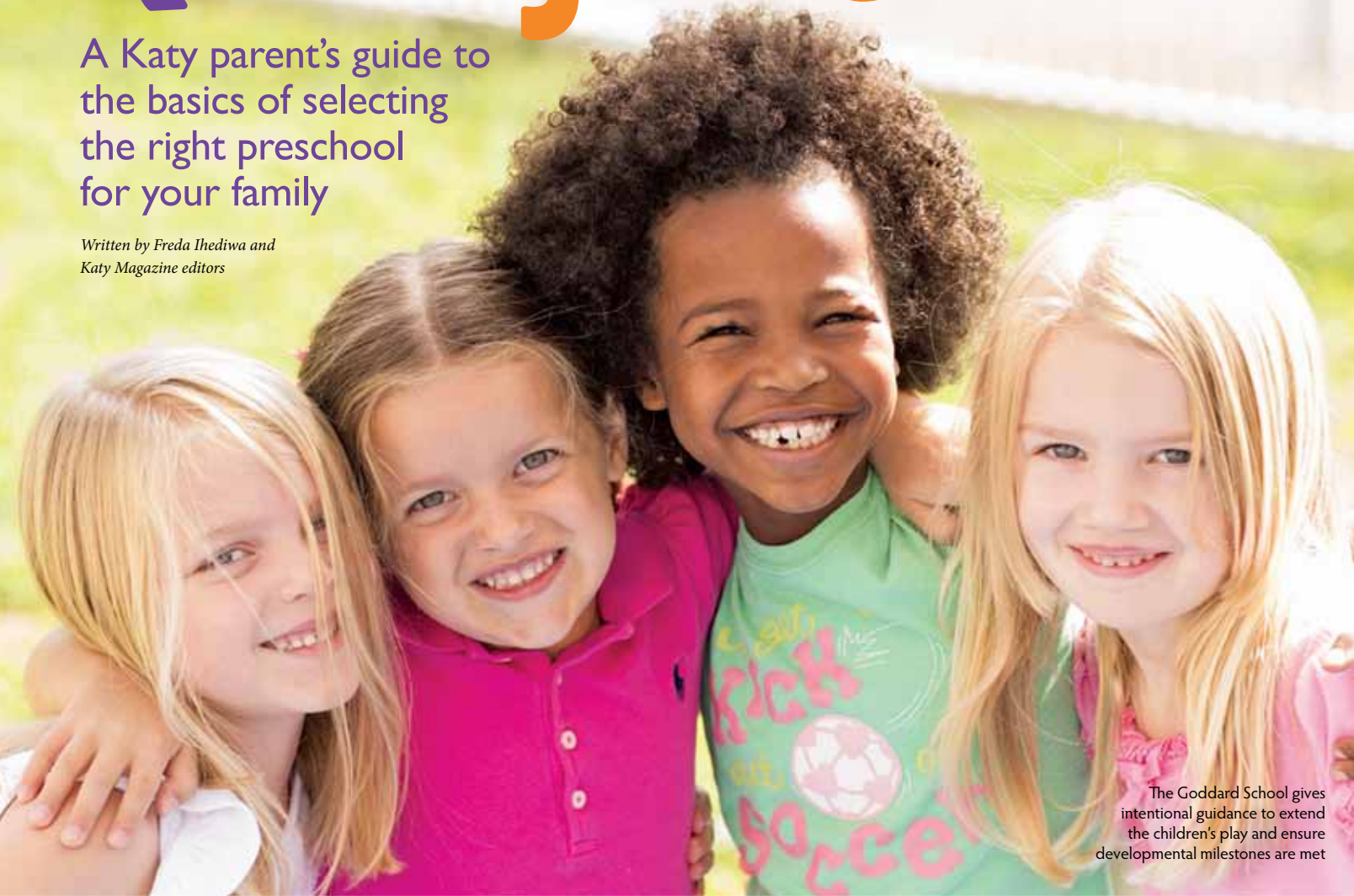


The ABC's and 123's of Choosing a Quality Preschool

A Katy parent's guide to the basics of selecting the right preschool for your family

Written by Freda Ithediwa and Katy Magazine editors



The Goddard School gives intentional guidance to extend the children's play and ensure developmental milestones are met



Katy's Early Childhood Enrichment Center emphasizes developmentally appropriate hands-on experiences



Primrose partners with parents to assist children with developing a love for learning



Preschoolers can learn through art, music, and dramatic play as well as curriculum



Katy's ECEC gives children the opportunity to choose activities from a variety of centers

Selecting a preschool is not an easy task, especially with the overwhelming amount of quality preschools to choose from in the Katy area. Each one has its own unique qualities, and parents diligently seek a preschool that matches their family's educational beliefs and values. Communication and research are key components when selecting a preschool that will accommodate your needs. Here are the basic ABC's and 123's of selecting the best fit for you and your child.

A Ask

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Make a list before you visit each school of things you would like to know about. For Katy mom Ashley Lancaster whose son has a life-threatening illness, she had to main questions entering into her evaluation process. "What is your sick child policy?" and "What is your hand-washing policy, and is it enforced?" Evaluate what is most important and valuable to your family, whether it's health-related, education-oriented, or a matter of proximity.

"Open communication with parents, management, and staff helps to foster a healthy and beneficial learning environment," says Kamilla Saidova, owner of The Learning Experience. Also, ask for referrals from other parents. They have already done the research or may have children currently enrolled in programs. Find out what they've appreciated most about their school's curriculum, teachers, and overall environment.

Do your research. Preschool accreditation can be easily verified through the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and most schools also allow you to view sample curriculum. Do you want a more hands-on approach to learning, or would you prefer a structured academic schedule? "Our motto sums it up: Learning for fun. Learning for life. I would like all parents

to know that at The Goddard School, learning is fun," says Laurie Harvey, marketing representative.

Familiarize yourself with the basic educational philosophies of preschools and how they are applicable to your child. For instance, if your child is more of a visual learner, you will want to seek out a preschool that embraces the Waldorf educational philosophy, focusing on the unique interests of each child. "Katy's Early Childhood Enrichment Center (Katy's ECEC) gives children the opportunity to choose activities from a variety of centers, express themselves through open-ended art, music, dramatic play, and determine their own play by using unstructured materials," explains Nicole Istre owner of Katy's ECEC.

B Balance

Look for programs that offer a good mix of learning, playing, activities, and extracurricular opportunities. Schools that are too focused on just learning or just playing are usually not the best fit for children. "Primrose classrooms are furnished with developmentally appropriate furniture, fixtures, and equipment," says marketing director of Primrose School of Cinco Ranch Starla Fitch. "Our units of learning and our character development program, alongside a culturally diverse staff and student population, helps create a positive, productive, and cultural learning environment."

Once you have narrowed down your choices and come up with two or three places you are interested in, schedule a time to visit each preschool. You can learn a lot about a setting by the way staff approach introductory visits with you and your child. During your visit ask yourself questions such as, "Do I feel welcome here? Does my child seem interested in what they have to offer? Do the children in the setting seem happy? How do the adults and children interact? Is the setting clean and safe?"

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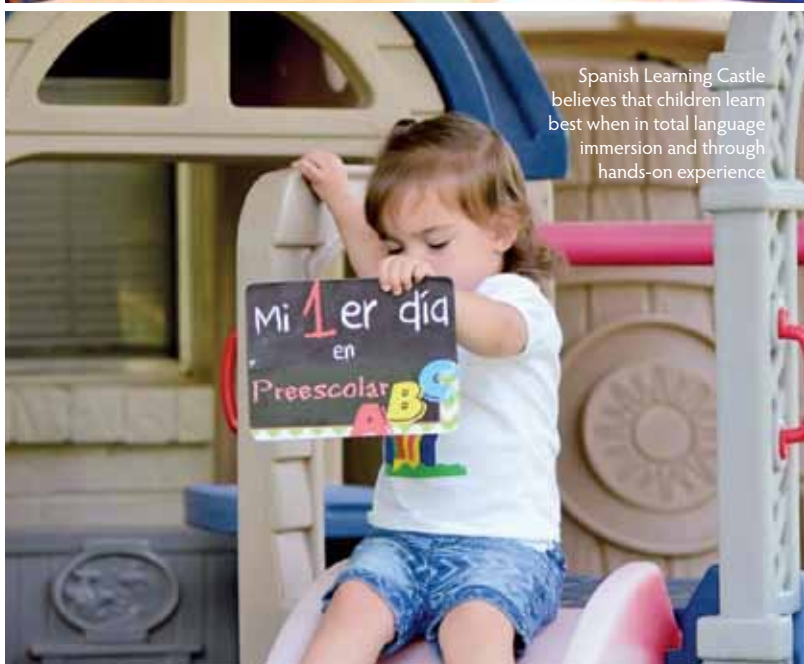
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Katy's ECEC focuses on language experiences and the development of fine and gross motor skills



Spanish Learning Castle believes that children learn best when in total language immersion and through hands-on experience

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The 123's of Preparing Your Child

- 1 Start getting them on a schedule that imitates what is expected during class time
- 2 Visit the preschool and let your child get acclimated
- 3 Set expectations, show enthusiasm, and talk to your child about what will happen at school

Don't Forget

to be upbeat and happy about this transition.
Your child will take their cues from you.

“Spanish Learning Castle is a school setting where their child is safe, and he or she, feels at home. Parents are confident knowing that their child is being attended to every minute of the day while learning and having fun. Recently, a parent told us that this is the reason she enrolled her child at our school,” says Ramon Marin of Spanish Learning Castle.

Connection

Find a preschool you feel is in line with your child’s needs and fits your family’s philosophies. Remember to ask how the preschool stays in close communication with parents and updates them on their child’s progress. “An emphasis is placed on parent communication to foster the connection between school and home, creating continuity in the child’s educational experience,” says Fitch.

Spend at least one hour in the classroom of your top three choices. This will not only allow you to see teachers and students interact, but determine if their education philosophy supports your family’s values. “We have a loving, family atmosphere that exists between the staff, kids, and extended families,” says Steve Sandweiss, owner of Tiger Land Child Care Center.

Connect with your child’s teachers. They will be the ones interacting with your child every day and their new primary source for knowledge. Find out if the teachers are available for quick side chats at drop-off and pick-up. Do they offer their email addresses to parents? And if so, how quickly will they get back to you? “Besides Goddard’s play-based curriculum, the school realizes the importance of the home and school connection between parents and teachers,” says Harvey. “The teachers differentiate instruction for each child. They also modify or enrich goals as needed for the success of children.”

Many schools also send home newsletters to update parents on classroom activities. Find out if these will tell you menu plans for the week, what projects are being completed, and other school-wide news.

Choosing the best preschool for your child does not have to be an overwhelming task. Successful parents go into the process aware, informed, and ready to ask questions. Being prepared will make the process efficient, effective, and meaningful for you and your child. **KM**

FREDA IHEDIWA is freelance writer, and teacher at Hancock Elementary. She is proud to call Katy home.

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Koko FitClub

An open letter to our community,

Fitness is a very personal choice. We all want to be fit and healthy, but how we choose to do it, or not, becomes very individual for every person.

We started Koko FitClub here in the Greater Houston Area because we believe there was something missing for people (me included) for whom big mainstream gyms simply don't work.

Traditional gyms have never provided me with the support and guidance that I needed to get the results I hoped for. I've always had the motivation, but I have never had a program that kept me engaged for very long, either mentally or physically. And as my life got busier, my gym became less and less a part of my life – other than when it was time to pay the monthly bill. I believe being healthy is one of the most important responsibilities I have to myself and my family. Plus, I like how I feel when I am in better shape. So, giving up wasn't an option for me. I also knew a lot of people were struggling just like me, so I decided to do something about it. I became determined to be part of a gym that would provide everything a typical person in the real world needed to get on – and stay on – a healthy path.

That's why I joined the Koko FitClub Team here in Houston, Texas. At Koko FitClub, we exist for one reason and one reason only: to change lives in our community. We specialize in helping people who just don't fit into the typical gym scene get real results.

Our job is to guide you, motivate you and support your personal fitness journey. Koko is a one-of-a-kind, proven approach to fitness, based upon a personalized and structured programs that can be done in as little as 30 minutes, just a few times per week. The Koko "Smartraining" System has worked for thousands of people nationwide, people just like you and me. We knew there had to be a better way, and Koko is it.

If you are new to fitness, ready to make a change, or just out of excuses, come try us, completely risk free, for 30 days for just \$30. Let us prove to you that fitness can be simple, and let us show you how easy it can be to stick with our program and change the person you see in the mirror.

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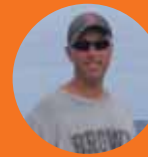
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Ask questions to find out if your family's philosophies are in line with those of the preschool



Common Preschool Educational Philosophies

- Bank Street:** students set the learning pace, and the teacher serves as a guide
- HighScope:** learn actively by having hands-on experiences with their surroundings
- Montessori:** takes a developmental approach to learning
- Parent Co-Ops:** parents are actively involved with their little one's education on a daily basis and work closely with the classroom teachers
- Reggio Emilia:** encourages exploration and focuses on the importance of community and self-expression
- Waldorf:** strives to nurture a child's spirit, soul, and body and to focus on the child's interest

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