

# MOVING ON TO PRESCHOOL

## A Resource Guide to the Transition Process for Your Child with Special Needs



Prepared for you by the

## **FAMILY FOCUS RESOURCE & EMPOWERMENT CENTER**

(Serving the San Fernando & Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys)

In collaboration with Los Angeles Unified School District, the Santa Clarita Valley SELPA, North Los Angeles County Regional Center

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## CHOOSING A PRESCHOOL PROGRAM FOR YOUR CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

**Your child is approaching three years old and you will soon be leaving an early intervention program and transitioning to a preschool program. Deciding which preschool program will be the best for your child can be a difficult process. This guide is designed to give you basic information on transition from infant to preschool programs and on some of the different options for preschoolers. This information may assist your family in making an informed decision about an appropriate preschool placement for your child.**

**Before your child is placed in a preschool program, at your request, he or she will be evaluated by a school district multi-disciplinary team. The purpose of this evaluation is to gather information about your child's abilities and areas which may need further intervention. This team includes you (parents or caregivers) and may include an Early Childhood Special Educator, a school nurse, a school psychologist and a speech/language specialist. Although the professionals from the school will conduct the assessment, other professionals will be consulted. These other professionals may include social workers, occupational or physical therapists, speech therapists, behavior specialists, teachers and medical personnel. After the assessment, the team will meet to discuss the results of the assessment, to develop goals and objectives for your child and to consider which preschool programs will meet your child's unique needs. At this meeting, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be developed that will be the basis for your child's preschool services.**

**As a parent or caregiver, you have a great deal of knowledge about your child that you can share with the assessment team. You are the best person to describe your child's abilities and challenges to help the team become more familiar with your child. You will be asked to sign releases to obtain information about infant services, evaluations and medical records.**

**This guide was prepared as a resource to give you timelines of transition, information about preschool options, suggestions for observing preschool programs and ways to prepare for your child's assessment and IEP meetings. The next few pages describe the steps in the referral, assessment and IEP process.**

**Your Regional Center Service Coordinator and/or School District Representative is a valuable resource to you during this transition time. Be sure to contact him/her with any of your questions or concerns. It may also be helpful to talk with other parents who are going through or have completed transition with their child. The Family Focus Resource Center or your Service Coordinator can put you in contact with other parents.**

## **PREPARING FOR YOUR CHILD'S ASSESSMENT AND INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN MEETING**

**Your child's TRANSITION IFSP and/or ASSESSMENT appointment is an opportunity for you to share information with team members from your local school district and Regional Center Service Coordinator to gain additional information and insight into your child's strengths and needs and to discuss your future plans for your child.**

**Prior to your child's assessment take time to think about your child's unique abilities and strengths. Also think about your child's current and future needs. You may want to write these thoughts on a list or use the boxes on the next two pages to record your ideas. You should also think about the short-range and long-range goals that you have for your child. Please bring or send copies of reports or assessments completed by other agencies to assist your school district in their evaluation. Your Service Coordinator will have copies of many of these reports. The actual assessment process for you and your child will vary according to the school district in which you live. You may meet individually with different members of the assessment team or you and your child may be involved with all of the team. You provide valuable information about your child. The goal of the other members of the team is to generate additional information about your child to determine eligibility and service needs.**

**At the conclusion of the assessment, be sure to make arrangements for your child's IEP meeting. This includes scheduling a date and time. You may invite anyone you want to the meeting who has an interest in your child. This may include other professionals who have worked with your child, family members, caregivers, friends or other support persons. If your child has been determined eligible for outgoing Regional Center services, your service coordinator will attend the IEP with your consent.**

**The Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting is required by law and has several purposes. The first purpose is to determine your child's eligibility for special education services. This includes reviewing the assessment information and deciding as a team whether your child meets the state specified criteria as a child who requires a special education. If it is determined that your child is eligible, then the team will develop long range (1 year) goals and short range (3 to 6 months) objectives in all areas where your child has identified needs. Based on these goals and objectives, related services will be determined and a recommendation for placement will be made. All ideas and information discussed during the meeting are recorded on an IEP document and a copy will be given to you. Everyone participating in the IEP meeting will be asked to sign this document. At the conclusion of this meeting, be sure to make arrangements to visit your child's proposed placement and find out how to register your child for school. If you disagree with any of the recommendations regarding your child's program, you have the right to "due process" in order to resolve any disagreements with the school district.**

## SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CHILD

The following information pages are designed for you to share information about your child. You may complete these forms and take them with you to your child's Transition and IFSP Meeting, Assessment Appointment and/or IEP Meeting. Use additional paper - if necessary.

**Our child's favorite toys and activities:**

**Our child's favorite foods are:**

**Allergies:**

**Things our child does not like:**

**Things our child does like:**

**Our child communicates his/her wants and needs by:**

**Our child wants to move around, he or she will:**

**Our child is really special. Here are some neat things that we want you to know:**

**Some of our concerns are:**

**Some of our goals for our child are:**

**Our child can do these things by him/her self:  
(Eating, dressing, toileting, bathing)**

**We need more information about:**

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INFANT AND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Transition is a time that can be very exciting knowing that your child is growing and changing and that you have helped him or her get a very good start by participating in Early Start. It can also be stressful for you and your family as you consider different placement options participate in the transitional IFSP and IEP process and finally begin a new program

Whether you are transitioning to a community preschool, a special education preschool class, a Head Start program or another program, it will help you to be aware of the differences between preschool and infant programs.

*Some of these differences are:*

### **Service Delivery Model:**

Preschool programs are based on an educational model. Children generally go to a classroom to receive services. Instruction is primarily in small and large groups. Many infant programs are based on a therapeutic model delivered in a center or at home. Infants and their families receive intervention services individually, or in small groups.

### **Emphasis of the Program:**

When your child begins a preschool program the emphasis shifts from therapy to your child's educational needs. As your child grows older, more and more emphasis will be placed on helping your child to be independent in the least restrictive setting. The emphasis of the preschool program will be on learning how to interact with other children and adults, learning social skills and learning in groups, as well as meeting your child's unique needs. There will be less emphasis on individual, intensive therapy and skill development as in the infant program. Services will be provided in a developmentally appropriate manner and integrated into the curriculum.

### **Group versus Individual Instruction:**

Teaching in preschools is generally accomplished in a whole group, small groups and at learning centers. Your child will receive some individual instruction, but it will be less than the intensive therapy provided in an infant program.

### **Length of Day and Number of Days per Week:**

The schedule for your child's preschool program will probably be quite different from the infant program. Generally, preschool programs meet from one to five days per week for half a day. Your child might be spending more or less time in a preschool program than in an infant program, depending on his or her needs.

### **Location of Program:**

Special education preschool programs are on public school sites. Sites for community preschool programs may vary. Your child will have many opportunities to be with other children and to participate in a variety of activities.

### **Transportation:**

Your local school district may provide bus transportation to special education preschool programs. Head Start (see page 8) also provides some transportation. You may continue to transport your child as you did in an infant program or you might want to utilize the bus. Your child does not have to ride a bus until you decide that it is right for your family.

### **Parent Involvement:**

Your involvement in the preschool program, as well as later on in school, is just as important as when you provided stimulation for your child in an infant program. Although you may not be in your child's classroom on a daily basis, there are many ways that you can participate in the preschool program. Some ways for you to be involved in your child's preschool program include:

- Talking informally with the teacher either on the telephone or by appointment.
- Each day send a small notebook with your child for writing notes back and forth to the teacher.
- Attending IEP meetings and Parent/Teacher Conferences.
- Observing your child in the classroom when appropriate.
- Offering to make materials for the classroom or donating items you no longer use.
- Joining parent groups at your child's school.
- Volunteering to be a Room Mom or Dad.

### **Public Preschool Programs**

**Parent Participation Preschool Classes:** are operated by the Adult Education program provided at many local school districts. These preschool classes allow parents or caregivers to participate with their child in a developmentally appropriate preschool program. A variety of class schedules is offered throughout the week. Parent participation in the program may decrease as children get older so the preschoolers increase their experience in larger groups. Parents are able to learn skills for working with their child as well as get support from other parents in the program. These classes have a minimal cost per semester to parents.

**Head Start:** is a federally funded preschool program that serves primarily children from low income families. Head Start is required to have a portion of its population as identified children with special needs. Head Start is a half-day program with morning and afternoon sessions. Some transportation may be provided to children. Due to space limitations, Head Start gives priority to 4 year old children who meet income guidelines and to children who have special needs. There is no direct cost to parents for this program; however, parents are strongly encouraged to volunteer time in the classroom or on various advisory committees.

**Other programs in the community that you may want to consider for your child include preschool classes offered by the local Park and Recreation District, swimming classes, gymnastic classes, parent and child classes, etc. Our area is fortunate to have many recreational programs for children and their families. These programs can be a wonderful way for your child to learn social and play skills in a group with other children.**

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**School District State Funded Preschool Programs: are operated in some local school districts. These programs are half-day and have some income requirements. These programs provide developmentally appropriate instruction for children. Parent involvement is encouraged. More information about State Funded Preschool is available from your local school district.**

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### **Private School Options for Preschool**

**There is also the option of sending your child to a private preschool, such as those affiliated with a private elementary school, or with a church or synagogue at your own cost. You will need to visit the campus and talk to the administrator in order to determine if you feel your child's needs could be served in that setting. Your child would be able to receive Designated Instructional Services (DIS) such as speech or occupational therapy at your local School District site, if he/she is eligible to receive these services from the District your child needs to have an IEP. This type of setting can be helpful in adapting a child to a typical preschool. It is important to be clear with the school as to your child's needs, any limitations in participating in activities and any special medical conditions. Then you and the administrator can make an informal decision as to which school programs will be appropriate for your child.**

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**Combination Programs are available to meet the unique needs of individual children and their families. Many families find it desirable to use a combination of programs for their child. This might include having the child attend a community preschool program and receive related services from the local school district. Some children may attend a special education preschool program from one to five days weekly and in addition, attend a community preschool program. If deemed appropriate upon consultation with school district specialists, some children with special needs will be included in a public or private preschool program. Some families choose to use other community resources such as recreation or gymnastic classes, religious schools or informal social groups to provide for their child's needs. Because no two children or their families are alike, developing a creative combination program can be a way to individualize and personalize services for a child with special needs.**

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**Special Education Preschools (*Special Day Classes*)** are preschool classrooms for children with identified disabilities who meet eligibility criteria set by the State Department of Education. Local School Districts and the LA County Superintendent's Office operate a variety of special education classes. Preschool children with special needs may attend a local program, depending on needs, from one to five days per week. Classrooms are staffed by one certified teacher and one or more instructional assistants. Activities in the classroom are designed to help children reach the goals specified on their IEP as well as to provide a stimulating, developmentally appropriate preschool program. Financial support for special day class programs is provided by local, state and federal tax dollars with no direct cost to parents.

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**Designated Instructional Services (*DIS*)**, also known as Related Services may be provided to children in addition to a preschool program. However, if appropriate, you may choose to have your child participate only in these instructional services. Related Services are determined by the IEP Team and may include adaptive physical education, Deaf and Hard of Hearing services, speech/language therapy, counseling services, transportation, vision and orientation/ mobility service, occupational/physical therapy services and extended school year.

School Districts currently provide preschool speech/language instructional programs to eligible children. Speech/language specialists see children individually or in small groups to work on objectives involving receptive or expressive language skills, oral motor skills and/or articulation skills.

School Districts provide an adaptive physical education specialist to assess motor skills and development and to consult with classroom teachers and parents in order to provide a motor program for eligible children.

A teacher of the visually impaired and an orientation/mobility specialist are available to evaluate children's visual skills and to consult with classroom teachers and parents in order to provide appropriate materials and methods that assist the visually impaired child.

Itinerant teachers for children who are hearing impaired provide services and consultation to preschools. Some audiological services as well as funding for hearing aides are available to eligible children through California Children's Services.

Occupational and physical therapy services are generally provided by the California Children's Services Program. Parents must apply to CCS for these services which are provided at therapy units. Children who do not qualify for CCS services will be provided with therapy if it is determined at the IEP Meeting that these services are necessary for the child to benefit from his/her educational program.

## **SUGGESTED STEPS FOR INVESTIGATING PRESCHOOL OPTIONS**

Getting started with the search for a preschool program for your child is often the most difficult “First step”: Once you have some experience investigating preschool options, it will be much easier for you to continue your search for the best program for your child. Here are some suggestions for beginning your search.

**\*Begin to determine the unique needs of your child and family. You know your child best. Does your child feel most comfortable in large or small groups or in individual settings? Does your child need more experience with peers and adults other than family members? Do you want your child integrated or included with typical developing children, or do you want your child to be educated with other children with special needs? Does your child have medical needs which will need attention at school? What activities does your child enjoy? Does your family need program hours to accommodate work or school schedules? How much are family members able or willing to participate in the preschool program? Think about the environment that you feel would best suit your child.**

**\*Identify several programs that might be beneficial to your child. Your Service Coordinator and/or School District Representative can help with this. Friends, relatives, other parents and professionals can all provide recommendations for programs they might know. Prepare to investigate these programs by developing a list of questions that you can ask on the phone or in person. A sample checklist is included on the next page. Acquire information about programs by calling your local special education unit.**

**\*Screen programs by telephone calls. This saves you time and helps you eliminate programs which are not suited for your child.**

**\*Discuss the range of options with school personnel and arrange to visit programs with a District Representative, if possible, following the assessment different programs have different policies on visitation. If you cannot visit immediately, ask to talk with the classroom teacher and/or parents already involved in the program. Prepare a list of items you want to observe on your visit or use the checklist. Make notes after the visit of what you liked or didn't like about the programs and what will be beneficial to your child.**

**\*Prior to the IFSP/IEP meeting, try to identify potential programs for your child. Remember that the IFSP/IEP team will make suggestions for programs for your child based on all the gathered evaluation information. You will be able to visit any placement programs recommended before you agree that your child can attend that program. Even if you have not yet visited a particular program, you will be able to contribute your opinions to the discussion because you will know the range of options available for children with special needs and the unique needs of your child.**

## Selecting a Preschool for Your Child

Adapted from a brochure originally, written by the members of the Preschool Language Programs of Tucon)

Choosing a preschool for your child can be a confusing task. This article provides guidelines for questions to ask about preschools.

Identify the items on the following checklist which are important to you. As you look at different preschool programs, determine how each program measures up. You may check each item that occurs. Or, you may want to rate each item according to the following system.

- 1 = poor
- 2 = fair
- 3 = good
- 4 = very good
- 5 = excellent

If you are using this rating system, add up the total number of points for each school. The schools with the highest totals will provide the best programs for your child.

### Program

- \_\_\_\_\_ The atmosphere is relaxed and accepting of children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A written statement of policy concerning behavior management is given to parents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You can enroll your child at a convenient time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The length of the day is appropriate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ There is a daily schedule with a good balance of structured activities and free play.

- \_\_\_\_\_ The age range of the children in the program suits your needs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fees are acceptable.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Financial aid is available.

### Staff

- \_\_\_\_\_ **There** are enough adults to guide and supervise the number of children at the school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The adults responsible for the program are certified teachers or therapists.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers and teacher's aids provide the children with guidance during activities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The staff creates a warm and comfortable environment for the children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The staff communicates well with the children.

### Services Provided

- \_\_\_\_\_ Physical, occupational, and/or speech therapy is available.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Special Education teachers assist in the program.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Individual therapy is available.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Group therapy is available.

\_\_\_\_\_ Inclusion into a regular preschool program is available.

\_\_\_\_\_ Toilet training is provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ Nutritious meals and/or snacks are provided.

### **Parent Participation**

\_\_\_\_\_ Parent-Teacher conferences are scheduled regularly.

\_\_\_\_\_ Parent participation in classroom activities is encouraged.

\_\_\_\_\_ Parent participation in classroom activities is required.

\_\_\_\_\_ Observations by parents is allowed.

\_\_\_\_\_ A parent organization or support group exists.

### **Facility**

\_\_\_\_\_ Classroom are sectioned into areas for play.

\_\_\_\_\_ Space is provided in the classroom for a clothes bin or work bin for each child.

\_\_\_\_\_ There is adequate space provided for the number of the children in the program.

\_\_\_\_\_ Adequate heating and cooling is provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ There is an outdoor play area which consists of grass and dirt, covered and uncovered, hard and soft areas.

\_\_\_\_\_ There are sufficient drinking fountains inside and outside.

### **Activities**

\_\_\_\_\_ There is a variety of activities so that each child has a chance to be successful.

\_\_\_\_\_ Children are grouped for activities either by age, skill level, or interest.

\_\_\_\_\_ Learning is recognized as an active process. Children participate in activities and manipulate objects, while learning.

\_\_\_\_\_ Children participate in activities which required responsibility, such as water plants, wiping the table, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ Activities are planned which are creative and productive.

\_\_\_\_\_ Children participate in indoor and outdoor play.

\_\_\_\_\_ There is enough time allowed for both active play and rest.

\_\_\_\_\_ Children participate in self-directed, individual activities and group activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Children participate in both noisy and quiet activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Imaginative play is encouraged.

\_\_\_\_\_ Activities that encourage language development and talking are included.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Music activities, including singing, listening to music, playing instruments, and dancing, are included.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Art activities that encourage experimenting and creating are included.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children have opportunities to read and to listen to reading.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If there is television watching, adult direction is used to encourage thinking and language skills.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children participate in community programs, field trips, and library visits.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children participate in activities that require large muscle movements, such as running, and small muscle movements, such as pasting and cutting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children are provided with experiences that stimulate all their senses: hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling.

## **Materials**

- \_\_\_\_\_ There are enough materials for a variety of activities, including: sand, water, paint, fabric, clay, crayons, blocks, puzzles, balls, and wheeled toys.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children can supply materials.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Toys are safe materials that are placed within children's reach.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Unsafe materials are out of children's reach
- \_\_\_\_\_ Books on a wide range of interests are available.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A variety of "noisemakers" are available.
- \_\_\_\_\_ There is a variety of safe playground equipment available.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Materials are appropriate for the age and skill range of the children.

## **Vocabulary**

***Inclusion:*** Educating children with special needs in the regular school environment with the support they need to be successful.

**ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS**

After reading this booklet, please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. It is important to discuss your questions and concerns and to have them addressed. Please share this list with your School District representative and/or with your Service Coordinator. You may contact them in person or by phone.

**Do you need more information about or assistance in:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Preparing for your child’s assessment?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Preparing for your child’s IFSP/IEP meeting?

**Do you need more information about:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Your legal rights and responsibilities?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Preschool special education programs and related services?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other placement options (community preschool, Head Start, etc.)?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your involvement with the preschool program?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Communicating with your child’s new teacher?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Services from other community agencies?

**Do you have any other concerns or questions not listed above?  
Please write them here:**

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