

What Am I Looking For?

Observing A Child
Looking At A School

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Observing a Child: Some Questions To Ask Yourself

As parents we can see/observe many things about our children that can help us when professionals ask us questions about a child's development. Here are some questions you might ask yourself about your child's growth and development. Use this list as a starting point. It can be changed or added to by you, based on your child's needs and any special concerns you might have about her growth and development.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

What are your child's energy and endurance levels?
Is she frequently tired? Restless? Cranky?
Does she have difficulty seeing? Hearing?

MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

How does your child use her large muscles?
Does she climb? Tumble? Jump? Run?

How does my child use her small muscles?
Does she use scissors? Crayons? Tie shoelaces?

How is my child's eye-hand co-ordination?
Does she draw? Throw a ball? Use tools? Do puzzles?

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

What does my child's language tell me?
Can she use language to tell me what she wants, feels, or sees?
Does she understand when adults or children speak to her?

What does my child's play tell me?
How difficult are the play materials that she uses? Does her play have goals? Does she use imagination?

What concepts does my child have?
Does she know what time means? Does she know colors? Shapes? Numbers? Letters? Textures? Relationships?

Does my child use play to explore?

Does my child use play to solve problems?

Does she use alternative ways to play with materials? Does she ask for help when necessary?

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How does my child express emotions?

Is she affectionate? Does she receive and express feelings?

How does my child enjoy herself?

What are the source of her pleasure?

How does my child express fear?

What scares her?

How does she respond to being hurt?

Is she quick to recover?

Does she seek reassurance?

How does my child deal with frustrations?

What behavior does she display?

How does she respond to adult interventions?

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

How does she interact with adults?

How much time does she spend with adults?

How does she ask for attention from adults?

How well does she respond to adult direction?

How does my child interact with other children?

Does she initiate and accept contacts?

How do other children react to him?

WHEN TO OBSERVE YOUR CHILD

PLACES

At home playing alone, with siblings, with parents, with other children and adults

In the supermarket or other shopping areas

In church, synagogue or other place of worship

At birthday parties or other social gatherings

In school

At grandparents, relatives or other friends homes

Outside playing alone or with other friends

TIMES

When your child is doing something she really enjoys and is happy with

When your child is meeting new people or visiting a new place

When your child is watching television, listening to a story or playing with toys and games

When your child is trying something new for the first time (for example, climbing a tree, playing with a new toy, trying to make a sandwich, using scissors, clay, etc.)

When your child is in different moods (for example, very excited, happy, frightened, tired, sad angry, bored)

When your child may be feeling left out

When your child is very active or very quiet

How To Evaluate a School/Program:

In the process of choosing schools and programs for their children, parents often depend upon rumor or hearsay. The following suggestions may help you, the concerned parent, make your own decisions. You can start by having some idea about what you want for your child and do not be afraid to question school officials. Don't fall into the "expert" trap. No one person is an "expert" on all things. Think about your child's needs in terms of social and emotional development, self-help skills, and academic skills. Then you can look for a program that will respond to these needs. If possible, see several different programs before you decide which program you think is suitable. In addition, visit the program as frequently as you are able to do when your child is in a program. It is important for you to know what is really going on in the classroom.

You can arrange to spend time in several classrooms, especially those classrooms with students in your child's age range. Tour the school and talk with staff members, children and young adults in the program. Remember that each child's needs are different and so are classrooms. Be active about seeking the kind of school or program that *you* think is best for your child.

Questions To Ask

What is the philosophy of the program?

What happens to children leaving the program?

Does the program prepare a person for a job or for further schooling?

How are children prepared for participation in the community?

On what basis are the program activities chosen?

Do staff members recognize the individual needs of each child, set goals and then choose activities to meet these goals?

What sort of goals are set for some of the children in the program who might be like your child?

How does the teacher assess what gains the children have made?

What kind of records are kept? By whom?

Ask to see a sample of the students works.

Are parents encouraged to be involved in the program?

In what way are parents involved by the teacher and the staff?

How often is contact made with parents?

What is the attitude towards parents?

To what extent are children in the program interacting

with typical, age appropriate peers?

What activities are planned together?

What is the philosophy of the program with regard to behavior management?

What kinds of support services (i.e. speech therapy, counseling, etc) are available?

Does the school encourage the use of volunteers to help in the classroom?

Do teachers and other staff members interact positively with the children?

Are children described in a stereotypical way (for example, "All children with cerebral palsy act like that.") rather than as individuals?

Things to Observe

Look for a range of materials in the classroom

Every classroom should have a variety of materials available to meet the varying needs of children

Many teachers keep things put away but still have a variety of options for the children

Materials need not be expensive

Get a feeling for the atmosphere in the classroom.

Is the atmosphere warm and welcoming?

What kind of relationship does the teacher have with the students?

Does she touch the students?

Does she speak loudly or softly?

Does the teacher call children by name?

Does the teacher seem to respect and value the children?

Are the students' works displayed in the classroom?

In what way does the teacher control behavior that may not be appropriate?

Is there evidence of goals and activities designed for individual children?

Are there folders of planned work for children?

Are there both social and academic goals for the students?

Is there positive interaction between peers?

Are the children learning appropriate behavior from each other?

Do children with special needs eat, play on the playground and have gym, art and music with children in the general programs?

What is the ratio of students to adults in the classrooms?

Are there aides and volunteers in the classroom?

Is the teacher willing to have volunteers in the classroom?

Did you ask to volunteer?

Do teachers and staff seem to support one another?

Is there evidence of teachers working cooperatively with children?

Is there evidence of parents working cooperatively with teachers?

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