



First step

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Come September and many of us would be scrambling around with the back to school fever. And for some, it would be the very first step our child takes, outside the comfort of home.

Woman Today helps you along.

According to an ancient proverb, 'when the wings grow, birds and children fly away!' Weak becomes the plant that grows under the shadow of a tree! Nature and needs of human civilization advocate that the child steps out of the homely care into a world of strangers where he will learn about – the life itself!

Every fortunate parent has gone through or is dreadfully waiting to go through this inevitable, extremely vital phase of separation from their little one.

A little preparation and understanding however can make



10 Quality indicators

- 1** Is the setting welcoming, clean, bright and cheerful?
- 2** Do the children seem happy and calm when they play together?
- 3** Are the child carers listening to children and answering them carefully?
- 4** Are the teachers friendly and proud of their work?
- 5** Are the teachers and carers joining in what the children are doing?
- 6** How do the staff relate to the children?
- 7** Look for safety equipment. Are stair gates, fireguards, smoke alarms in place? Furniture is smooth and round edged.
- 8** Is there a variety of clean toys and equipment for the babies and children to use?
- 9** Can the children choose toys and equipment themselves?
- 10** Do you feel comfortable in the setting?

this seemingly terrible task an enjoyable, cherishable moment.

With advancements in educational psychology and deeper understanding of the child's nature, keeping him/her at the centre of all activities has also made the transition from home to the first school/nursery a comparatively easier task.

the grind to 'earn better, live better', the age at which children are being taken under the care of the nursery is reducing.

Personality of the child: The first child and his parents are usually more reluctant and anxious of the separation as compared to the younger sibling who is

nurturing care of the nurseries instead of the housemaid. The reason being that in a nursery, children get an opportunity to observe, listen, communicate, explore, manipulate, experiment and create through fun activities. Children communicate and socialise with adults other than their parents and learn to make new friends that

happens there. Approach the nursery as if you were a child and consider how your child would respond to the setting. A good nursery is the one where both the parent as well as the child feel comfortable and at ease with the nursery environment.

You can also see if the adults interact with the children appropriately, in a man-

forward



When is your child ready for the nursery?

There is no fixed age at which a child should be admitted to a day care nursery. It depends on a number of factors:

Working parents: With more and more parents getting busier than ever in

generally found to be more sociable and outgoing. Parents also seem to be more relaxed with their second or subsequent kids.

Shifting preferences of the parents: Nowadays, parents find it better to leave their children in the

help prepare them for the school.

Criteria for selection of a nursery:

According to educational psychologist, Dortha Tholsgaard, the most important thing is to visit the nursery and see for yourself what

ner that demonstrates care for the child. For mom Linda Shaw, the quality of staff was one of the deciding factors when she chose a preschool program. She felt that it was crucial to find a likable person who was respectful of her twin daughters. As she puts it, "A good rapport with



the teacher is the best thing you can have for peace of mind."

Sheryl, mother of a 3-year old daughter also suggests that a good preschool/nursery has well-trained teachers who are sensitive to what a young child's mind becomes engaged in, and uses this as a learning opportunity. She believes that learning "should be fun, and it should always be done through play with preschoolers."

Asma, working mother of a one-year-old boy, suggests that a good day care nursery will try to keep up to the same routines as you would at home—ensuring that babies are fed, changed, warm, happy and contented – the normal comforts and care that you would want for your child.

Some other pointers that must be kept in mind before selecting a nursery:

- ❖ Its proximity to your home. Long hours of travelling can add unnecessary fatigue to your little one and tire him out early.
- ❖ Suitability of its opening hours. Especially for

the working parents, the nursery should have a convenient time plan so as to match with your office schedule.

- ❖ The reputation of the nursery. Discuss with your friends or neighbours before taking the final plunge. However, believe your senses the most!
- ❖ Whether satisfactory security is available, main doors are kept locked; is it located in a safe compound.
- ❖ Cleanliness.
- ❖ Appropriate staff-child ratio.
- ❖ No cluttering of furniture and other material. There should be enough space in the rooms for children to walk and play freely.
- ❖ Large enough play area, outdoor as well as indoors.
- ❖ Type of fun activities and the way they are conducted.
- ❖ A good nursery should appear to you as an extension of home where babies and toddlers are cared for in a multi-sensory environment.

Preparing your child for this first step forward

A visiting psychologist at Tots Corner Nursery, Dorthe Tholsgaard, says that it depends on how old the child is when starting nursery. For young children, it is more a question of being 'snatched' away from the warmth and security of their mother's arms.

Dorthe advises that it is always a good idea, regardless of the age, to let your child be with other people once in a while. This way the child will learn to separate from her mother knowing that she will always return and pick her back. In case of older children, prepare by bringing them to playgroups, where mothers are also allowed. This will provide an opportunity to the child to learn to be with (social, unspoken rules) and feel comfortable in the presence of other kids.

Once you have decided on the nursery, bring your child to visit it so that he/she can see the place. Make an appointment with the nursery so that you can stay for a while. Let your child watch

the class and get a feeling of the place.

Make the first week in nursery simple. Let him/her stay a few hours every day so that she begins to feel comfortable with the people and surroundings. Tell your child when you will pick him/her – after snack, after play etc. Don't use time frames like 10 o'clock that a child of her age won't be able to comprehend! Depending on the child's personality, it may take few to many days for him/her to finally relax and 'settle down'. Initially put her in the nursery for an hour and then gradually increase her stay.

To prepare the child and reduce the ordeal of separation, Kimberly and Maria, owners of Starfish Lane Kids Nursery, suggest:

- ❖ Children are like sponges capable of reading and absorbing emotions. They react accordingly to the situation. Consequently, stressed out parents will lead to stressed children. It is advised that parents should never rush in the morning. Rushed parent,

anxious child! Kimberly suggests that the parents should organise their tasks well in time, preparing in the evening always helps stay calm the next morning.

- ❖ Take time to enjoy, listen and be excited about your child at the nursery. Ask him/her how her day was, about her new friends and teachers. Ask her about the things she loves about the nursery and concentrate on the positives.
- ❖ Try to send him to the nursery regularly and on time. Frequent breaks or variable timings pose difficulty in making the child feel settled.
- ❖ Build up trust in the child for you and the nursery. Once you drop him in the class, don't linger on! Say a loving goodbye with a promise to pick him back and immediately leave! When you say you will collect him after lunch then do so. Don't be late! As owners of the nursery, Kimberly and Maria make

sure that the environment of the nursery is kept fresh, fragrant and soothing. The teachers communicate with children at their level, and initially small group activities are encouraged so that the child develops confidence.

Preparedness for the parent

More than the child, it is the parent who is anxious of the anticipated trial. It is not uncommon to find worried parent sitting outside the nursery imagining a struggling crying picture of their child left all alone amongst strangers!

Parents must understand that this separation is in the best interest of their child and the experience is only going to metamorphose her into a confident, communicative person, preparing her well for the future transition into the big school!

Once you have taken final decision regarding the choice of nursery, then it becomes imperative that you learn to trust its staff and caregivers. This however

doesn't mean that you forget and loosen up entirely. It is good to interact regularly with the teacher, visit the nursery at times and participate in their programs involving parents.

Learning through fun!

Activities in a nursery are based on certain biological and psychological parameters with respect to children. Little children are curious, energetic and eager to learn. But their bodies and minds are still in the process of growth.

- ❖ Their bones and muscles are still developing, so sitting for long periods at a task tires them out.
- ❖ Heavy schoolbags and activities like writing, which require them to sit in slouched position, can adversely affect their posture and physical development.
- ❖ The fine muscles of their hands and wrists are not yet ready for finer activities like writing.
- ❖ Their attention span is

limited to 7-15 minutes.

- ❖ They can think only in terms of concrete objects and events.
- ❖ Their logical and abstract reasoning is yet to develop.
- ❖ Their social skills and listening comprehen-

sion are still not mature enough for them to work in large groups.

A good nursery should provide plenty of opportunities to children for guided and unguided play, and vigorous and quiet activities to promote:

- ❖ Physical and motor development.
- ❖ Socio-emotional development.
- ❖ Language development.
- ❖ Sensory and intellectual development.
- ❖ Creativity.

By providing a 'learning through play' environment each child can learn and develop at an individual pace while still benefiting from being part of a group. Through the use of themes, activities, songs, books, crafts and field trips, the child will learn by active participation, experimentation and experience. A love for learning is inspired by presenting information through the children's interests and ideas. The children should be free to explore craft materials and to express themselves freely without adult expectations placed on their work. Through well-planned play, children will develop skills such as speaking, listening, concentration, learning to work together and co-operation with other children. They will experiment and learn through fun activities, which stimulate their imagination and equip them with the basic skills to prepare them for school. 📖

Nurseries in Doha

- Al Maha Modern Kindergarten (admin@almahaschools.org.qa)
- Busy Bees Nursery (busybees@qatar.net.qa)
- Doha Montessori and British School (www.doha-montessori.com)
- Elder Tree Nursery (eldertree@qatar.net.qa)
- Little Angels Nursery (www.littleangelsqatar.com)
- Little Cherubs Nursery (www.littlecherubsqatar.com)
- Star Fish Lane Kids Nursery (starfishkids@hotmail.com)
- Sunbeam Kindergarten (sunbeams@qatar.net.qa)
- The Learning Centre (www.qf.org.qa)
- The English Kindergarten (+974 5842579)
- Tots Corner Nursery (totscorner@qatar.net.qa)

(This list is not a comprehensive one.)