

"AND WHAT DID YOU DO at school today, Judy?"

"We clapped hands. I climbed and saw-sawed. We drank milk. I made a clay pussycat, and we heard a story."

Nothing unusual about this dinner-table report—except that Judy is just 2½ and "we" is a brand-new word for her. This—in a word—is what good nursery schools are doing for many thousands of children who yearly bridge the gap between home and school, "I" and "we," via supervised group play.

In the last 30 years, nurseries have taken a leading educational role in America. Many parents are beginning to realize that the activities of two- to five-year-olds are too important to leave to chance.

The trend to bigger families and more compact homes also contributes to the hordes of preschoolers who are sent to the wide-open spaces and elaborate play equipment of nurseries. A record number of mothers are working at least part time; others need a few extra hours to devote to a new baby; still others use nursery school to make up for a shortage of neighborhood playmates.

Nursery schools, however, are no place to solve the problems of a "problem child." The content, stable, secure youngster is the best nursery enrollee. The child who is not toilet-trained, not "off" the bottle, not able to communicate clearly or dress himself is not ready to leave his mother. A child who is sent to nursery because of a new baby should be established there before the baby's arrival.

Questions to ask yourself or your family doctor before deciding: Is your child especially susceptible to colds? Does group play overstimulate or overtire him? Will he rest—or at least keep quiet—during nap periods? Can he eat without help and wait until regular mealtimes? Is he secure enough so that he won't be afraid to leave you? Does he understand that other grownups can love and protect him?

ALTHOUGH most nurseries are privately run, you're likely to find parochial, public-school, university, and cooperative nurseries, and perhaps day-care centers not far from you. A well-staffed, well-equipped private nursery can't charge much less than \$35 a month (part time) and \$50 a month (full time), but schools with mother-help and subsidies can charge substantially less. Many operate on a sliding scale, according to your income. University and public-school nurseries, serving as laboratories for students and parents, charge only a nominal fee. But more important than price is policy. Here are some of the ways you can learn if a nursery school is a good one:

1. Ask your local board of education,

SHOULD YOUR TOT GO TO NURSERY SCHOOL?



*Preschool training
can't substitute
for home care,
but it can often be
a valuable supplement*

By
**ROLLIE
HOCHSTEIN**

board of health, or social welfare department for a list of recommended schools.

2. Visit the school while a session is in progress. Do the children seem happy? Is there lots of space both indoors and out? Is there plenty of good, safe, well-kept play equipment outdoors? Is there a variety of tools, toys, and materials indoors? Look for excellent lighting, accessible toilets, child-size chairs, tables, and shelves. Does the program alternate free play with organized activity?

3. Look at the kitchen. Is it sanitary? Is there good refrigeration? Are well-balanced meals served?

4. Talk to the teacher. Ask questions. Nursery-school and child-psychology training are fine, but a college degree is less important than a warm friendly personality.

5. Meet the director and learn about his background. Are the children examined daily for colds and contagious diseases? Are all safety precautions observed? Does the school carry liability insurance for teachers and children? Are parents' visits welcomed? Are parent-teacher conferences encouraged?

6. Be sure there are enough teachers and enough floor space per child. The Child Welfare League of America recommends 35 square feet of floor space per child and, in the three to four age group, two teachers for every group of 12 to 15 children. For four- and five-year-olds, the League recommends two teachers per group of 15 to 20 children.

7. Is there a relaxed attendance policy? Better schools expect your child to be absent from about one-fourth of the sessions during his first months. The freedom to go or not to go is part of making nursery a happy place for the child.

Once you've picked the school, tell your tot's teacher anything about him you think she should know. It's a good idea, too, to stay at school with him as long as he wants you to. After a few days, he'll probably wave you off so gladly that you'll feel a trifle sad. In a few months, though, you'll probably find that nursery school is worth the effort.

You'll also find that time away from your child brings more enjoyment with him; that outside activities can give you personal satisfaction without a sense of guilt; that conferences with your child's teacher give you a better understanding of your child and his assets and liabilities.

But never forget: nursery school is a supplement—not a substitute—for home life. There are, of course, some things a nursery school does better than you can. But for the preschooler, as well as all other children, affection, support, and confidence from parents in the home is what comes first and counts most.

COVER:

The very beautiful Mrs. John F. Kennedy as photographed by Jacques Lowe. She is the second subject in our series on "The Women Behind the Candidates." See p. 4.

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