

TATS TALKS WITH FAMILIES

ABOUT PRE-K

FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



What does Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) mean, and what does it look like for my child?

The LRE is the school setting, or place, that allows a child to be educated to the greatest extent possible with children who do not have disabilities. The Individual Educational Plan (IEP) team determines the best place for the child to be educated. Parents are members of these teams. The “range of possible placements” or options where children can receive their education includes programs where the child with the disability is in a classroom with other children, most of whom do not have disabilities (least restrictive); and, at the other end of the spectrum, programs where only children with disabilities are in a separate classroom (more restrictive).

What are preschool options for my child?

Preschool children with disabilities can be educated in a school district preschool program or in an early childhood setting in the community with their typically developing peers. Different school districts may provide different options, so it is important to discuss these with your school district before deciding where your child will be placed.

School District Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Programs

There are Pre-K programs for children with disabilities in every school district in the state. A list of the contact person for each district is available by accessing the following link: <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/Pre-K%2007-08.pdf>

Community Child Care Centers/Preschools

Services for children with disabilities may occur at a community child care center. A licensed child care center must meet minimum health, safety, and staffing requirements set by the county and/or state. For more information regarding child care options, access the following Web site: <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/childcare/>

Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded program that serves children from birth to 5 years old. There are 4 program parts: Head Start (or Preschool Head Start), Migrant Head Start, American Indian Head Start, and Early Head Start. The goal of these programs is to increase school readiness of young children in low-income families. For more information, access the following Web site: <http://www.floridaheadstart.org/>



Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) Education Program

VPK is a program for all children in Florida the year before kindergarten. The program allows all children who become 4 years old on or before September 1 and reside in Florida to be enrolled in a program provided by school districts or community-based providers. There is no cost to the family for their child to participate. School districts may offer a school year program and must offer a summer program. Families have the option of choosing either a school year or a summer VPK program. For more information, access the following web site: <http://www.fldoe.org/earlylearning/>

This TATS Talks gives you some highlights of preschool programming for children with disabilities in Florida, preschool options for children with disabilities, and what to look for in a quality preschool program. Other helpful resources and links for more information on topics are also included.





What should I look for in a high quality preschool program?

- ◆ **Children are safe and the program promotes good nutrition and health.**

What this might look like – children are carefully supervised; teachers are trained in first aid; there are regular routines for hand washing and toileting; snacks and meals are nutritious.

- ◆ **Children are provided a safe, clean environment; equipment; and materials.**

What this might look like – furniture and equipment are child-sized; staff can see all children all the time; outdoor play areas are safe and contain adaptive equipment, if necessary; first aid kits, fire extinguishers, etc. are available.

- ◆ **Children’s activities (curriculum) support learning and development of a child in the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive (thinking and awareness).**

What this might look like – children can explore and play with a variety of equipment, toys, books, and materials; learning centers and activities are designed to help children think, solve problems, get along with others, and use language and other skills; assistive technology is used to support and increase participation of children with disabilities, if necessary.

- ◆ **Classrooms reflect art, literature, and activities that respect diversity (differences in cultures, languages, and abilities).**

What this might look like – books are available in languages spoken at home by children; books depict both men and women engaged in gender-neutral work activities (e.g., female firefighter, male sewing); pictures, puzzles, toys, dolls, and props (such as dress-up clothing) reflect people of different races, cultures, ethnicities, and disabilities.

- ◆ **Teachers promote positive communication, relationships, and interaction among children and staff.**

What this might look like – children are greeted and addressed by name; children are engaged in appropriate conversation with peers and/or teaching staff; children are encouraged to work and play together.

- ◆ **Teachers establish and maintain good relationships with each family.**

What this might look like – families are welcome to visit their child’s classroom and are encouraged to be involved in school activities; family cultural values are respected; the program communicates with families in many ways (parent handbook, newsletters, bulletin boards); families receive information about their child’s progress and their input is valued.

Children who play together learn to live together.



Long before your child enters school, he or she learns many important things from you. You are your child's first teacher. When your child goes to school, that learning continues and grows with another teacher. It is important that you share the knowledge you have about your child with this teacher. As your child progresses in school, you can become a valued partner with the teacher in school.

Be involved

A lot of research supports the fact that children whose parents participate in activities with them and are involved in their education do better in school. Starting this involvement when your child is young helps give him or her a good beginning.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provides some good ways for families to be involved:

- Read together with your child to help him/her see the value of reading. Read anything — cereal boxes, instruction manuals, newspapers, magazines, menus, road signs, etc.
- Make sure your child has regular times for eating meals and going to bed.
- Decide what and how much television to watch. Talk with your child about what he/she is watching.
- Keep in touch regularly with your child's teacher and other staff to know what your child is doing in school.
- Praise and encourage your child often. Help him/her become a successful, confident learner.

Working with teachers and other staff

In order to work together as a team, teachers and parents need to build strong relationships. Here are some things that professionals and families should think about in order to form strong partnerships. These research-based strategies come from the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices. DEC is a division of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, and McLean, 2005).

1. Families are essential partners working with teachers and staff to help children succeed.
2. Families are the experts with regard to their child — they have important information and perspectives that educators can use to help children succeed.
3. All of us want what is best for the child. Understanding family perspectives will help us reach common goals.
4. There is common ground from which we can all work together if we try to understand and respect each other's perspectives. Making judgments about others interferes with this process.





What is “People First Language”?

When we use people first language, we focus on the fact that someone with a disability is first a person, and the disability is what he or she *has*. Boys and girls with disabilities are *children first*. All adults who work with children with disabilities should be aware of this protocol.

Always put the person before the disability. For example, say “the child who has autism” not “the autistic child.” Say “the child who has a disability” not “the handicapped or disabled child.” For more information on people first language, please access the following Web site:

<http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/explore/language-communication>

Advocate Kathie Snow (2003) says it best:

Adults with disabilities are adults, first. The only labels they need are their names. An adult with a medical diagnosis of cancer doesn't say, 'I'm cancerous,' so why does an adult with a diagnosis of cerebral palsy say, 'I'm disabled'? A person's self-image is strongly tied to the words used to describe him or her. For generations, people with disabilities have been described in negative, stereotypical language which has created harmful, mythical portrayals. We must stop believing (and perpetuating) this myth. We must believe children and adults with disabilities are unique individuals with unlimited potential to achieve their dreams, just like all Americans.



Useful Web site Links:

The Florida Directory of Early Childhood Services (Central Directory)

A statewide information and referral service for families and professionals who work with children and youth, birth to age 21 years, who are at risk for developmental delays or who have disabilities and special health care needs. For more information, access the following Web site: <http://www.centraldirectory.org/>

Florida's Rules for Pre-K Children with Disabilities or Developmental Delay

Information about the Florida Statutes that define criteria for eligibility and procedures for evaluation of prekindergarten children with disabilities in Florida.

Florida Rule 6A-6.03026, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), *Special Programs for Prekindergarten Children with Disabilities*.

<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/readFile.asp?sid=0&tid=1062846&type=1&file=6A-6.03026.doc>

Florida Rule 6A-6.03027, (F.A.C.), *Special Programs for Children Three Through Five Years Old Who are Developmentally Delayed*.

<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/readFile.asp?sid=0&tid=1062943&type=1&file=6A-6.03027.doc>

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

A national association with a primary focus on the provision of educational and developmental services and resources for all children from birth through age 8. This Web site provides information about NAEYC and current research and information about early childhood education: <http://www.naeyc.org/>

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