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Parent Orientation | August 24, 2025 | 30 Av, 5785

What Matters in Preschool Most

Building the Foundation for Success Through Social & Emotional Growth

The Big Picture

When parents think about preschool, they often imagine ABCs and 123s. But research shows the real magic of preschool happens in social and emotional development. These skills—how children manage feelings, control behavior, and get along with others—predict future success even more than IQ or early academics.

Three Core Skills Children Learn in Preschool

1. Self-Regulation

- The “umbrella skill”: managing emotions, behavior, and attention.
- *Example:* Waiting for a turn, following classroom routines.
- *Research:* Harvard’s Center on the Developing Child calls self-regulation the “air traffic control system” of the brain, developing most powerfully from birth to age five.

2. Emotional Regulation

- A piece of self-regulation focused on feelings.
- *Example:* Calming down after frustration, asking for help instead of melting down.
- *Research:* NAEYC (2018) states: “Children who can manage their emotions and behavior are better able to learn, to get along with others, and to succeed in school and in life.”

3. Prosocial Skills

- Positive, helpful actions toward others.
- *Example:* Sharing, cooperating, showing empathy.

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- *Research:* Developmental psychologists Nancy Eisenberg & Richard Fabes found that prosocial skills in preschool predict stronger peer acceptance and social success later in life. CASEL calls them a key marker of school readiness.

Why These Skills Matter

- James Heckman (Nobel Prize economist): Early social-emotional skills—like persistence, cooperation, and self-control—predict lifelong health, employment, and well-being.
- Daniel Goleman (*Emotional Intelligence*): EQ matters more than IQ for thriving in relationships, careers, and leadership.
- The Dunedin Study (40+ years, New Zealand): Self-control in early childhood predicted health and financial outcomes more than IQ or family background.

Takeaway for Families

Preschool is not a race into academics. It’s the place where children learn:

- 🌟 How to manage big feelings
- 🌟 How to work and play with others
- 🌟 How to keep trying when things feel hard

These are the skills that last a lifetime.

IQ might open the door, but EQ—emotional intelligence—determines how far your child will go.

📖 *Sources: NAEYC (2018, 2024), Harvard Center on the Developing Child, Heckman Equation, Goleman (1995, 2006), Eisenberg et al., CASEL (2023), Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health & Development Study.*

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