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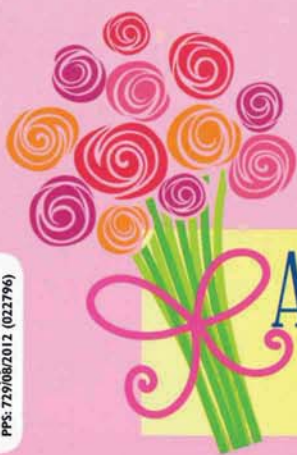
**Daycare**  
It's all in  
the details **Decisions**

**Cord Blood**  
Saves  
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**Mealtime**  
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**The Cupcake Queen**  
& Her Little Princess

Jamie Teo & Renée Ong



# Celebrating Mums

A Mother's  
Day Special

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## SELECTING A SUITABLE CHILDCARE

Mrs Grace Ng, the executive director of Character Montessori has these pointers to share...

### Seek the curriculum that meets your child's needs

Most parents enrol their child while he or she is still a toddler and as result, they may not think too far ahead as their focus might be on care-giving needs. However, the curriculum becomes important as your child gets older so check the following:

- Does the school provide a strong reading programme that incorporates phonics and other reading strategies?
- Are the children trained to confidently present their ideas and work co-operatively?
- Do they prepare children for the new strategies in the Primary 1 Maths syllabus?
- How does its Mother Tongue curriculum prepare children for the lower primary Mother Tongue curriculum?
- Do the teachers teach in a fun way without stressing the children?
- Is there a good balance of enrichment programmes and activities that could be conducted by early childhood trained teachers (eg. speech and drama)?

### Small teacher-student ratio

As preschoolers are very active and have short attention spans, the smaller the group, the more quickly the teacher is able to settle all the children. A smaller group size means more time for the teachers to work with each child individually on disciplinary issues or if the child needs more support in a particular area.

Check the qualification of teachers. Are they warm and approachable, yet firm when required? They should also be interacting with children in big groups, small groups and most importantly, individually as well. Are the children comfortable and happy under their care?

### Observe the centre's culture

Visit the school with your child

when the programme is in full swing, like mid morning. Request for a half day sit-in session. Observe how the teachers interact with the children – are they tense and agitated or calm and friendly? Do the children look happy and confident or do they seem stressed and withdrawn? Do the teachers and children smile a lot?

Observe how your own child reacts at the centre. If your child appears comfortable, calm and assured, chances are you are on the right track.

### Health, hygiene and safety

As young children fall sick easily, it's important that the centre has a rigorous regime in ensuring a high level of hygiene. Do the children go through temperature checks and checks for HFMD symptoms before entering the centre every morning? Ask how it contains spread of illness if there is a HFMD or contagious disease outbreak?

Food preferences and eating habits formed in pre-school years remain with them throughout most of their lives, so check out what's available on the menu. Are the meals well-balanced? Is there opportunity for children to experience a wide variety of food, for instance brown rice and wholemeal bread?

### Parent-centre relationship

Good communication between

teachers and parents creates trust both ways, so when issues arise, like the toddler's frequency of temper tantrums at home suddenly increases, it is easier for the parent to find out if something has happened in school and to work with the teachers.

Most centres have a notebook or folder for teachers and parents to write to one another. For infant care, there should be daily record sheets for temperature records, meals and milk feeds and nappy changes. There could be newsletters or even blogs to keep parents updated on what is happening.

### The centre's environment

Consider the classroom, the centre's outdoor area as well as its surroundings. It is a plus point when the children's work is aesthetically displayed. Check that the classroom space is well planned for both group and individual activity. Materials should be laid out on shelves at children's level for them to access independently. If there are plants or pets in the classroom that children take care of, that's even better.

If the centre has an outdoor area, there should be equipment and space for children to climb, run and cycle to develop their gross motor skills. Other equipment includes a sand pit and water play. If it has no outdoor area, its indoor play area should allow for gross motor activities.

Sometimes, the surrounding area wins hands down, for example, a nearby park for the children or a good public playground.