

Great Classes for Children (Birth to 5) *and* Their Parents!

Community College-Based Parent Education & Cooperative Preschools

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Are you looking for:

- A place where your child can explore toys, do art, hear stories, sing songs, and make friends?
- A fun activity to do *with* your child where s/he learns new skills and you get new ideas?
- Opportunities to meet other families and build community?
- Expert advice and research-based information about parenting and child development?
- Support from professionals and other parents for the challenges of life with a little one?

You can find all these great opportunities in one place!

In the Seattle area, our community colleges sponsor parent education programs, which are a fabulous resource for families. For children, classes offer hands-on learning, discovery and play. For adults, they offer on-going education on all topics related to parenting, and connections to other parents.

What is the children's experience like?

The programs are *play-based*, because research shows that children learn best through hands-on exploration in places where they feel safe and free to explore. Each classroom has several stations around the room, each with developmentally appropriate activities to help children build the skills they need. Children are encouraged to move around and explore at their own pace. In parent-child programs, parents play along with their children. In coops, working parents are assigned to a station:

- Art activities: play-dough to roll, easels to paint at, markers for learning to write
- Sensory activities: tubs of water or rice or beans to scoop, pour, stir, and run fingers through
- Large motor: mats for tumbling, tunnels to crawl through, climbers and slides, balls to throw
- Small motor: blocks to stack, puzzles to assemble, shape sorters to solve, beads to thread
- Imaginary play: dress up zone for trying on new roles, dolls to care for, kitchen for "cooking"
- Science experiences: seeds to plant, tadpoles to watch, items from nature to explore
- Snack time: a place to practice social skills and table manners and to discover new foods

Classes also include "circle time" where the teacher leads the class in singing songs, dancing, playing musical instruments, and reading stories. This is a chance for children to practice sitting still, listening to a teacher, and participating in a group activity, all essential skills for kindergarten readiness. Academic skill-building (reading, writing, pre-math skills) is integrated into all types of activities.

What makes these children's programs different from other programs?

Diverse Experiences in One Familiar Setting: Most children's programs focus on one domain of learning: dance class, art class, story time, music class, or tumbling. These programs do it all. And they do it in a known space where the child feels safe and comfortable. Some of the same toys and activities reappear from week to week to provide reassurance and routine, and some new toys and activities rotate in to encourage children to explore and try new things.

Long-Term Relationships: Lots of programs run in short sessions of 4 – 6 classes. Parent ed programs run for the full school year. Seeing the same children week after week allows kids to build friendships.

Close parental involvement: Parents are always welcome in the classroom.

What are they like from the parent perspective: how do they work?

Each program works a bit differently, so check to be sure of the details, but here is the general idea:

Parent-infant Classes and Parent-Toddler Classes: Meet weekly for two hours. Every other week, the parents attend a one hour parent education session. In infant classes, the baby typically remains with the parent for parent ed. In toddler classes, the children are encouraged to play in one room with the children's teachers and other parents while their parent attends class.

Staffing and Parents' Role: Each class is staffed by a parent educator and one or two children's teachers. Parents provide snacks for the class on a rotating basis. Each family may bring snacks 1 – 3 times a year. Parents may also be asked to help tidy up the toys at the end of the class.

Cooperative Preschools: Three-year-olds may attend 2 or 3 days a week, four-year-olds attend 3 or 4 days a week. Typically, the parent stays with the child and works in the classroom one day per week, and the other days are "drop-off" preschool for that family. Classes may be 2 – 3 hours long.

Staffing: There is a preschool teacher, trained in early childhood education, who is responsible for planning and coordinating the children's activities, and leading group times. A parent educator observes / consults during some class sessions, and offers a monthly parent education session.

Parents contribute by working in the classroom once a week. They also help with the running of the school by: providing snacks, fundraising support, helping with end-of-year cleanings, serving on the board (chair, treasurer, secretary, etc.), or as class photographer, play-dough maker, etc.

Length of program: Most classes (parent-child and coops) meet for the full school year – September through May. [Note: sometimes families need to leave during the year, so if you're looking for a class in the winter or spring, check with programs to see if they have openings – they'll often have a few.] Some have summer programs.

What do Programs Cost?

For some programs, you pay by the month, some by the quarter, some by the year. If you look at the cost for a quarter (11 weeks) or year (33 weeks), it may look like a lot compared to other children's activities in the community. So, to compare apples to apples, it's best to look at it as cost-per-hour for any program. Infant and toddler groups at our local community colleges range from \$7.00 – 11.00 per hour. For comparison's sake, here's what a sample of other programs cost on an hourly basis:

- Big motor activities: Gymboree \$30, Gymnastics East \$20, Northwest Aerials \$13
- Parent education and support: Mommy Matters \$22 plus child care costs. Baby Peppers \$9
- Art programs: Kidsquest \$17 per hour. Kirkland Parks \$13. Kirkland Arts Center \$10.
- Music programs: Kindermusik \$22, Kirkland Parks \$11. Bellevue Parks \$21 for residents.

Cooperative preschools in these programs range from \$7 – 9.50 an hour. For comparison sake:

- Bellevue public schools, \$10 per hour. Bellevue Christian School \$10. Bellevue Boys & Girls Club \$11. Bellevue Montessori \$16. Jewish Day School \$18. Villa Academy \$18. Seattle Waldorf \$22. Cedar Crest \$24.
- Note: most preschools have an adult/child ratio ranging from 1:6 – 1:9. At a coop preschool, the ratio may be 1:3 or 1:4.

All the parent education programs and cooperative preschools offer scholarships to lower income families which can further reduce the cost.

What makes these programs different from other programs?

College credit and student privileges: Parent education programs are college classes, and parents receive college credit for attending. They can also receive student ID cards, which depending on the school may give access to discounts and services such as fitness center or gym access.

Parent Education: Experienced professional educators offer information that is current and research-based but also relevant to the day-to-day reality of parenting little ones. Topics are tailored to the age and needs of the families, but may include: daily routines, discipline, child development, enhancing early learning, nutrition, potty training, emotional intelligence, and self-care for parents.

Individualized Advice: Parent educators and children’s teachers have the opportunity to get to know each child as an individual, and also get to know parents well. This allows them to answer questions in a highly personalized way. They can also refer on for additional services when needed.

Parent Involvement: Participating in your child’s classroom from day one encourages you to think of yourself as an active participant in your child’s learning and an advocate for them in future classrooms. You’ll know the other children and can help your child learn about them. You’ll know what happened in class, so you can later reinforce the learning. Seeing classroom activities may give you new ideas for what you can do at home to enhance your child’s development. Having the opportunity to observe other children each week helps give you a deeper understanding of child development, and seeing parents respond to their children shows you options for parenting style.

Peer Support and Long-Term Relationships: Parents meet with other parents over the course of many months, which allows for long-term connections. Working together on projects strengthens those bonds, as does the peer support gained when parents discuss and share the joys and challenges of caring for kids.

Programs offer classes for families with children from birth through age 5, so instead of having to search for new classes every month or every year, you always know where you can find a fun and educational class for you and your child.

Learn More about Programs Near You:

Program Name / Website	Locations *	Ages Served / Programs
Bellevue College www.bellevuecollege.edu/parented/	Bellevue, Carnation, Issaquah, Mercer Island, Renton, Sammamish, Snoqualmie	Birth to 7: Parent-Child (day & evening), Coop Preschool, Dad & Me, Science Enrichment
Edmonds Community College www.edcc.edu/pared/	Edmonds, Lake Stevens, Marysville, Mill Creek, Snohomish	7 months to 5: Parent-Child, Coop Preschool, Daddy & Me
Green River CC. Limited info available online: www.greenriver.edu/academics/areas-of-study/details/parent-child-education.htm . Auburn area, birth to age 5.		
Lake WA Institute of Technology www.lwtech.edu/parented	Bothell, Kirkland, Redmond, Woodinville	5 months to 5 yrs: Parent-Child and Coop PS
North Seattle Community College http://coops.northseattle.edu/	Several sites in Seattle, north of ship canal to NE 145 th . Vashon.	Birth to 5: Parent-Child (day and evening), Coop preschool
Seattle Central Community College www.parentchildcenterseattle.org/	Capitol Hill, Mt. Baker, Madison Pk, Rainier Val, Queen Anne	Birth to 5 yrs: Parent-Child and Coop Preschool
Shoreline Community College www.shoreline.edu/parenting-education/	Shoreline, Bothell, Inglemoor (Kirkland), Woodinville	Birth to 5 yrs: Parent-Child and Coop Preschool
South Seattle Community College https://sites.google.com/a/southseattle.edu/homelife/	SCCC campus, Admiral, Alki, Arbor Heights, Lincoln Park	Birth to 5 yrs: Parent-Child and Coop Preschool

*Not all ages served at all sites. For example, most programs only have infant classes at one site.