

If the preschool fits: Part 1



Introduction to our search for the right preschool:

In searching for a school for our son Frank, who has developmental delays, we found it difficult to find a warm and safe place where he can play and learn. This is the first in a four-part series on our preschool search.

When my oldest son Collin was 3, he attended preschool at the local high school through the “Working with Children” program, which offers high school students considering careers in education the opportunity to experience what it’s like to be a teacher. (I took the classes when I was in high school. It’s certainly paid off!) It was a great fit for Collin, who, according to his Spanish teacher, is an “old soul,” since he grew up surrounded by adults and teenagers. Collin is also extremely social and a very good listener. He’s the eager learner that fledgling teachers need so that they can gain the confidence to work with all kinds of kids.

Because of my middle son Frank’s speech, language, and developmental delays, Patrick and I decided that the high school program wouldn’t be a good fit for Frank.

Up until now, he’s only been under the direct supervision of his family. His tendency to find himself in dangerous (and messy) situations is frustrating, as is his inability to understand everything we say or tell us what he wants and needs. We love him unconditionally, so we exercise tremendous patience when enduring trial after trial in order to protect and educate that sweet blue-eyed boy. Our question is, will someone else be able to endure the challenges of taking care of Frank? Or will he be dismissed?

Frank’s never been handed over to be cared for by a stranger without a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or very close family friend within sight. In a group setting, he’s the quiet, investigative type likely to slip away and stumble into trouble like his literary hero, Curious George. (In fact, I just turned around at my kitchen desk to find an entire pint of blueberries spilled on my floor.) Frank has needed one-on-one attention since he took his first step.

Still, my husband Patrick, Frank’s speech and special education teachers, and I have decided that it’s going to be best for him to attend preschool in the fall, where his teachers’ attention will be divided between him and his classmates. At school, Frank

will have a more consistent routine, will learn to develop social skills and relationships, and will find a positive outlet for his natural curiosity.

First and foremost, Frank must be in a safe and nurturing environment. He escaped our yard the other day, but fortunately, one of the neighbors I introduced him to, brought Frank back home. All it takes is a split second for Frank to figure out how one of our hundreds of locks works while my head is turned and he's found a pair of scissors, or dumped a gallon of orange juice on the counter, or climbed to the top shelf of the closet under the stairs, scattering DVDs, photographs, books, and Legos in the process. I can only imagine the damage he could do to a classroom. (I won't let him out of the stroller in mine.)

Even I have trouble managing Frank at times, so how would he be with a stranger?

Would I find someone who could keep a close watch on my little escape artist?

Could someone other than a family member offer him the patience and resilience required to endure the many trials he puts us through? I pray they'll recognize that even though he doesn't always comprehend what we say, Frank is shy, gentle, and sweet. But, sometimes that's hard to see.

And so, I embarked on a journey to find the perfect (or close to it) preschool for the little boy who challenges me every day to be a better mother and a better Christian.