

# If the preschool fits: Part 2



## *Our preschool search...*

### **Part 2: First Impressions**

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. Here is the story of one of our visits on the “preschool tour.”

When I visited my first choice preschool for Frank, my three-year-old son with developmental delays, I was feeling anxious. He needed so much more attention and patience than most kids his age. Frank needed a teacher who modeled Jesus’ gentle way with children.

With that in mind, I thought that a church school would offer the support Frank needed. (Unfortunately, it’s not St. Joan of Arc, Aberdeen where I worship, work, and send Collin to school. We’re still working on getting a 3-year-old program. I’ll let you know when we do!) I rang the doorbell to a highly recommended church preschool and was greeted by a kind grandmotherly-type who warmly greeted Frank, Leo, and me. But, in the classroom behind her, I heard a woman screaming at the 3-year-olds about a picture she was trying to take.

I wanted to turn around and walk out, but the older lady was so kind and excited to show us around. I tried to be open-minded, but I had visions of Frank bursting into tears because his teacher couldn’t control her emotions enough to utilize a gentler form of discipline (which he certainly needs). Everyone has bad days and every teacher has to raise his or her voice sometimes, but there is never an excuse for screaming in the way that she did.

When we visited the HUGE classroom, Leo and I played, participated in circle time, sang, and danced while Frank explored on his own. Eventually we moved to a smaller room where the lady and I could talk quietly, and Frank could be less distracting to the other boys and girls.

“He’s much better than I was expecting,” she said, referring to our initial conversation several months ago about Frank’s situation and whether or not they could accommodate him.

“He’s come a long way,” I told her, “But he still has some catching up to do.”

“I can tell he thinks a little differently than most kids his age. He’s like a little engineer or something.”

I laughed. She understood him. This might be a good place for him, after all.

“Unfortunately, I’m retiring this year and (the teacher who was yelling) is taking

over. I've been here for over thirty years, and I'm hoping she keeps things going the way we have."

I began to imagine this wonderful program my friends experienced sinking under the watch of someone who lacked the poise and patience that it takes to work with young children, especially one as challenging as mine...who was climbing over the gate and headed for the front door.

"Frank! Come back!" I shouted, but in customary Frank form, he didn't listen, or hear me, or understand. I chased after him and held him tight. Maybe he had the right idea.

I told the kind woman I'd be in touch. But, I even then knew I'd be offering my regrets.