



## Cheaper Alternatives to Preschool

By Judy Arnall

I considered preschool when I had a 4, 3 and 2 year-old at home. I would watch my neighbor send her children off and the space and quiet she got for two hours a day was enviable, but when I looked at the cost of sending 3 children to preschool, it came just short of \$800 per month. I figured that amount could be better saved for tuition at university rather than a few hours of wonderful peace and quiet.

Are preschools absolutely necessary? They are a “nice to have” change for your child, but are not necessary for building social and active learning skills. Your child can do just as much at home as the average child at preschool and excel in arts, sports, friends and academics when they get to school. The key is in you as facilitator, and your home as the environment, and your willingness to endure a wee bit of mess. In fact, research supports that a child that has a huge hand in their own creative endeavors, builds more brain connections than a child that has to be told what to do. If you can't afford the cost of preschool, here are some alternatives that will foster your child's social, cognitive and emotional development just as much:

- Have a sand/rice/lentil table
- Set up painting twice a week - all you need is newspaper, paper, paints, brushes and lots of patience
- Go on field trips to different places
- Set up water play in the sink or backyard pool
- Have play dates in your home, in the other parent's home or meeting at an indoor playplace – you control length, company and activities
- Have as many toys on hand as possible, but rotate them often, so every week is a new bucket of theme toys or old favorites
- Have a building block station with wooden blocks, Legos, K'nex or Meccano pieces
- Assemble a dress-up tickle trunk with hats, shoes, belts and shirts obtained from the local goodwill store
- Set up a play dough table with cutters, rollers, pans, etc.

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book, ***Discipline Without Distress: 135 tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery*** and the new DVD, ***Plugged-In Parenting: Connecting with the digital generation for health, safety and love*** as well as the new book, ***The Last Word on Parenting Advice***  
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