

YMCA PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM



In collaboration with
The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool

YPRESCHOOL™
We build strong kids, strong families, strong communities.

YMCA Preschool

The *Y's Way to The Creative Curriculum* companion outlines the six core content areas identified in *The Creative Curriculum* and includes two additional areas specific to YMCAs.

Literacy

Literacy is one of the determining factors in children's success in school and in life. Thus, it is critical to begin early to lay a solid foundation of literacy skills. In a YMCA early childhood classroom, literacy includes seven components: increased vocabulary and knowledge; phonological awareness; knowledge of print, letters and words; comprehension; understanding of books and other texts; and literacy as a sense of enjoyment. In a Y program, you'll see a print-rich environment with a well-stocked library of books and audio. You'll find staff reading to children, children leafing through books, and adults and children talking about what they are reading.

Mathematics

Preschool children are fascinated by numbers and measurements, comparisons and logic. There are multiple opportunities in a day for children to build their competence in mathematics. Math includes numbers concepts; patterns and relationships; geometry and spatial sense; measurement; and data collection, organization and representation. In a YMCA early childhood program, you'll find children using a variety of math-related toys, tools and games. You'll hear children counting, and observe them manipulating measurements and sorting and classifying collections.

Science

Young children love science and learning about the world around them. In an early childhood program, science generally falls into three categories: 1) physical science: physical properties such as weight, shape, size, color and temperature; 2) life science: living things such as plants and animals; and 3) earth science: the natural world, sky and weather. In a YMCA early childhood program, you'll find a place of discovery where children can experiment and explore. You'll see staff talking about the world around them, introducing scientific ideas to children, and responding to and expanding upon children's observations. Don't be surprised if you find nature activities happening on a YMCA sports field.

Social Studies

Children are social beings and engage with their families, communities and the world around them every day. In an early childhood program, social studies is the study of people and how they relate to spaces and geography, how they live, the environment around them and past events. In a YMCA early childhood environment, you'll find staff introducing social-related concepts to children in large and small groups. You'll find children trying on different roles in the dramatic play corner, and you'll find children and adults taking responsibility for their environment by recycling, for example. You may also find children writing to their penpals in a YMCA halfway around the world.

Arts

Art is designing, creating and exploring. Through art, children learn to express themselves and find meaning in the world around them. Art in early childhood programs includes dance, music, theater and visual arts. In a YMCA, you'll find children and adults listening to, moving to and making music. You're likely to see a variety of art materials including paints, markers, crayons, clay, paper and glue. You might even find young children participating in puppet shows or performing skits or stories they've read. A YMCA arts specialist may be working with youth to take their art skills to a higher level.

Technology

The more children interact with their environment, the more likely they'll encounter technology. Technology is the study of tools, machines, materials, techniques and sources of power that make work easier and solve problems. In a YMCA early childhood program, you'll find children using a variety of tools, both for play and for real. It's not uncommon to see children as young as 3 or 4 using a computer. In the dramatic play corner, you're likely to see children using cell phones to communicate, cameras to capture people and events, radios and music players to listen to their favorite tunes or PDAs to schedule their weekly appointments.

Healthy Habits

Given increased concerns about the health of Americans, it's critical to help young children develop (and feel passionate about) lifelong healthy habits. Cultivating healthy habits in early childhood falls into three key areas: nutritional choices, physical activity, and physical and personal safety. Most important is the healthy environment that adults design and organize for children. In a YMCA early childhood program, you'll find staff modeling healthy eating and activity habits. You're likely to see children enjoying a variety of healthy foods, asking for water as their preferred beverage and discussing the impact of healthy foods on their growing bodies. You will find children engaged in fun, safe and rigorous activities in the gym and pool, on the playground and in the classroom.

YMCA Preschool Curriculum

	Core Content	Sample Outcomes/Children will demonstrate...
Creative Curriculum Content	Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased vocabulary and language skills • comprehension skills (retell, re-enact, explain and summarize) • enjoyment of literary experience
	Mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beginning understanding of numbers concepts • beginning understanding of patterns and relationships; geometry and spatial sense; and measurement • ability to collect, organize and represent data
	Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beginning understanding of physical science • beginning knowledge of life science • beginning knowledge about the earth and the environment
	Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding of places and geography • understanding of people and how they live • understanding of people and their environments
	Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge of dance • understanding of music concepts • drama skills • visual arts skills
	Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased awareness of technology • beginning basics of how to use tools and terminology • beginning to understand how to use equipment responsibly
	YMCA-Specific Content	Healthy Habits
Social, Moral and Spiritual Development		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • age-appropriate social skills (using words to express feelings and resolve conflict) • core values in an age-appropriate way: caring, honesty, respect and responsibility • a foundation for spirituality by posing questions about the meaning and moral significance of life within children's context and experiences

Social, Moral and Spiritual Development

The latest research in early brain development highlights the importance of developing connectedness with others. It's through these connections that children develop a foundation for spiritual and moral growth and social skills. In a YMCA early childhood program, you'll find staff demonstrating, teaching and celebrating the YMCA character development values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility. You'll find children playing and talking with friends and developing a foundation for positive relationships. It is also common to see children creating a card for a classmate or relative, singing holiday songs to adults in a nursing home, or cleaning up a nearby park and planting flowers.

Sample Program Inputs/Program leaders will...

- engage in frequent conversations with individual children to build language, practice sequencing (ordering) and test comprehension
- design a print-rich environment (books, labels for furniture and toys, displays, magazines, menus)
- engage children in reading by reading to them, asking open-ended questions about what they are reading and encouraging them to leaf through story and picture books on their own
- teach counting songs, rhymes and chants
- count during daily activities; talk about quantity of a set; use number symbols
- create patterns (rhythm, color, shapes)
- provide materials for children to construct two- and three-dimensional shapes
- use locational and positional language (*on, off, under, around*)
- provide opportunities to compare the length and weight of objects, and discuss time
- engage children in sorting, classifying, graphing, counting, measuring and comparing, and record the information collected
- provide opportunities for first-hand investigations
- introduce science materials such as magnets, magnifying glasses, balance scales and mirrors to encourage exploration to learn about the physical properties of objects
- use open-ended questions to further investigation
- encourage children to observe carefully and describe changes taking place in the environment around them
- guide children to explore the materials that make up the earth's surface and notice changes in weather
- help children create rules for getting along
- create opportunities to learn about different jobs
- provide a variety of multicultural materials including crayons and paper to represent a variety of skin tones
- discuss recycling and teach recycling habits in the classroom
- teach social problem-solving skills
- provide a variety of media for children to explore and create visual art: markers, crayons, paints, clay
- share and discuss art with children, including illustrations, paintings, sculptures, etc.
- offer music and scarves to allow children to dance and move to music
- provide a variety of tools (toys and real) such as computers, cell phones and cameras for children to use during play
- allow children to navigate their way through the use of technology tools
- use technology terminology as they demonstrate and work with children using technology tools
- model healthy eating and activity habits
- provide ample opportunity for fun physical activity both in the classroom and during outdoor time
- discuss physical safety (fire, traffic, medication) and personal safety (appropriate/inappropriate touch, interaction with strangers)
- model character development values (caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility) in their relationships with children and adults
- model character development values in their relationships with others and for the natural and cultural world
- provide ample opportunities for children to develop friendships and playmates
- use stories to reinforce positive messages and generate discussions

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Second only to human relationships, a well-planned curriculum helps define a child's experience in a YMCA program. Curriculum affects all aspects of a program: overall quality, parents' perceptions, and the outcomes and benefits of the program for individual children. To ensure that YMCA early childhood programs deliver high-quality activities and interactions, YMCAs have embraced *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool*, developed by Teaching Strategies, Inc. Based in Washington, D.C., Teaching Strategies is committed to improving the quality of early childhood programs by producing curriculum and training materials.

The Creative Curriculum includes five components:

- How children develop and learn
- The learning environment in which children learn
- What children learn
- The role of the teacher
- The role of the family



The curriculum is consistent with the YMCA's philosophy, which is grounded in a child-centered and holistic approach to early childhood. *The Y's Way to The Creative Curriculum* is a companion booklet that rounds out *The Creative Curriculum* with components that are unique to YMCAs. The curriculum and companion are designed to be used by YMCAs as guides to planning early childhood environments and activities. They are based on the premise that curriculum is developed from the following:

- Specific needs and interests of children
- Talents, abilities and teaching skills of staff
- Unique needs of a particular YMCA community
- Resources within a YMCA and its surrounding community
- The latest research on how children learn best.



Activities that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all.

Children experience the core components of the preschool curriculum through blocks, dramatic play, toys and games, art, library, discovery, sand and water, music and movement, cooking, computers, and through activities outdoors and in YMCA pools and gyms.

The specific activities for the core areas of the curriculum take place in one or several of the following contexts, each of which is balanced throughout the day or week:

Arrival and Departure Times

Arrival and departure times are opportunities for staff to engage in meaningful conversation with children and families. Staff greets the family, inquires about the child's life and shares information about the child with parents or guardians.

Large Group Time

Activities are designed for large group participation under the leadership of staff. Group times help children experience a sense of belonging and may be used to engage children in discussion, read a story or welcome a visitor.

Small Group Time

Small group activities are designed to teach children about a new topic or skill, and they typically occur in the interest areas. Staff also use this time to focus their observations on a particular group of children and to document children's learning.

Choice Time

Children have the option of choosing from several activities or interests; choices can range from relatively unstructured activities to staff-designed learning centers (based on children's interests).

Transition Times

These brief periods between activities can provide staff and children with opportunities to reinforce new concepts and skills (e.g., taking direction, assuming responsibility, listening).

Outdoors, Gym or Pool

Children need physical activity and fresh air each day. In YMCA gyms, pools and playgrounds, children are engaged in physical activities and introduced to lifelong sports and exercise such as swimming and running.

Meal Times

Trained staff can turn meal times into learning times by engaging in conversations, introducing topics, and responding to children's inquiries and ideas. It is also an opportunity to encourage healthy food choices and teach responsibility through meal preparation and cleanup.

Rest Time

Young children need time midday to rest and relax.

As with any YMCA program, YMCA preschool is grounded in the YMCA mission and program objectives. The YMCA mission is **to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all**. Y programs, such as preschool, are tools YMCAs use to help participants grow in spirit, mind and body.

Staff who implement the early childhood curriculum in YMCA preschool programs receive training in how all the pieces of the curriculum fit together. The training includes:

- Implementing *The Y's Way to The Creative Curriculum* in YMCA early childhood programs
- Introducing the curriculum: How children develop and learn, what children learn, the learning environment, the teacher's role and the family's role
- Workshops on interest areas: Blocks, dramatic play, toys and games, art, library, discovery, sand and water, music and movement, cooking, computers and outdoors
- Workshops on what children learn (core components)

YMCAs provide early childhood programs for over 100,000 children each year in 1,000 sites. Ys also provide afterschool programs to millions more.

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