



THE ELEMENTARY YEARS (K-6)

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Step Two: Chapter 5

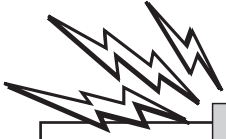
What are Your Child's Social and Practical Needs?

This downloadable PDF is an excerpt from:

Picky Parent Guide: Choose Your Child's School with CONFIDENCE

**Get all the chapters in electronic form, for free, at *PickyParent.com*, or
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LIGHT'NING LIST

What To Know from Chapter 5

- ***Fit Factor #3 is Social Issues:*** your child's own desire and need to attend school with friends.
- ***Fit Factor #4 is Practical Matters:*** scheduling your child's desired, essential *non-school activities*.
- ***Remember, you must identify the few most important characteristics of your child*** to match with schools for a Great Fit.
 - ✓ Attending school with current friends will be a Must Have for some elementary age children.
 - ✓ Scheduling essential non-school activities will be Must Have for a limited number of children.

Chapter 5

Child Fit Factors #3 and 4: What are *Your* Child's Social and Practical Needs?

Social Issues: *Your Child's Friends*

Kelli is a shy, only child and one very slow to make new friends. In three years of preschool she developed very close friendships with two other girls, Sara and Lila. She plays with each of them weekly after school and has a good, positive relationship with both. Both friends have older siblings attending the same school. In September, when her parents mentioned that they were beginning to look at “big kid” schools for next year, Kelli panicked and said, “but I am going to go to Sara’s and Lila’s big brother’s schools, right?” Kelli became obsessed and fretful over the possibility that she might not get to stay with her best – and only – friends. Her parents wanted her to stop worrying, but they also thought that kindergarten might be a good chance for Kelli to learn how to spread her social wings a bit. By February, Lila’s parents had decided to send her to a different school. As it turned out, this school was a better fit for Kelli’s top priority academic needs, as well, and so her parents opted for this school, too. They requested that Kelli and Lila be in the same classroom, a wish that the school principal granted. The three girls still get together at least twice a month for play and are taking ballet together after school. Kelli loves her new school and is learning how to make new friends while keeping the old.



Friends: What They Are, Why They're Important

Many parents form strong preferences about whom they want their children to befriend, and those feelings can grow stronger through the years. But from your child's perspective, it's not so much a matter of how she *ought* to feel but how she does *in fact* feel about friends – both current ones and the prospect of making new ones.

The more your child has developed bonds with particular peers, and the less apt she is to make new friends, the more you may need to consider her friends in your school choice. For some children, school friends are the rudder that keeps them headed in the right direction academically and emotionally, not just socially. If your child's school social group is critically important to *your child* – whether those friends are from your neighborhood, your child's current school, pre-school, day care or elsewhere – then you may need to make this a Must Have in your school selection.

You might also consider whether having friends of the same gender is important to your child. Single-sex schools at the elementary level are unusual, and most co-educational schools take great pains to balance the number of boys and girls in each classroom. But small programs, very small schools, and other options with few children may have imbalances in a given year. Even if this is not a Must Have at first glance, keep your eyes open for schools where your child may become isolated socially. If you are concerned, find out the school's policy on gender balancing.

Categorizing and Prioritizing

Choosing a school that your child's current friends will attend should be a Must Have for your school hunt only if your child:

- Has close friendship(s) with child(ren) who will be attending certain schools, *and*
- Does not have friends attending other schools you might choose, *and*
- Your child does not have the social skills needed to meet and make friends with new children, *and*
- You are unable to help your child continue current friendships outside of school or establish new friendships.

If the first three bullets describe your child, but you are able to help some in addressing the need, this can be a Nice to Have tie-breaker for schools meeting your other needs. Many, but by no means all, parents can help their children see old friends and make new ones with a little effort. One-on-one playtime outside of school is a simple and common way to accomplish both, but you will have to honestly say whether that's a role you can take on. Your child can wish for friends, but often needs you to make the playtime happen until an older age.

What are the reasons you might *not* consider your child's current friends in your school selection?

- ✓ Your child's school friends are secondary to non-school friends or to academics and other activities.
- ✓ Your child likes to meet and befriend new people.
- ✓ Your child is not particularly happy with or well-suited to his current set of friends.

- ✓ You think your child is ready to stretch his social wings, to learn how to get along with new children.
- ✓ You have time to help your child keep up with old friends and make new ones (with play dates, joint non-school activities and the like).

Identifying Your Child's Need

Identification strategies include:

- Ask your child's school, preschool or day care teachers how your child compares socially to other children of same age whom they have observed. Does your child play and work with other children? How well and how often? Does your child make new friends or just stick with the same ones every day?
- Observe and compare your child's social interactions to similar age children. Does your child seek out interaction with other children? Does your child approach new children successfully or stick to the same one(s) always? Does your child consider other children's needs in interactions? How do other children respond to your child?
- See the Social & Leadership sections of the *Child* tables at the end of the book for more help identifying and deciding whether you can deal with your child's friendship needs outside of school.
- Have a developmental test of social and related emotional skills conducted by a professional tester. This may include paper and pencil work, an interview and observation. Expected skills will vary according to the child's age, and a qualified tester should be able to explain how your child compares to the typical child of similar age.
- If you are on the fence, ask your child how she feels about the matter. Does your child express dread at the thought of making new friends? You may be surprised to find that she's ready for a fresh start!

Many parents can help their children see old friends and make new ones with a little effort. One-on-one playtime outside of school is a simple way to accomplish both.

Practical Matters: *Essential Activities (outside of school)*

Evan was a second grader attending his assigned public school in a medium sized New England city. From an early age, it became clearer and clearer that he possessed unusual singing talent. The first week of second grade, Evan got the lead part in a locally staged version of the hit "Oliver." During the play's run, a Broadway producer happened to see his perform-

ance and approached his parents about Evan's participation in a revival of the same musical on Broadway. Evan's school principal was not impressed and said they would have to make home schooling arrangements if Evan took the part. Neither feeling qualified to home school him nor possessing the money to hire a full-time tutor, Evan's parents searched for another more accommodating school. Fortunately, a local performing arts magnet school had a special program for children like Evan, including shippable weekly packages of learning and instruction materials and internet and phone tutoring. With Evan's parents acting as facilitators but not instructors, Evan was able to excel in both academics and his theatrical life.



Extracurricular Activities: What They Are, Why They're Important

While the practical needs of most *families* loom large (and are the focus of Chapter 9), elementary age children have few that will affect the choice of a school. Most practical needs arise out of another child need, such as medical care for a health problem, and you can address them as such.

One need – uncommon but not unheard of – is for a child's participation in *essential* activities outside of school. Does your young soap opera star have daily shoots to attend? Does your violin virtuoso have concerts scheduled around the world? Does your Olympic hopeful have a rigorous workout routine? If your child's strong capability or interest has led to a demanding schedule of practice and performance, then fitting in these "extracurriculars" may not seem like an extra at all, but an essential factor in your choice among schools.

Categorizing, Prioritizing, and Identifying Your Child's Need

If your child has extracurricular interests or needs that:

- cannot be met at school,
 - must continue, and
 - often conflict with typical school scheduling,
- then this should be a Must Have in your school hunt.

If your child fits this category, you surely know it. Whether your child is a nationally renowned pianist, has started an early career on stage, or has another combined passion and talent, you will want to find a school with the flexibility to meet your child's non-school demands. If you're not sure, we say this: do not pressure your child to pursue a demanding and time-consuming activity outside of school unless your child's own interests, capabilities and motivation have led the way.

Schools may meet your child's need in various ways: by offering on-site practice facilities, flexible scheduling, or cooperation with outside tutors. What's most important is that your child is allowed to continue the outside activity without sacrificing the long-term academic, social, physical and emotional benefits of school. Check periodically to ensure that your child's passion for the special activity is enduring. If his academic, social or emotional needs get short shrift, he may begin to crave a more typical school life for a while. Listen and be willing to help your child make changes when needed.



SNAP TO IT

What To Do

- **Refer back to your Child "Quick Think"** on page 37 to refresh your memory regarding things that really stand out about your child. Estimated Time: 2 minutes
- **Use the Child Needs Summary** on page 38 to get a quick fix on whether Fit Factors #3 and 4 may be Must Haves for your child. Estimated Time: 5 minutes
- **Use the Know Your Child's Needs table** starting on page 368 to further clarify your child's Fit Factor #3 Social Issues and #4 Practical Matters characteristics and the importance of each for choosing a school. Do this only if you suspect these items are important for your child. Estimated Time: 10 minutes
- **Record your Must Haves and Nice to Haves, if any,** on your *Child Needs Summary* (page 38). Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Optional Activities

- **Discuss your child's needs** with your spouse or other parenting partner. Estimated Time: As needed
- **Plan now to schedule professional testing for your child** if you are concerned about your child's social development and ability to make new friends. Estimated Time: 30 minutes to find a tester and schedule an appointment
- **Mark your calendar to ask current school, preschool or day care teachers** about your child's ability to make new friends compared to other children. Estimated Time: 2 minutes to mark your calendar, 5 minutes to schedule time to talk with teachers, 15 minutes to talk with teachers
- **Make a plan to observe your child,** as needed. Estimated Time: 5 minutes to plan; you decide how much for observing

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"These tools eased our worries and helped us choose just the right school for our child and family."

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