

California has free and low-cost preschool programs for four-year-old children.

California has many Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) and early learning programs to help your child develop and get ready for kindergarten.

Pick the Right Program for Your Family



Where are free programs offered?

These Pre-K programs are offered at child care centers, homes, and elementary schools.

- **California State Preschool Programs take place at child care centers, homes, or elementary schools.** They can be free or low-cost for families who qualify, including those who receive certain benefits or meet income rules. Learn if you [qualify here](#). Programs may be full-day or part-day, and hours can be different at each location.
- **Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is free for all four-year-olds, is part of California's public school system, and takes place at public elementary schools.** TK follows the regular school calendar (August–May) and hours vary based on district availability. Some programs follow school hours, while others are part-day.

What happens at these programs?

All programs allow young children to learn through play before they start Kindergarten. Children:

- Play with other kids to learn sharing, taking turns, and being a good friend.
- Ask questions and use their imagination to learn new ideas and solve problems.
- Build confidence and independence.
- Get ready for Kindergarten in a fun way.

How can I learn more?

You can start by visiting or calling programs near you and asking questions. Think about what helps your child learn and grow. Trust yourself—you know your child best.

- To learn more about Transitional Kindergarten (TK), reach out to your local school district.
- To learn more about preschool programs, visit [California Child Care Resource & Referral Network](#) or call 1 (800) 543-7793.

Things to Think About When Choosing a Pre-K Program

What Matters to Your Family

Every child is different. Choose a program that fits your child's needs and works well for your family.

Location and Transportation

- Look for a program close to caregivers, home or work.
- Think about how your child will be transported there and back. Consider: morning/evening traffic, transportation costs, etc.
- Make sure the schedule works for you. Some programs do have late pickup fees.

Cost

Many programs are free or low-cost.

- **Preschool programs:** No or low-cost for families who qualify, including those who receive certain benefits or meet income rules. Learn if you qualify here.
- **Transitional Kindergarten (TK):** Free for all four year olds.

Hours and Schedule

Ask programs about:

- Full-day or part-day options
- Before- or after-program care - what does it look like?
- Nap schedules
- Whether they are open year-round
- Holiday and summer schedules

Meals and Snacks

- Ask if the program provides breakfast, lunch, or snacks, or if you need to send food from home.
- Ask if meals are free or low-cost.
- Tell the program about any food allergies, dietary needs, or cultural food preferences for your child.
- If your child has a food allergy, ask how the program keeps children safe during meals.

Vaccines

- Most programs require children to have up-to-date vaccines before starting.
- Ask the program for a list of required vaccinations and when they must be completed.
- If your child is missing a vaccine, ask how to get help or where to go.
- Bring your child's vaccine record when you enroll.

Toilet Training

- Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and many preschool programs do not require children to be potty-trained.
- Ask about toileting rules and if they help with training efforts before you enroll.



Children with Disabilities

Ask the program if they:

- Include all children in the same classroom.
- Offer support like speech therapy or behavioral help.
- Work with families to meet each child's needs.
- Provide support to manage classroom disruptions.

Multiple Languages

Some programs offer **dual-language** or **bilingual classes**. If your child speaks a language other than English, ask:

- Do your teachers speak my child's home language?
- Can my child use their home language at school?
- How do you help children learning English?

Trust Yourself

Visit programs, ask lots of questions, and choose the one that feels right for your family.

Need help finding a program?

Contact your local [Child Care Resource & Referral Network](#) to learn more about preschool options.
1 (800) 543-7793

Visit [Trustline](#) when choosing in-home preschool programs.

Visit your school district's early learning website for more information about TK.

Questions to Ask When You Visit a Program

- How much does it cost? Do I qualify for financial help?
- What are the hours? Is there before- or after-school care?
- Is there space available, or is there a waiting list?
- Do you provide meals?
- Is there summer and/or holiday care?
- Does my child need to be potty-trained?
- What vaccines does my child need to attend?
- How do you support children with disabilities?
- Do teachers speak my child's home language?
- Do you offer a bilingual program?

