

# The Importance of Amazing Teaching Teams

By reneebock

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Teachers are the heart and soul of any early learning center. Their educational background, temperament, commitment to lifelong learning and love of the children all contribute to the making of a wonderful place for families to thrive.

Parents rely on Directors as experts who can select the best teachers a city has to offer, the most well educated, creative, reflective and empathetic individuals, who will be outstanding caretakers and educators of our kids. Once those amazing teachers are hired, though, the Director has to create teams that nurture and support each other as a first step to nurturing and supporting parents and children. The parts must come together to create a greater educational whole.



photograph by Jennifer Lee Photography

A teaching team is like a marriage. Teachers live together day in and day out, facing the highs and lows, learning and struggling for the good of the children. Together, they can fashion an enchanted world of learning where friendships blossom and everyone is supported as they take risks and grow in a million ways. Just like in a marriage, teachers can also have very different and strong opinions – about children, curriculum, relationships with parents, ideas about authority and conflict, and even about what it means to be a teacher.

When you are visiting schools you will observe many teaching teams, each with their own style, tone, strengths and weaknesses. It is not easy, when parents are seeking the best center for a child, to step back and note the relationships between teachers and assess whether the teaching teams are high functioning and inspired. In order to appraise the health of teams ask the Director the following questions:



1. What do you look for when you are hiring a teacher?
2. What is the educational background of your teachers?
3. What do you consider when you are building a teaching team?
4. How do you support your teams as an administrator?
5. What is the school's process for addressing conflicts within a team?

As you tour the classrooms, you can also look for the following indicators of a healthy teaching team:

**Tone:** No matter what is going on in the classroom, teachers should speak to each other and the children in an even, pleasant, respectful tone. The interactions should appear to be enjoyable and without stress. Empathy is a crucial component to life in the classroom, and if you see it exhibited between individuals, you are in a nurturing place.

**Evidence of Routines:** An organized day is crucial to a sense of calm and security for teachers and children. You should see evidence of a daily schedule (and a clock) on the wall of the classroom. The schedule may be more or less detailed, include photos, illustrations or words, but as long as it is there, it shows that the teachers are thoughtful about time and have agreed upon what happens when. If you don't see the schedule, ask the Director for it.

**Flexibility:** Despite the best planning, every day will present many unexpected curves in the road and teachers must be able to respond flexibly without becoming rigid about their own ideas. Great teams think together on their feet, stay calm, and draw upon each other's strengths when faced with the unexpected.

**Diversity of Temperament:** Each person in the team brings different gifts to the classroom, in terms of how they relate to the world. Not every teacher is or should be outgoing and talkative. Some are more warm and cuddly than others. Quiet teachers are often astute listeners and observers, offering tremendous and necessary insight. Teams should include a balance of temperaments, as children will have varying needs and attractions.

**Diversity of interest:** Teachers should bring different personal passions to the children. One will love to sing and play guitar, another will have a strong background in visual art, and yet another will have spent years thinking about children's emotional life. All of these interests shape the culture of the classroom and what the children will learn in that community. When the Director selects a team, he or she seeks a complimentary balance of skills where teachers together offer a fully enriched curriculum.

The health of the teaching team is of crucial importance when selecting a learning environment for a child. Children are keenly aware of the relationships between the adults around them. As children will spend many hours with their teachers and caregivers, those center-based relationships are formative and profoundly impactful. If you enter a center looking for evidence of respectful, balanced and flexible teaching teams, you will be well on your way to finding a happy and healthy learning environment for your child and the whole family.



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**Renee Bock** is a dedicated early childhood educator, who is currently the Educational Director at [Explore+Discover](#), a social learning center in Manhattan that is dedicated to setting the standard for infant and toddler care and education. Renee has more than a decade of experience in the field and holds a Master's in Early Childhood Education from Bank Street College in New York. In her present position, she is helping Explore+Discover open the first of 27 New York City centers focused on children from 3 months to two years old. She can be reach at [Renee@K3Learn.com](mailto:Renee@K3Learn.com).

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