

## **On My Own Programs for Kids – When, Why and How to Start**

Are you thinking about enrolling your child in “on my own” style activities but not sure what age is best to start or what program to try first? Independent classes for kids can start as early as age 2 and provide a great way to prepare young children for the routine and socialization skills needed in preschool. Here is a list of possible activities you may want to think about, broken down by recommended starting age:

### **2 Years**

Preschool Prep – This type of program is valuable because it encourages a child’s natural desire to explore through play and imagination while preparing little ones to become more independent.

### **2 ½ Years**

Art – Every kid loves to get messy and dive into his or her own creation. An art class will give your child exposure to different media, help foster independence, and enhance motor skills.

Multi-Sports – Children at this age do well with an introduction to fundamental skills across many different sports while having fun.

Math – Programs at this age use song and dance to create a fun learning experience focused on numbers and counting!

### **3 Years**

Ballet, Tap, Hip Hop, Jazz, and Tumbling – These classes are popular and introduce technique while improving gross motor skills, coordination, balance and posture.

Theater – At a very young age, kids can have fun and build self-confidence through dramatic play and creative movement, while learning stage etiquette and performing stories.

Yoga – Young children are capable of learning and practicing yoga. This type of class incorporates songs, games and stories to hold a child's interest, build self-confidence, and promote relaxation.

Half Day Summer Camp – A half day camp with a small camper to counselor ratio will provide the right amount of summer fun, activities, and time to make new friends. The small ratio will ensure that your child gets the individual attention needed to succeed within the camp group.

## **4 Years**

Beginner Martial Arts – Children can develop confidence, focus and self-control as they learn self-defense skills.

### **The Benefits of On My Own Programs:**

Have fun while learning new skills

Increase creativity and love of learning

Enhance motor skills

Socialize

Exercise

Build confidence and self-control

### **Deciding on a program**

With so many choices out there, you may not be sure what to start out with! Speaking from my own experience as a mom, I say, "Go for whatever they get excited about!" Try to really listen and pay attention to what your child enjoys doing, and then look for a program to add to the fun. When one of my daughters was little, I noticed she would ALWAYS, with no exception, hum or sing a tune while doing something at home that she really enjoyed. She got super productive one day, and proudly came to me with her "bakery" made from paper, crayons, scissors and glue! She actually spent hours on it. From this,

I learned that she loved to express herself creatively, so I went with it. Over the years, she took independent classes in dance, martial arts, art, piano, and others as her interests changed over many years. If your child gets excited about music and loves to move, then you may want to start with a dance class. If he/she likes putting on little plays in the family room or sing without anyone listening, then you might want to try a theater class. If they love to toss a ball around the house and play games of “catch” with you, then a multi-sports class can be a great introduction to different sports, teamwork and self-confidence.

### **What to look for in a program and facility:**

Once you know what kind of program you want for your child, the next step is finding a facility that meets your standards. A good enrichment program will grow with your child. And the familiarity of using the same facility for multiple classes will help increase your child’s confidence to try new activities, as he/she gets older. You will want to seek out classes that offer different levels to best fit your child’s abilities.

A search online in your area will provide some options, and the best way to get a feel for the program is to visit the facility and talk to the instructors. If the program doesn’t look fun, or if you and/or your child are uneasy after visiting, then you need to look for a better fit. Lastly, keep in mind that the staff of a good enrichment facility will make time for both you and your little one and answer all of your questions. You should be able to schedule a time to talk about the program or programs that are best suited for your child.

From my own personal experience, I can see that it isn’t as important what they take, but that they enjoy it. Having fun is the best way to learn something new, and each experience has so many benefits. We don’t need to focus on finding programs with the goal of producing artists like Van Gogh or world-renowned dancers like Baryshnikov. Activities at this stage in the game are all about raising confident, independent kids who are not afraid to try new things and be the best they can be.

After all, my little singing artist is well on her way to a biochemistry degree, and I am certain that her childhood experiences have provided her with skills to succeed. They have helped to shape the fun loving, intelligent woman she is becoming. Good luck to you and your little one as you start this fun-filled journey.