



9 Extracurricular Activities for the Youngest Set

By Sue Douglass Fliess

To schedule, but not over-schedule. That is the dilemma. With a multitude of options in such convenient proximity to our homes, it is nearly impossible *not* to register our preschoolers for some type of enrichment class. How can one resist a class through the Young Chef's Academy, TinyTreks or the Community School of Music and Art? Here is a sampling of what you can expect to find when you query like-minded moms and research this area:

1 Community School of Music and Art (arts4all.org)

Located in Mountain View, the CSMA is a gold mine for art and music classes for kids of all ages. In addition to classes offered at the campus itself, the Arts in Action program offers camps in the summer, which are often a good litmus test for enrolling in an ongoing art or music program during the year.

CSMA's preschool program "is designed to create

Above: Preschoolers can improve their gross motor development and have fun at classes like those offered at The Little Gym.

age-appropriate experiences in art and music for children from 18 months through age 4,” says Linda Covello, CSMA art school director. The very youngest children explore through process-oriented classes and progress in their skills and experiences as they are introduced to art and music from around the world. These classes help children develop fine motor skills, listening skills and the basic language of art and music as they build imagination and creative expression.

Unique about these preschool classes is that parents attend the classes and learn the use of art materials and songs along with the children, in order to continue the experience at home.

2 Happy Hollow Park and Zoo (hhpz.org)

While this Bay Area landmark may not offer on-going classes, it is a hot spot for ongoing education and fun. The expansive park and zoo reopened in March, boasting its \$72 million green renovation that includes 12 acres of existing ride areas and Zoo. There are four additional acres that offer several new animal exhibits, veterinary and commissary buildings, an Education Center, Guest Services and Gift Shop, a restaurant, a new parking lot and a pedestrian bridge. Happy Hollow staff also perform puppet shows that are sure to delight. Entrance fee is \$12 for ages 2 – 69 (0-1 is free), or you can become a member.

3 Hiruko Center (hirukocenter.com)

A unique form of martial arts that focuses on healing while teaching the skills of Tae Kwan Do, Hiruko is a holistic wellness model that incorporates integrity, innovation, action and connection. Based in Palo Alto, classes are offered for ages 3 and up.

“The founders and teachers at Hiruko Center in Palo Alto do an amazing job of teaching children of all abilities the

fundamentals of Tae Kwan Do in a safe and nurturing setting that feels like a team,” says Stephanie Nelson of Mountain View. “The kids learn about keeping safe and treating others with respect, while focusing your eyes, mind and body, and most importantly, having fun.”

4 Juguemos en Español/Let’s Play in Spanish (letsplayinspanish.com)

Juguemos en Español, or Let’s Play in Spanish, teaches toddlers through kindergarteners the Spanish language in an energetic and effective way. They offer parent participation or drop-off classes in various locations throughout the Bay Area, from Santa Cruz to San Francisco. Founder Suzy

Dorn is a musician who has written numerous catchy songs in Spanish that make learning fun. Instructors are musically-inclined and use puppets. All activities are hands-on.

5 Kidz Love Soccer (kidzlovesoccer.com)

Founded more than 30 years ago, Kidz Love Soccer caters to a wide range of ages, from 2 ½ to 12-years-old and is the perfect introduction to sports. The program teaches basic soccer skills in a non-competitive environment for the youngest child who just wants to kick the ball around and learn the basics. The program grows gradually competitive as the child’s skill level increases. There are many class

times to choose from and camps are offered in the summers. Kidz Love Soccer spans locations from San Jose to Millbrae.

6 The Little Gym (thelittlegym.com)

With locations from Morgan Hill to Millbrae, The Little Gym gives kids the cardiovascular workout they need. It offers a wide range of classes that include karate, gymnastics, dance, sports and cheerleading. Parent-child classes start as young as 4 months old, and there are drop-off classes when kids are ready. In this program, kids are preparing their



The Community School of Music and Art offers classes for children starting at 18 months old.

Quick Tips for Scouting Out Other Activities

■ Check out your **local city recreation center** for inexpensive classes – a great place to try a sport on for size, or to see if your child is interested in the arts without running out and purchasing a piano.

■ Your **local library** offers baby and toddler classes, story time, puppet shows and other learning programs.

Because they are typically free, you may need to sign up in advance and quickly.

■ Your local **YMCA** is a great resource for youth activities. Most YMCAs run parent-baby development classes and offer youth sports, including basketball, karate, swimming, flag football and even skateboarding.