

Selecting a Quality School-Age Program



America's most trusted child care resource.

1-800-424-2246

[ChildCareAware.org](https://www.ChildCareAware.org)

Why is a quality school-age program important for your child?

- ▶ Children are likely to spend as many hours in their out-of-school-time program as in school.
- ▶ Quality school-age programs help your child grow socially, emotionally and physically.
- ▶ Quality school-age programs support your child's learning. Children in quality school-age programs tend to do better in school.
- ▶ Low adult child ratios allow individual attention and help children build strong relationships with caring adults.
- ▶ Children who have attended quality school-age programs are less likely to engage in criminal behavior.
- ▶ Children in quality school-age programs are less likely to smoke, drink alcohol and use drugs.
- ▶ Quality school-age programs build links to the community and encourage community service.
- ▶ You can be more productive at work when you know your child is safe after school, during school breaks and during the summer vacation.

How do you select a quality program for your child?

- ▶ Think about the type of program that would best serve your child and family.
- ▶ Ask friends, family members and school personnel for recommendations.
- ▶ Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency (CCR&R). An information specialist can give you facts about school-age child care and a list of school-age child care options in your area that meet your needs. Call 1-800-424-2246 to find the CCR&R in your area.
- ▶ Look for programs that are dedicated to continuous improvement and are working toward accreditation.
- ▶ Once you receive several referrals, narrow your search by calling a number of programs and asking about availability, hours and fees. Ask if they are open on school vacation days and in the summer.
- ▶ After you have narrowed your list to a few options, make appointments to visit the programs and to interview the staff.

During your visit, remember to look, listen and ask questions.

Look at the staff and children.

- ▶ Are they happy to be at the program?
- ▶ Do the children seem engaged in their activities?
- ▶ Are there activities for children of different ages?
- ▶ Are staff involved with the children?
- ▶ Are both the indoor and outdoor spaces safe and clean with adequate equipment?
- ▶ Do snack menus include foods that are healthy and nutritious?

Listen to the sounds of the program.

- ▶ Do you hear laughter and lively conversation?
- ▶ Do you hear staff engaged in conversation with the children and youth?

Ask questions.

- ▶ Do the staff have training to work with school-age children?
- ▶ Are all staff trained in CPR and first aid?
- ▶ Is there ongoing training available to the staff?
- ▶ Is the program licensed? Is the program accredited by a national organization?
- ▶ Is transportation available from school or to other programs (athletics, dance, etc.)?
- ▶ Is the program open during school holidays or when schools close for emergencies?
- ▶ Is there a time for children to do homework?
- ▶ Does the program have a relationship with your child's school?
- ▶ Are children involved in planning program activities?
- ▶ Is there a parent board or council?

Make a choice.

- ▶ Tear off the checklist and take it with you as you look for a program for your child.
- ▶ Consider the information you have collected, and discuss the options with your child.

Your child deserves a rich learning environment after school.

What to look for, listen for and ask about on your visits

Look and Listen:

- Does the program seem clean, safe and organized?
- Do children and youth appear to be happy in the program?
- Do you hear happy sounds in the program?
- Are the children busy with activities?
- Do the children help each other and cooperate?
- Do staff seem to work well together? Are staff respectful of each other?
- Are staff engaged in activities and conversation with the children and youth?
- Are there adequate materials and space for a variety of activities?
- Are there quiet, soft spaces for reading, quiet games and relaxing as well as space for active play?
- Do the materials and program space reflect diversity?
- Does the space reflect the work and interests of the children and youth in the program?
- Does the program provide a rich learning atmosphere that supports children's education?
- Is the playground area safe? Is it fenced in? Is there cushioning material under climbing equipment?
- Does the bathroom look and smell clean?
- Are all hazardous materials kept out of reach of children and youth?
- Is food nutritious? Do food preparation areas look and smell clean?

Tear off this sheet and take it with you as you look for a program for your child. Ask questions and feel free to take notes about what you see and hear.

Remember to think about the needs of your family and your child.

Ask The Children:

- Do you like coming here?
- Are you able to choose what activities you want to do and with whom?
- Do you help plan activities?
- Do the children here get along well with each other?
- Do you feel safe here?

Ask The Director:

- Does the program have references?
- Is the program licensed?
- Does the program follow quality standards for school-age care? Is the program accredited?
- Does the program have written policies and procedures, including emergency plans?
- Have all staff members been trained in CPR and first aid?
- Do the staff have specific training to work with school-age children?
- Has a satisfactory criminal history background check been conducted on each adult present?
- Has the program been inspected by the licensing agency within the last 12 months?
- Does the program welcome drop-in visits and parent ideas and involvement?
- Does the program offer any financial assistance?
- How does the program serve children with special needs?
- How does the program support children's education and learning?

Ask The Staff:

- What is your system for knowing where my child is at all times?
- What is your procedure for handling emergencies?
- How do you handle sick children?
- Are children able to get a drink or use the bathroom when needed?

Helpful Hint: You can copy and take this checklist with you on visits, or use the *Evaluating Child Care Worksheet* that has additional information and room for writing notes. This worksheet is available at www.ChildCareAware.org or by calling 1-800-424-2246.

Child Care Aware® is committed to helping parents find the best information on locating quality child care and child care resources in their community. In partnership with Child Care Resource & Referral agencies (CCR&R), Child Care Aware® builds consumer awareness and supports families in making choices for the care and education of their children.



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For additional resources or help finding your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency (CCR&R), call:

1-800-424-2246

TTY Line: 1-866-278-9428

ChildCareAware.org

For local information contact:



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