

What to look for in After School Programs

The weekday hours between 3PM and 6PM present a serious challenge for all too many families. This article will give you a checklist of things to look for in choosing an After-School Program, and steps you can take if you don't find the program you want in your community.

In the US nearly 28 million school age children have both parents employed. About 7 million of them are alone without any adult supervision every day after school. That represents millions of kids on their own, and perhaps even with responsibility for younger siblings, 15 or more hours every week. The need for safe, educational and fun after-school activities has never been greater.

Look for after-school programs in your community. Often you can find a school that is open as a Community Learning Center. These centers represent an efficient use of school buildings, and can minimize the need to transport some or all of the students they serve. Nonprofit youth organizations [such as YM/YWCA or scouts] very often are partners in school-based programs or maintain their own programs off school grounds. Churches and other faith-based organizations also sponsor centers, quite often in their own facilities. If you can't find any such program, gather a group of parents and work with one or more local organizations to create one.

8 things to look for in a quality after-school program:

1. Is the physical location safe? Secure? Drug-Free?
2. Will your children get homework help and encouragement? Is tutoring available? Are there educational enrichment activities?
3. Is the program fun for kids? Inviting? Interesting?
4. Are parents welcome? Are they required to give time? Can community members volunteer?
5. Are the activities well suited to your community?
6. Are staff members professional?
7. What community organizations are involved?
8. Is it affordable and available when and where YOUR FAMILY needs it?

Be sure that you get answers to all of these questions. DISCUSS them with your family [include kids whenever you can]. That way you can decide if a specific program is RIGHT for you. But what if NONE in your area seems like the right one? Then what?

- Gather a group of concerned people. You will find that many if not most working parents would agree that there are not nearly enough high-quality after-school options.



- Talk details. Find out exactly what your neighbors and friends are looking for, and, even more important, how they are willing to help. You'll be surprised at the many people, parents or not, who would be happy to share an interest or skill.
- Talk to the non-profit leaders in your community. Enlist their help in general and specific ways.
- Publicize your efforts at meetings and in local publications that will accept your letter or article.
- DON'T STOP until you find or create a GREAT EXPERIENCE for your kids while you are at work each day!

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