



Child Care Referral Service

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Approaches to School-Age Child Care

School-age childcare includes almost any program that regularly enrolls children from kindergarten through early adolescence during the times when schools are traditionally closed. This includes programs operated by schools, family day care providers, recreation centers, youth-serving organizations, and child care centers. Also known as extended day programs, before-and after-school programs provide enrichment, academic instruction, recreation, and supervised care. An array of drop-in and part-time programs also serve an ad hoc child care function.

Options Available to Families of School-age Children

Changes in family structure and values have altered the way in which many children are cared for. More mothers are in the labor force; more families are headed by a single parent; and fewer relatives are available to care for children. Increasing numbers of families are looking for ways to care for their children in before-and-after school programs or through the use of a patchwork quilt of care arrangements.

There are many options for school-age care. Each offers advantages and disadvantages, and none is right for all children under all circumstances. Some children may benefit from the slower pace and smaller environment of a family day care home, while others may need the larger physical and social settings of an after-school program. Children with special talents may enjoy a narrowly focused program that allows them to improve their skills, while other children may require highly varied programs that help them maintain their interests.

Developmental Needs of a School-age Children

Self-care arrangements do not meet the developmental needs of some school-age children. As these children navigate the passage from early childhood to adolescence, they need opportunities to make friends, play, develop skills and initiative, see products through to completion, and receive attention and appreciation from caring adults.

Many professionals are concerned about children who are on their own after school and children for whom relationships with other children, adults, and family members are no longer are no longer a given. A number of questions were rising about self-care. How much self-care is appropriate, and at what age is it appropriate? Are children on their own at a greater risk for premature sexual experimentation or drug or alcohol use?

Characteristics of Quality School-age Programs

Researchers summarized three years of research on programs in the U.S. In the course of this research, it was discovered that the best school-age childcare programs have certain common elements. These programs:

- Offer a safe environment that fosters optimal development;
- Employ a sufficient number of qualified, well-trained staff;
- Are administered efficiently;
- Encourage staff-parent interaction;
- Balance activities to include structured and unstructured time, teacher-directed and child – initiated experiences, and a range of activities;
- Capitalize on the interests of the children and opportunities for informal, social learning;
- Use community resources as much as possible;
- Communicate clear, consistent expectations and limits to children;
- Provide indoor and outdoor space for active play, and places for socialization and private time.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has established the National Academy Of Early Childhood Programs, which offers accreditation to centers serving children through age eight. Its validation criteria confirm the elements if quality programming mentioned above.

The School-Age Child Care project of Wellesely College Center for Research on Women has created self-guided assessment instructions for school-age childcare programs. Assessing School-Age Child Care Quality (ASQ) examines a program to determine which areas are strong and which could be improved. ASQ is designed to create a dialogue among program participants as they explore strategies for program change.

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