

# FINDING QUALITY SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAM (AFTER-SCHOOL) CARE FOR YOUR CHILD

For Rules, Regulations & other school-age program information, contact (4 Cs: Community Coordinated Care for Children @ (239) 213-1137 or 1-866-987-5678

## YOUR CHOICES

Have you considered?

- Changing your work schedule so that you could be home when your child returns from school? Some employers allow flexible work hours or job sharing.
- Hiring a friend, neighbor or relative to care for your child in your home?
- Arranging with neighbors to have your child go to their home after school?
- If none of the situations above is possible or suitable, you'll want to find a good child care program for the times that school is not in session. Two options are:
  1. A **Family Day Care Home** where someone cares for a few children in her or his home. (See *Family Day Care* in this directory)
  2. A **Child Care Center** where one or more staff care for a larger number of children. Many are located in schools, churches and community center, as well as in child care facilities. (See *School Age Programs* listings in this directory)

Some children do better in smaller groups with other children close to their own age. A family day care home is more likely to offer this environment. On the other hand, child care centers are likely to have more resources and activities, such as toys, books and field trips. You may want to look at both kinds of programs before deciding which is best for your child.

## WHERE TO LOOK

Many local agencies and organizations have after school programs for school age children. You might check first with your local school district. Many schools offer before and after school care, sometimes called extended day programs. Also, see if your employer has a program to help employees find school age child care. **See After-school programs listed in this directory.**

Other resources for finding out what's available in your community are:

- **The Yellow Pages of your telephone book.** Check the listings under "Child Care."
- **Child Care Referral Services.** (4 Cs: Community Coordinated Care for Children @ (239) 213-1137
- **The Licensing Division of Florida's Health and Rehabilitative Services Department** (239-338-1341)
- **Local Churches, Community Centers or Civic Groups**
- **Friends, Neighbors or Parents of Your Child's Classmates.** They may tell you not only about programs they know of, but also their own experiences with these programs.

## **DOES THE PROGRAM SUIT YOUR NEEDS?**

Once you've found the names of programs in your area, you'll want to make some telephone calls to see which programs offer you the right:

- **Age Group.** Does the program serve children the age of your child?
- **Location.** Is the program located near your child's school or close to public transportation? Or does the program have its own bus to pick up children from their school?
- **Cost.** Are the fees affordable? Is financial aid available?
- **Schedule.** Does the program operate during the hours and days that you need it? Is the schedule flexible enough to allow your child to attend an outside activity, such as a soccer club, that's not part of the program?

Your next step will be to visit the child care programs you're interested in, so that you can choose the best one for your son or daughter.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PROGRAM**

A school-age (after school) program should be different from a early childhood education program for preschoolers. It should allow school age children greater independence and offer activities that older children will enjoy.

A school-age program - even ones located in a school building - should not be a continuation of school activities. Children need time after school to relax and to choose what they want to do.

A high quality program will keep children safe and happy after school by providing caring adults, a pleasant physical environment and lots of fun activities. Such a program will include:

- **A Safe Environment.** The home or center and any outside areas should be large and safe enough for children's play. Children should be supervised by sight at all times. There should be written health, safety and emergency rules that all staff follow.
- **Qualified Staff.** The staff should have training that helps them work well with school age children in a group setting. This could include child development, recreation, education, social work or related areas. Good programs also provide ongoing staff training. In Florida, staff in licensed centers are required to have 30 hours of preliminary training and 8 hours of in service training annually; staff in family day care home are required to have a 3 hour training course.
- **Enough Staff.** Florida requires that there be one adult for every 25 children over the age of 5 in a licensed center. Family Day Care is a bit more complicated. (See *Family Day Care Homes* in this Directory) Ideally, look for child care centers that have at least one adult for every 10 to 15 school age children. Look for family day care homes that do not have more than 4 to 5 children at one time.
- **Good Adult-Child Interactions.** Staff should be friendly, helpful, patient and energetic. They should give positive guidance and discipline that encourages children to be independent and solve problems
- **Varied Activities.** Children should have lots of fun activities to choose from. They should be able to play in groups or by themselves. Children need time and space to let off steam" after school by running, jumping and climbing, and by participating in games and sports activities. They need plenty of equipment and toys, as well as art, craft and reading materials to keep them interested.
- **Quiet Time.** Children also should be allowed some "quite time" to unwind, do homework, or have a private conversation with a friend.
- **Parent Involvement.** Parents should get frequent information about how their child is doing. Good programs encourage parents to be involved in some way - for example, by attending a special family night, helping with a field trip, or sending a snack or some material needed for an art project.

In addition to these characteristics, a good program **allows parents to visit at any time, without an appointment or prior notice. It also encourages parents to express questions and concerns.**

## **EVALUATION OF SCHOOL-AGE (AFTERSCHOOL) PROGRAMS**

The better the program, the more checkmarks you'll have in the "yes" column. If you're not able to answer all the questions by observing the program, you'll want to talk to the program director or another staff member during your visit.

Most important, you must decide if the program will be something **your child** will enjoy each day after school. Remember that it's up to you to find the best possible after school care for your child.

## **COST OF SCHOOL-AGE (AFTERSCHOOL) PROGRAMS**

The cost of child care is a problem for many parents. If you've found one or more programs you like but can't afford the fees, financial help may be available. Ask the directors of the programs if they have reduced rates for parents with small incomes. If not, ask them to suggest places you can call to find out about sources of financial help. Some places that may know where help is available are:

- Your county or city social services or family services department.
- Child care referral services such as Community Coordinated Child Care 4 Cs (239) 213-3321
- The mayor's, city manager's or county manager's office.
- Your district's state senator or representative.

The after school hours can be a time for your child to learn things other than reading, writing and math. A high quality *School-Age Program* will take into account children's different interests and moods, and will provide a wide range of activities for your child to sample. At a good after school program, your child can learn how to get along with other children and how to use free time happily, creatively, productively and safely.

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## Evaluating After School Child Care Programs

The following checklist will help you measure the quality of the program you are considering. Take it along when you visit, and check each item.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Are the indoor and outdoor areas safe:	( )	( )
Are the children supervised by sight at all times:	( )	( )
Are bathrooms nearby?	( )	( )
Are there written health, safety and emergency rules?	( )	( )
Is the staff qualified in school age child care?	( )	( )
Are there enough adults for the number of children in the program?	( )	( )
Does the staff talk to children often and in a friendly, helpful way?	( )	( )
Does the staff listen to children, answering their questions and requests?	( )	( )
Does the staff encourage children to be independent?	( )	( )
Are children of both sexes given equal opportunity to try the same activities?	( )	( )
Does it appear that the staff does not use physical or other punishment that hurts, frightens, or humiliates children?	( )	( )
Are children encouraged to solve problems without being forced to do so?	( )	( )
Are children relaxed and happy while they play?	( )	( )
Are there fun and exciting activities to choose from each day?	( )	( )
Are there enough equipment and materials to make the play areas interesting?	( )	( )
Is there an area set aside for quiet activities?	( )	( )
Is there evidence that parents receive reports on their children?	( )	( )
Are there opportunities for parents to participate from time to time?	( )	( )
Can parents visit any time?	( )	( )
Are questions and comments from parents encouraged?	( )	( )