



Choosing a Quality School-Age Child Care or Summer Day Camp Program

School-Age child care programs are often found in schools, child care centers, YMCAs, recreation centers, community centers or churches. These programs may offer before and/or after school options, tutoring, or care during school holidays and summer breaks.

Remember to look, listen and ask questions before selecting a program for your child. Finding a quality child care and education setting for your school age child is very important. Call several programs to find out vacancy information, the hours of operation, the ages of children served and the cost. Consider whether there is school bus service from the school to the program or whether the program offers transportation to and from school. Make appointments to visit two or three that sound most promising. Try to spend at least one hour at each program when children are there. Use the following checklists to help you evaluate each program. Keep in mind what is best for your child and family's needs. Choose carefully.

REGULATION

Licensing does not guarantee quality care for your child. The states of Ohio and Kentucky do require licensing for most child care centers, however, not all programs are required to be licensed to operate legally. Many school age programs in these states are not required to be licensed. For more information in Ohio: 1-(866) 635-3748, option 2, www.jfs.ohio.gov/cdc and in Kentucky: (502) 564-2800, ext. 3305, www.chfs.ky.gov/dccbs/dcc.

NATIONAL ACCREDITATION

Accredited programs meet voluntary standards for child care that are higher than most state licensing requirements. Programs that meet these standards excel in the care and education of young children. The National After-School Association (www.naaweb.org) works with programs that serve school age children ages 5 to 14 years.

STATE QUALITY RATINGS

Programs with a state quality rating, voluntarily meet a tiered set of standards that exceed state requirements. The more stars, the higher the quality. Ohio operates Step Up to Quality, www.stepuptoquality.org, and Kentucky operates STARS for KIDS NOW, www.education.ky.gov.

QUESTIONS TO ASK & QUALITY INDICATORS TO LOOK FOR:

How have staff been trained to care for children?

- Director has college level training in how children learn and grow.
- Staff receive annual training in how children grow and learn and have experience working with school-age children.
- Staff have been employed long enough so that children form healthy bonds with them.
- Staff are trained on child abuse prevention and how to report suspected cases.

How will my child be able to learn and grow?

- Children are happy and involved.
- Activities should be child chosen for most of the day.
- Staff are positive role models for children.
- Staff are energetic and maintain a safe place, while being flexible and fun.

- Staff sit with children during mealtime and throughout the day to promote language and social skills.
- Toys and supplies are offered that promote learning at different levels, such as puzzles, books and games.
- Toys, games, arts, crafts and dramatic play supplies are plentiful so that children do not have to wait to use them.
- Supplies and equipment for indoor and outdoor play have a variety of choices.
- Group games and sports are offered for all ages.
- Time for talking, reading, listening to music, homework, or alone play is offered.
- Activities are interesting, fun and challenging. Children learn by doing.
- Children are encouraged to solve problems.
- Public resources and services are used to enhance learning and the program.

What shows that this is a healthy and safe place for my child?

- Children are well supervised at all times.
- Outdoor play area is in good condition, fenced, child sized equipment, shaded and open, with room to run and places to climb.
- Teachers and children's hands are washed regularly.
- Accreditation requires a minimum of two staff per group of 30 children, ages six and older.
- Written policies exist and are followed for children that are sick or become sick, injured or lost.
- Written policy regulates for storing and giving medicine to children.
- First-aid and CPR trained staff member and first aid kits are on-site at all times.
- Emergency and exit plans are posted and drills are practiced.
- All staff have successfully passed a criminal background screening.

How is family involvement encouraged?

- Parents are encouraged to visit at any time.
- Newsletters and information boards are used to keep families up to date.
- Parents are asked to offer ideas, help with planning or take part in the program.
- Parents are informed of any special events, visitors or trips.

How well is the program managed?

- Current license (if required) and compliance report are displayed.
- Schedules and lesson plans are posted and show daily offered activities.
- Program policies and rules are reviewed with and copies given to parents.
- Written policy that does not allow physical punishment. Discipline is handled in a positive way.
- Rules about holidays, vacations and other child absences are clearly stated.
- Staff meet regularly to plan and evaluate the program.

Warning signs:

- Program does not encourage parents to observe.
- Children move about for 30 minutes or more without interaction with staff or being involved in an activity.
- Staff spend most of their time scolding or controlling children.

For More Information

Contact 4C at 513-221-0033 in Southwest Ohio, 937-220-9660 in Miami Valley and 859-781-3511 in Northern Kentucky, or visit www.4cforchildren.org.