



Resources for Child Caring

Raising the standard of care for children

Approaches to School-Age Child Care

School-age child care 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 child care providers, recreation centers, youth 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 provide child care on short notice.

Options Available to Families of School-age Children

Changes in family structure and values have altered the way we look at child care. 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 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 others may want highly varied programs that help them broaden 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.



Approaches to School-Age Child Care, continued

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 a given. A number of questions are 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, 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 the best school-age childcare programs have certain common elements:

- A safe environment that fosters optimal development
- A sufficient number of qualified, well-trained staff
- Efficient administration
- Staff-parent interaction is encouraged
- Activities are balanced to include structured and unstructured time, teacher-directed and child-initiated experiences and a range of activities
- Programs capitalize on the interests of the children and opportunities for informal, social learning
- Community resources are used as much as possible
- Clear, consistent expectations and limits are communicated to children
- Indoor and outdoor space for active play and places for socialization and private time are provided

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 of quality programming mentioned above.

The School-Age Child Care project of Wellesley 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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