

LOOK, LISTEN, AND ASK

Tips for Choosing Quality Before-School and Afterschool Care



Use this tip sheet as a guide when you visit to help you look at, listen for, and ask about key features of a quality program. Please note that because of the current pandemic, some programs may not be able to offer in-person tours or program visits at this time. In this case, you should discuss virtual tour options with programs you are considering.

Look



- Look at the building, classroom space, materials, and equipment. Are they **clean** and in **good repair**?
- Look at the space where the children will be spending their time. Is it **inviting and appropriate** for school-agers? Would your child like to be there?
- Look to see if the spaces are **well organized** and materials are **easily accessible**. Are there a variety of materials and spaces for school-agers (such as arts and crafts, dramatic play, games, physical activities, computers, reading area, areas to relax)?
- Look at the program schedule. Is there a **mix of activities** planned (indoor and outdoor, alone and small and large groups, active and quiet, and staff-directed and child-initiated activities)? Is there time for children to **relax and just "hang out"**?
- Look at the outdoor area and play equipment. Does it look **appropriate for school-age children**?

Listen



- Listen to how staff are interacting with the children. You should hear a **calm, positive tone of voice** at an **appropriate volume level**.
- Listen to the sounds you hear while visiting the program. Do you hear **frequent laughter and conversations**? Do you hear children playing?
- Notice the smells while you are visiting the program. Are they **clean, pleasant smells** or do you notice strong unpleasant odors?

Ask



- Ask if the program is **licensed or accredited**.
- Ask for a copy of the **program's policies**. Review important information on philosophy, billing, payments, drop-off/pick-up procedures, discipline and guidance policy, closures, etc.
- Ask if the program provides **transportation** for children to and from school. Is there an additional cost for this service? How are children supervised during transport? Is a safe and reliable vehicle used? Is the driver licensed and insured? Are children properly restrained?
- Ask about the program's **sick child policy**? How does it handle children who become sick onsite?
- Ask how the program handles giving children **medication while in care**, if applicable.
- Ask **how children are grouped** (ages, grades). Are separate areas of the building used for different ages and interests? Is there mixing of age groups?
- Ask what the adult to child ratio is (how many children each adult must supervise).
- Ask how the program supports children in **completing their homework**. Is there a designated time or space for completing homework?
- Ask how the program handles **challenging behaviors**. How does it resolve conflict between children?
- Ask if they provide **meals and snacks**.
- Ask about the **education and training requirements for program staff**. Do they participate in continuing education? Are staff specifically trained to work with school-age children?
- Ask **how the program keeps families informed** about things happening in the program.
- Ask if the program **accepts child care assistance payments or offers a sliding fee, discounts, or scholarships**, if applicable.
- If your child has a disability, ask how the program would support your child throughout the day. Ask if **staff received training on how to support children with disabilities**.