

LOOK, LISTEN, AND ASK

Tips for Choosing School Vacation and Summer Programs



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 around the program. Are the building, materials, and equipment **clean and in good repair**? Is the space **inviting and appropriate** for school-age children?
- Look at the activity spaces. Are they **well organized**? Do they offer a **variety of materials** that children would find interesting?
- Look to see if children have a **designated place to leave their belongings**.
- Look to see if there are spaces where **children can relax or have quiet time**.

Listen



- Listen to how staff are interacting with the children. You should hear a **positive, nurturing tone of voice** at an **appropriate volume level**.
- If children are present, listen to the sounds in the program. Do you hear **frequent laughter and conversations** among the children?
- Notice the smells of program. Are they **clean, pleasant smells** or are they strong unpleasant odors?

Ask



- Ask if the program is **licensed or accredited**.
- Ask if the program offers an **open house or scheduled tours (virtual or in-person)**.
- Ask about **education and training requirements for staff** (including CPR and First Aid). Are staff specifically trained to work with children and are they required to participate in ongoing training?
- Ask if program **staff undergo background checks** as a part of the hiring and screening process.
- Ask **how the program groups children**. How many adults are responsible for each group? Are there separate areas for different age or interest groups? Do age groups mix? How often?
- Ask how the program **helps new attendees get oriented** and become comfortable with participating.
- Ask if the program provides **meals and snacks**.
- Ask if **field trips are part of the program**. How are children supervised on field trips, including the time spent traveling to and from the location?
- If the program provides **transportation**, is a safe and reliable vehicle used? Is the driver licensed and insured? Are children properly restrained according to their height and weight?
- Ask how the program handles **children who need to take medication** while onsite.
- Ask about the **activities offered**. Can children choose which activities to participate in?
- Ask about their **safety and supervision practices**.
- Ask how the program handles **challenging behaviors**. How does it resolve **conflict between children**?
- Ask about the program's **sick child policy**. What does the program do if a child becomes sick onsite?
- Ask if **water activities** are a part of the program. How are children supervised during these activities and how is water safety enforced? What are their water safety procedures?
- If the program includes outside activities, ask when and how often children **have access to drinking water, shade, and restrooms**.
- Ask for a **copy of the program's policies**. Review information on billing, payments, pick-up procedures, safety, emergency planning, etc.
- Ask if the program **accepts child care assistance 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.