



Finding Out-of-School Programs for Children and Youth

Finding out-of-school care for your child can be difficult. Your time is needed to call and visit possible programs.

Try to make a good first choice for your child. It's hard for children to switch from one program to another. Children depend on routine in their lives to feel safe and secure. So, check out all the possibilities before you choose a program for your child.

Many parents feel guilty and anxious about placing their children in out-of-school programs. Finding high quality, affordable, and reliable care decreases concerns and worries. Parents know their children are safe, happy, and involved in activities that lead to healthy development.

How do you find a program for your child? The steps listed below will guide you in your search.

Step One - Finding the Names of Programs

Remember to start early to find a program.

To learn when your child will need to be enrolled in an out-of-school program, call your child's school. Ask them for a calendar of the school year. Most schools have their calendars set months before the school year begins. Learn the dates of school vacations, the dates when school begins and ends, and the hours your child will spend in school. This will help you plan your schedule as well as your child's.

Here are some ideas to help you locate the names of programs:

- Is there a program at your child's school? If not, ask the school if they know of any out-of-school programs for youth in the area.
- Call the YMCA or YWCA, churches, and/or the community/recreation center in your town.
- Call the NH Child Care Resource and Referral at 1-800-264-7189.
- Ask other parents for the names of programs.
- Ask friends, relatives, and neighbors.
- Check the phone book under child care.



Different Types of Programs

Programs for school age children and youth may take place in a school, a community center, a church or synagogue, or a home. You need to explore your options and decide what is best for your child.

Home-based or family child care providers offer supervision in their homes. These providers may be neighbors, friends, or relatives. They may live close by so you don't need to worry about transportation. Home-based providers have fewer children than a large child care center. Still, it's important to know what kind of activities the providers offer children. For example, is the television frequently used as a way to keep the children occupied? Also, make sure health and safety regulations are followed.

Center-based programs often take place in schools, YMCAs or YWCAs, Boy's or Girl's Clubs, community centers, churches or synagogues, or community child care centers. Center based programs often offer many activities. There are quiet areas as well as space for active, noisy play. Children can do homework, eat snacks, and play outside. Clubs may also take place in the programs.

Other center based programs focus on one type of activity. For example, a program may feature sports, arts and drama, religious study, computer study, or music.

An in-home provider is someone who comes to, or lives in, your home. The provider may be a neighbor, friend, relative, or someone else who is paid to care for your children in your home. They may be considered a nanny, an au pair, or a baby sitter. Although this type of care is expensive, it may make sense if you have three or more children. An in-home provider can transport children to a variety of after school activities. This care may be best if you have a child with a disability or if you need care at night or on weekends. Be sure the in-home provider has had education in child development and experience in child care.

Step Two - Calling Programs

To save yourself time, call potential programs or providers. Listed below are some questions to ask. Rehearse by asking these questions to a friend if you're uncomfortable calling people on the phone.

- What is the name of the program director?
- Is the program licensed?
- When is the program open (for example in the summers, on holidays)?
- What are the hours the program is open?
- What are the ages of the children served?
- Is transportation provided from the child's school to the program?
- What is the number of children for one adult in a group?
- What is the total number of children in my child's age group?
- What are the ages of the children in my child's age group?
- What are the qualifications (background, training) of the program staff?
- How long have the staff worked in the program?
- Can you tell me briefly about the philosophy of the program?
- What is the fee (daily, weekly, monthly)?
- Is there an opening for my child when I need it starting on_____?
- Can you give me the names and phone numbers of references (parents of children who have attended or are attending the program)?
- When is a good time to visit?

Two important questions to ask references are:

- "What did you like the most, and the least, about the program (or, provider)?"
- "Would you choose this program again for your child?"

Step Three - Visiting the Programs and Deciding on Quality

Based on your phone calls, you may have the names of one or more programs that interest you. Before you visit the programs, think carefully about the needs and interests of your family and your child. Perhaps your child needs a quiet, homelike situation with a lot of attention from an adult. Or, perhaps your child is very active, or is interested in sports or hobbies. Your child's age, needs and developmental level are important to consider when choosing care.

Be sure to consider your attitudes about discipline, education, food and nutrition, adult-child interaction, and certain activities. Consider your schedule and that of other family members. Consider the cost of the program and where it's located. Try to find programs that match the needs of your family and child.

The next step in finding out-of-school care is visiting the program. Visiting will help you determine the quality of a program. Take time to walk around the program and talk with the staff. Try to imagine your child in the program. By asking questions and watching the children and adults, you should be able to answer the questions below.

Name of Program _____

Address _____

Date _____

Does The Staff

- Seem healthy and energetic?
- Enjoy children?
- Appear warm, friendly, and affectionate?
- Enjoy talking with you?
- Listen to, watch, and help children to prevent and/or to solve conflicts?
- Pay attention to children and praise them?
- Work as a team?

- Handle discipline as you would like?
- Seem to understand the developmental level of children, including their need for independence and to make choices?
- Treat each child as an individual?
- Help children to cooperate and respect others?
- Help children to solve problems, make decisions, and accept responsibility?
- Take time to talk to parents about their children?
- Provide good role models for the children?

Does The Environment Have

- Enough indoor and outdoor space so all children can move freely and safely?
- Enough furniture, games, and activities?
- Equipment, supplies, toys, and activities that are safe and in good repair?
- Adequate heat, light, and ventilation?
- Safe windows and stairs?
- Working smoke detectors/fire extinguishers?
- A safe place to store medicines, cleaners, poisons, matches, and other dangerous items?
- An alternate exit in case of fire and a safety plan to follow in emergencies?
- An outdoor play area that is enclosed, secure, and free of litter?
- Staff trained in first aid and CPR?
- Clean play areas, bathrooms, and kitchen?
- Space for both active and quiet play, plus a space to do homework?
- Space for personal belongings?
- Nutritious meals and snacks?
- A place for children who are sick or tired to rest?

- A lay-out so adults can see and supervise children at all times?

Does the Program Have

- A license?
- A daily schedule?
- Age appropriate activities so children can practice skills, work creatively, and enjoy interests?
- A policy manual for staff and a parent's handbook?
- An opportunity for children to help set rules/limits and the consequences for breaking a rule?
- Parents actively involved in the program?
- Involvement of the children in determining the program's activities?
- Opportunities for children to fulfill important roles in their communities, such as volunteering to read to young children or planting a community garden?

Some additional questions to think about before placing your child in a camp

- Are lifeguards on duty?
- Is there adequate day time and night time supervision of the children?
- What type of transportation is available and is it safe?
- Are medical staff on call? Is there a hospital or trauma center near-by in case of an emergency?
- How old are the counselors? What is their training and experience?

Step 4 - Making the Decision

Many factors are important when choosing an out-of-school program. Still, you want your child to be happy. An important item to consider is the qualifications of the staff. Did you feel comfortable with them? Did they have training and experience working with children and youth? Do you think your child would be happy in their program?

When choosing care, many families realize that the best solution for them is to combine programs. This is sometimes called 'patch work' child care. This type of care is generally not recommended for preschool and younger children. However, many school age children and their families enjoy this type of arrangement. For example, a child could attend an after-school program at a church on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. On Tuesday and Thursday afternoons he/she could attend a sports program at the community center. On Friday afternoons, the child could participate in a reading program at the town library.

It's best to look at your own situation and decide what works for you and your children. No two families are alike.

For additional information on out-of-school programs for children and youth, contact your county UNH Cooperative Extension office or call PlusTime New Hampshire at 603-798-5850.

Credit

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