



Questions to ask when looking for an afterschool program

Many of today's working professionals grew up in single-income households where only one of their parents went to work each day. But that once-common dynamic is now largely a thing of the past, as economic necessity has driven both moms and dads to continue their careers even after they have had children.

That reality has led many working parents to lean heavily on afterschool programs to serve as safe havens that provide structure for their kids while mom and dad are still at work. Choosing an after-school program is a decision many parents find difficult, but there are some questions parents can

ask during their searches for programs that should make those decisions easier.

Can I tour and observe the facility?

When considering a particular afterschool program for their children, parents should ask to tour the facility, paying specific attention to the areas of the facility where their youngsters will spend the bulk of their time. Do the classrooms look clean? Are the materials up-to-date? Is the playground equipment safe and well-maintained? Well-maintained facilities with new supplies and equipment can make the program more enjoyable and safer for kids.

Parents also should

ask to spend some time observing the facility when it is abuzz with activity. Such observation can give parents an idea of what their kids' afternoons will be like should they enroll in the program. Stay out of the way, but watch to see how engaged kids and staff members are and how conducive to doing homework the environment is.

What is the program schedule?

Schedule is a significant issue for working parents, many of whom want a program that is open on holidays when schools are closed. Flexibility also is a concern for working parents, some of whom may need a

facility that is open before school starts. Parents also may want a facility that allows youngsters to attend just a few days a week, which might make certain programs that require parents to commit to full weeks less enticing. When discussing the facility schedule with staff members, be sure to get as specific a schedule as possible, inquiring about any additional costs associated with extending the typical schedule as well.

What are the activities available to the kids?

Many afterschool programs provide more than just a place for kids to sit and do their homework until their folks come to pick

them up. Ask staff members at the facility how big a role activities play in their programs. Many programs try to offer an array of activities that range from academic programs to athletic events and more. A wide range of programs can increase the chances that youngsters will find activities that pique their interests and make the afterschool program more enjoyable.

How are staff members vetted?

Parents also may want to ask about the program's hiring practices. Ask about the background checks performed on staff members and if the facility requires any specific certifications

for staff who will be dealing directly with children.

When asking about hiring practices, parents also may want to inquire about the ratio of staff members to children. The smaller the ratio, the more attention youngsters will receive. Facilities with an especially high ratio of staff to children may not be able to provide the type of environment parents want for their children.

Finding an afterschool program requires parents to exercise their due diligence. Parents who can be patient and learn as much about facilities as possible are more likely to find the right fit for their children.

School bus safety tips to impart to youngsters



ists find kids in the danger zone are more difficult to see, and children can get struck by either the bus or oncoming cars that fail to stop when the bus is picking kids up or dropping them off.

Knowing the safety rules While a large part of protecting children is on the shoulders of the school bus driver, it is also vital for passengers to learn the basics of school bus safety. Kindergarteners or children who are riding the bus for the first time should be taught the rules of school bus safety.

Some schools offer a school bus tour prior to the new school year. This lets youngsters acclimate themselves with the look and feel of the school bus. This introduction also may in-

clude information about bus safety, but parents can also educate their children (and themselves) about using caution in and around the bus by following these guidelines.

* Get to the bus stop 5 to 10 minutes prior to the assigned pickup time. Rushing last-minute can lead to injury, especially if you're chasing down the bus.

* Remain on the sidewalk or grass at the bus stop. Do not step off the curb into the street until the bus has arrived and is completely stopped.

* When boarding the bus, go directly to a seat and sit down. Buckle up if there are seatbelts on the bus.

* Remain seated while the bus is in motion.

* Keep voices low so as not to distract the driver.

* Keep your head and hands inside of the bus, and never hang out of the window.

* Do not throw things on the bus or play rough with friends or classmates.

* Keep the aisle clear at all times.

* Be careful when getting off the bus. Hold on while going down the stairs.

* Only get off at your designated stop unless you have permission to get

off elsewhere.

* When exiting the bus, walk at least 10 steps past the front of the bus and cross in front where the driver can see you. Do not cross behind the bus.

* Wait for the driver to give you a signal that it is safe to cross. Be sure to check that all cars on the road have come to a complete stop.

* Get to the sidewalk or off the street as quickly as possible.

* If you've forgotten something on the bus, do not run back and attempt to retrieve it. The driver might not see you and start the bus. Rather, call the bus company and see if you can pick it up at another time.

* Do not get into the cars of strangers waiting around bus stops, even if they offer to take you home.

Parents can arrange to meet with bus drivers so that they will recognize their faces. Adults also can encourage schools to host bus safety courses to further ensure their youngsters are safe.



Each day thousands upon thousands of children board school buses to take them to and from school. Parents and caregivers entrust their children's well-being to the care of school bus drivers and aides. Although parents may worry about school bus accidents, such accidents are few and far between.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration advises that school buses are designed to be safer than passenger vehicles in avoiding crashes and protecting against injury. Buses are arguably the safest mode of transportation for getting kids to and from school. By keeping millions of cars off the roads surrounding schools, school buses contribute to less crowded roadways, which are less conducive to accidents.

Danger zone

Though parents may feel buses are most likely to be in accidents while in transit, experts advise that children are more likely to get hurt during pickups and drop-offs when they're in the "danger zone" of the bus. The danger zone is a 10-foot radius around the outside of the bus. Bus drivers and other motor-

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