



How to Choose a Quality Out-of-School Time Program for Your Child

Parents want their children in quality out-of-school time (OST) programs. These programs support working families, inspire learning and keep children safe. But parents often ask, “How do I recognize a high-quality OST program?”

Prime Time Palm Beach County, Inc. is an organization that helps to train OST counselors and staff. Prime Time offers a checklist of ten questions to help parents choose a quality OST program:

- Does the program have written policies to protect the safety of children?
- Is the program organized? Ask to see a printed calendar or schedule of activities. Ask if the activities usually begin and end on schedule. Does the staff seem to be rushed or calm?
- Is the OST staff trained in strategies that result in providing children with new and positive learning experiences? Parents/guardians should ask to see educational credentials of the staff.
- Does the OST staff involve children as partners in the program and encourage them to work together?
- Does the program staff create an environment that allows children to feel a sense of belonging? Staff who shame, ridicule or embarrass children are creating an unhealthy environment.
- How does the OST staff handle conflicts, arguments, disagreements, or misunderstandings among the children? Are there clear rules for behavior?
- Are there lots of activities for children to do? Or is the program “one size fits all?”
- Are the youth in the program taking part in activities? Are they busy, or are they bored? Do they seem to be enjoying the activity?
- Does the program allow children to work on homework? Are staff members helping them with their homework? Are there other things the children are learning during the program (art, sports, music, cooking, etc.)?
- Does the program offer email updates, parent meetings, one-on-one talks, etc?

