

# The Transition

# to Kindergarten and Out-of-School Time Programs

## TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Afterschool and Summer Enrichment



The transition to kindergarten is a big event in the life of a child—and for the child’s parents and caregivers as well! If your soon-to-be kindergartener will need before- or afterschool care, be sure to think about that in your transition planning. Finding a program that you and your child are comfortable with can help make the transition to kindergarten successful.

## BEFORE KINDERGARTEN

**Think about what your child care needs** may be when your child enters kindergarten. Will you want before-school care? Afterschool care? Both?

**Confirm your child’s elementary school** before making afterschool plans. Some districts assign children to schools, while others offer a choice. Knowing which elementary school your child will attend can affect the before- and afterschool options that work best for your family.

**Determine what you can afford** to pay for child care and whether you may be eligible for assistance, such as through a subsidy, a voucher, or a child care scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

### Selecting a Program

**Ask whether there is onsite before- or afterschool care** at your child’s elementary school. More than one program might be offered. Gather information about all the options available so you can decide which one fits your family’s needs.

**Look for nearby programs** in the community. Find out whether programs offer transportation to and from your child’s school. Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral agency](#) or [statewide afterschool network](#) are great resources for finding afterschool programs.



### Make sure the hours

of the programs you’re considering meet your coverage needs. Is the program open during school vacation weeks? On early release days and holidays when the school might be closed? On snow days?

### Learn about financial assistance.

Some programs may accept child care subsidies, while others may not. Those that don’t accept subsidies may operate on a sliding fee scale or offer other tuition discounts.

### Visiting Programs

#### Schedule a time to visit

the programs you’re considering, and if possible, bring your child with you. Ask staff about the activities. Does the program offer a variety of things to do, such as arts and crafts, dramatic play, games, and physical activities? Is there a safe outdoor play area? Is there a designated homework space?



See [Making the Move Together](#) from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning for more suggestions on how to support children during the transition to kindergarten.

<sup>1</sup> Child care subsidy eligibility is handled by different agencies in different states, territories, and Tribes. These agencies include [CCDF lead agencies](#), [Temporary Assistance to Needy Families](#), and [Child Care Resource & Referral](#) agencies.

**Observe the children** during your visit. Do they seem happy and engaged in the activities? Are staff paying close attention to what's going on and interacting with the children?

**Ask staff how they encourage** children's social-emotional learning. Young children often need help navigating social interactions, managing frustration, and resolving conflict with peers. Staff should have the capacity to provide this support.



**If your child has a disability**, be sure to talk to staff about how the program can accommodate your child's needs. Ask whether they have experience addressing needs like your child's.

**Learn whether the program is flexible** and gives children choices. Kindergarten can be a big adjustment. Some children are tired after the school day ends and need time to unwind. Others have pent-up energy that they need to

express through physical activity. The program should address children's varying needs.

**Find out when registration** for the before- or afterschool program begins. It might be sooner than you think! Some programs fill up quickly, so be sure to call well in advance to secure your child's spot.



See [Summer Learning Fun: Tips for Parents and Caregivers](#) from NCASE for ideas on making the most of summer!

## DURING KINDERGARTEN

**Ask your child how** they like the afterschool program. What are their favorite parts? Is there anything they don't like?



**Check in with staff regularly** to find out how your child is adjusting to the program. Do they seem to be enjoying it? Are there any areas where your child is having difficulty? If so, find out what the staff are doing to help with the transition.

**Let staff know** about any significant changes in your child's

life that might impact their social-emotional well-being. Events such as the loss of a family member, divorce, or a close friend moving away can affect children. Staff should know when extra support might be needed.

**Look into "family nights"** or other opportunities to bring children and parents together through the program. This can be a great way to connect with other families in the community.

**Start thinking about summer programs.** (No, it's not too early!) Check out these [tips from NCASE](#) on engaging your child in fun, meaningful learning activities. Your child's afterschool provider may operate during the summer months. If so, find out what the program offers and compare it to others in your community to see which is the best fit.

## BEYOND KINDERGARTEN

**Congratulations! Your child has made it through a big transition.**

**Reflect on what your child liked best** about their afterschool program this year. (If you're not sure, ask your child!) Talk with staff about what they observed. What types of activities did your child enjoy most? Were there any challenges?



**Decide whether you want to keep** your child in the same afterschool program next year or make a change. If you decide to try a new program, think about what you hope will be different, and keep that in mind when looking at options.

**Consider how to support your child** during the transition to summer programming. Connect with

staff ahead of time to learn details about program activities and routines that you can share with your child.

**Reassure your child** that even if they may not see their school-year friends as often over the summer, they can reconnect with them in the fall. Find ways your child can keep in touch with friends and afterschool program staff over the summer months.

**In the years ahead, there will be more transitions for your child and family. Finding programs with enrichment opportunities that match your child's interests—such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), art, theater, cooking, or sports—can help your child build on their school-day learning and thrive in out-of-school time!**

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