

# Tips on Program Planning and Activities

## for Children Ages 5-11 in Out-of-School Time Programs

During their out-of-school time, children need time to play, explore, create, learn new skills, and relax. A balanced program should offer children free time as well as a wide variety of structured activities that are fun and interactive and that help them develop or enhance leadership and social skills, self-esteem, conflict resolution abilities, academic skills, and interests and hobbies. Programming can include opportunities for children to participate in group projects and special-interest clubs, work on homework, participate in tutoring and mentoring, go on field trips, and conduct community service projects. Quality out-of-school programs offer balanced, culturally-relevant programming that is tailored to children's interests and developmental needs as well as the needs and desires of parents, schools and communities. Following are basic suggestions for developing and implementing successful programming:

Survey parents, schoolteachers and children about children's interests and needs. Put together a simple survey asking about needs and listing types of activities that can be offered.

Involve children in program planning. Create a rotating "advisory group" of children who will represent the whole group. Present ideas to this group and get their input.

Decide on the regular daily, weekly, or monthly components of your program. Within each component, include many opportunities for children to make choices about their activities. Examples of components are:

- Homework and academic skill-building time (homework support, learning games for those not doing homework, tutoring, reading time)
- Outdoor recreation (offering choice of organized games and free play)
- Station rotation (choice between different stations - reading, board games, craft activities, computer use)
- Clubs (children can choose to be a member of a certain club that meets weekly for a set number of weeks - clubs could include art, music, dance, drama, sports such as basketball or soccer, reading, languages such as Spanish or French)
- Story time (children relax and listen to staff read a book or chapter of a book)
- Reading time (children choose a book or bring a book and everyone participates in quiet reading for a certain period of time)
- Field trips (children plan and participate in simple neighborhood field trips as well as more elaborate field trips requiring special transportation, planning and chaperones. Examples of field trip destinations: children's museum, art museum, parks, zoo, food pantry, nursing home, hospital, government buildings, historical sites.)
- Service-learning projects (children plan and participate in service projects on a regular basis - see NIOST tip sheet: "Tips for Effective Service-Learning in Out-of-School Time.")

Design appropriate routines and environments. Work with children to decide when and where different activities will take place, what kinds of transition time will be necessary, what materials and furnishings are needed to accommodate different activities, how the environment will look and feel, etc. Involve children in decorating the environment and change the way things look from time to time.

Establish and post a schedule of activities. Make sure children and parents understand the regular daily and weekly schedule of activities. Children and parents appreciate a sense of structure. Be flexible to accommodate for special events and for projects that take longer than expected.

Have activities focus on a theme each week or month. Brainstorm ideas with staff, parents and children and go through activity books for ideas. Tie themes to community events and holidays or build on the same themes that children are exploring at school. As much as possible, let themes emerge from ideas that come from the children. Following are some sample theme ideas:

- **Music** - Create instruments with household objects such as rice in a jar, glasses full of different amounts of water, and rubber bands stretched between nails. Have guest musicians come in. Research different instruments. Listen to and dance to all kinds of music. Hold a concert for families or at a hospital or nursing home.
- **Animals** - Create art and crafts representing favorite animals. Work together to create a mural of animals living in different parts of the world. Have guests bring in animals. Play charades and

guess what animal is being acted out. Make animal costumes. Research endangered species and write letters about concerns. Visit an animal shelter.

- **All About Me** - Make books about talents, likes, dislikes, favorite things, etc. Make personal history charts. Hold a talent show. Bring in baby pictures and current pictures and make them into a matching game. "Spotlight" a different child each day and have other children share what they like about the child being spotlighted. Go to a hospital or home for the elderly and make "About Me" books with the people there.
- **Nature** - Plant seeds and watch them grow. Go on a nature walk and collect different plants then do some research to find out about the plants you have gathered. Learn about a favorite flower or plant and create a poster about it. Learn about the weather. Incorporate science activities. Visit a sanctuary or arboretum. Research environmental issues in your community. Do a clean-up project.
- **Journalism** - Read and discuss selected newspaper articles. Do "reports" on daily events. Conduct interviews and do reports about other children or family members. Find out about neighborhood and school events, take pictures to go with reports, and publish a newspaper.

Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of your programming through focus groups and surveys. Make changes according to suggestions of staff, parents and children.

### **Sampling of Activity/Programming Resources:**

This list comprises a few resources which are representative of the vast array of materials available. This listing does not constitute an endorsement by NIOST.

#### **Available from School-Age Notes - (800) 410-8780; [www.schoolagenotes.com](http://www.schoolagenotes.com)**

*School-Age Child Care: An Action Manual for the 90's and Beyond* by Michelle Seligson, Michael Allenson

*School-Age Ideas and Activities for After School Programs* by Karen Haas-Foletta and Michele Cogley

*Summer Sizzlers and Magic Mondays: School-Age Theme Activities* by Edna Wallace

*Adventures in Art: Art and Craft Experiences for 7-14 Year Olds* by Susan Milord

*Take Part Art: Collaborative Art Projects* by Bob Gregson

*The Kids' Multicultural Art Book*

*Science Arts: Discovering Science Through Art Experiences* by MaryAnn Kohl and Jean Potter

*Showy Science: Exciting Hands-On Activities That Explore the World Around Us* by Hy Kim

*The Incredible Indoor Games Book and The Outrageous Outdoor Games Book* by Bob Gregson

*Games, Games, Games: Creating Hundreds of Group Games and Sports* by David Whitaker

*The Best Self-Esteem Activities for the Elementary Grades*

*The Kids' Guide to Service Projects* by Barbara Lewis

#### **Available from The Activities Club - (617) 924-1556; [theactivitiesclub.com](http://theactivitiesclub.com)**

The Activities Club Theme Guides and Resource Kits

Examples of themes offered: Marvelous Masks, Nature's Treasures, Take Flight!, Photography in a Snap

The Homework and Edutainment Club Guide and Resource Kit