

## **How to identify a great after school program**

What are your kids doing after school? About 15 per cent of Canadian children between the ages of 6-12 are left unsupervised after school, and that can lead to all sorts of trouble. If they aren't doing their homework, their grades can suffer. Unsupervised, they can start to experiment with drugs and alcohol. Or they can get involved in other risky behaviours: there's evidence that juvenile crime peaks between the hours of 2 and 6 pm between Monday and Friday.

A good after-school program can help provide structure, safety and supervision for kids. And, according to a 2013 study by the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto, after-school programs help children achieve success in a whole host of ways.

The study analyzed 39 community-based after school programs across Canada, drawn from more than 250 programs funded by the RBC After School Project since 1999.

Children who regularly participate in after school programs, over the course of several years, are more likely to complete their homework, achieving higher grades and lower dropout rates. In fact, high quality programs foster self-esteem, which in turn can increase math and reading scores. Kids in these programs have improved social skills, increased self-confidence, and are better able to form secure adult attachments. They have more positive attitudes towards school, with a greater interest in pursuing post-secondary education. They also show reduced sexual activity and drug use.

### **Here are ten things to look for in a good after-school program:**

- program provided at least 2-3 times per week, while longer participation is generally considered to lead to better outcomes
- a mix of academic, social and recreational activities that stimulate active learning
- interesting and developmentally-appropriate activities that grow more challenging during the course of the program.
- family involvement
- a low student-to-staff ratio
- staff with post-secondary education and training
- culturally-sensitive activities and non-judgmental staff
- low staff turnover
- fun programs for younger children that focus on helping the child's reading skills. Programs for high school students should have an unstructured socializing component, tutoring in math and exam preparation, and employment skill development
- rigorous program evaluation to identify effective and ineffective practices

The RBC After School Project has provided more than \$30 million to after-school programs across Canada since 1999, helping almost 35,000 children achieve more successful futures.