

Critical middle years; Young kids have few after-school options, but they're keen for something meaningful [CA] ^[1]

Author: Gordon, Andrea

Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 23 Apr 2007

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

It's 4 o'clock. Do you know where your children are?

Good question. Especially if you've got school-aged kids. Because for those in the so-called "middle years" - ages 6 to 12 - the hours between the school bell and dinner can be everything from active and fulfilling to lonely and treacherous. And a time when unsupervised kids can slip through the cracks.

Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, an associate professor at the University of British Columbia who has spent the past 18 months studying this age group, calls these "the critical hours."

They can be an opportunity for kids in quality after-school care or recreation programs to develop fitness, friendship and role models. Or, for kids left to their own devices, prime time for roaming the Internet, mainlining video games and junk food or, in later grade school, experimenting with sex, drugs and delinquency.

"Eighty per cent of moms these days work outside the home, and parents just want to keep their children safe," Schonert-Reichl says. "But there are not a lot of options." Especially affordable options that older kids actually want to attend.

Take Toronto, for example. Brenda Patterson, general manager of Toronto Children's Services, told a middle-years symposium last year that at least 35 per cent of the city's 204,000 kids age 6 to 12 are unsupervised after school "and many are taking on responsibilities at an early age that they shouldn't have to."

Lack of after-school options is one of the big topics at the National Learning Summit on Middle Childhood being held in Ottawa today and tomorrow. About 100 researchers, educators and community workers will discuss the needs of an age group that has been largely overlooked.

Sandwiched between the formative early years and the national child-care debate on one side, and crisis headlines about out-of-control teens on the other, the middle years are often painted as a gauzy time of innocence and free play.

But they are also a critical developmental stage. Kids spend more time in school than with their families. Peers become a major influence; with that come issues like bullying and peer pressure. Problems with learning and mental health may emerge.

...

After-school care ranges in cost and availability and is delivered by Boys' and Girls' Clubs, local parks and recreation programs, the YMCA, school-based child care, neighbourhood agencies or home-based care.

...

The after-school hours are also an opportunity to address the biggest worries about modern kids - obesity, lack of physical activity, unbridled media use, poor nutrition and homework angst. But what's needed are accessible quality programs that kids want to participate in.

...

Schonert-Reichl's research, which will be presented to the conference, backs that up. She surveyed 1,266 Vancouver-area children in Grades 4 through 7 about after-school activities and how they felt about themselves, their families and communities.

Three things surprised her: The kids, especially the boys, exhibited a declining sense of optimism and well-being as they got older; kids who had relationships with two or more adults they trusted outside their family were more successful; there was a huge disconnect between what kids were doing and what they wanted to be doing.

"The vast majority of children told us that they want to be engaged in activities that build their competence, their connectedness and their

physical health," she says. "Not one of the 1,266 said they wanted to watch more TV after school."

...

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Canada ^[2]

Tags: school-age ^[3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/07/04/critical-middle-years-young-kids-have-few-after-school-options>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/07/04/critical-middle-years-young-kids-have-few-after-school-options> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/school-age>