

School's Out for Summer!

How to Find Affordable Summer Child Care

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Your children are screaming, you're sweating in the summer heat, and everyone's bored. How can you avoid this situation? Follow these tips to find affordable and fun summer childcare:

- **Contact your neighborhood's YMCA or YWCA.**
 - These organizations usually offer affordable day camps with many activities. Options usually include a wide range of sports and arts from swimming to gymnastics, soccer, tennis, dance, and crafts.
 - Programs usually run from 9 to 3. If these hours do not fit your schedule, look into the charges for after-care and before-care.
- **Attend a summer camp fair.**
 - Check with your child's school to find summer camp fairs. These are usually held in the spring at schools and community centers. Representatives set up booths to promote their respective summer programs.
 - *Financial tip:* Many of these programs are more expensive. Check the price before you get drawn in by their promises to give your child "the best summer of his or her life!"
- **Check with your area's community center**
 - Many communities offer government-sponsored day camps, often staffed by college and high school students.
 - *Safety tip:* Make sure you check the camper-counselor ratio and the counselors' training, references and experience level. It's great to have a young, kid-friendly staff but the counselors need to know what they're doing!
- **Ask friends and relatives if they know any good babysitters**
 - Many college and high school students look for summer jobs with flexible hours to accommodate volunteer internships and family vacations.
 - *Financial tip:* If you can guarantee the babysitter a certain number of hours per week along with a semi-flexible schedule, the babysitter may be willing to accept a lower wage than he or she would during the year.
- **Investigate overnight camps**
 - Overnight camps range from one-week programs to eight-week programs. If your child has never been to sleep-away camp, a shorter program may be a good option.
 - To make your child more comfortable away from home, see if any of your child's friends would also want to attend. You can speak to the friend's parents or ask your child to speak to his or her friend.

- Overnight camps also range in terms of price. Sleep-away camps may give you sticker shock. Remember the price includes meals, 24-hour care, and activities and is usually not unreasonable.
- Many sleep-away camps offer traditional camp activities such as canoeing, camping, and singing around the bonfire, but options have become more extensive. You should be able to find a camp specializing in your child's interests.
- **Look into your local colleges and universities**
 - Many colleges offer affordable classes and programs for youth. This is a good chance for your child to learn a new skill or subject area at an inexpensive price.
- **Contact your child's school**
 - Many schools offer educational day programs. Because the school's year-round teachers usually work at the summer programs and know the school's students, your child will probably feel comfortable. These camps are usually affordable and offer a low-stress learning environment.

Once you have found a program you are interested in, you must check the camp's accreditation and/or the babysitter's references. Follow these tips to safeguard your child's safety:

- Check the American Camping Association website. This organization ensures that camps meet approximately 300 health and program standards.
- Ask your babysitter for references, a resume and documentation of a safe driving history (if he or she will be driving your child around).
- Investigate camp counselors' amount of training and previous experience.