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Developmental after school programs

As a child grows into an adult, different aspects of his physical, emotional and mental self needs development. To help a child reach his full potential, it is necessary to recognize the child's developmental needs and abilities. To be effective, after school programs should assist children with tasks they must accomplish during each stage of development.

A child's growth curve can be divided into three main parts:
1) Young child (ages 3-5)
2) Middle school (ages 6-8)
3) Older school (ages 9-12)

The four important domains of development are: The Physical Domain, the Social Domain, the Emotional Domain and the Intellectual Domain. Each of these domains needs to be separately addressed during the various phases of a child's growth. After school programs should concentrate on developing each domain as applicable to the age of the child. Although the children participating in these programs may have similar developmental needs and age, do not expect development to be uniform. Children will develop as and when they are ready.

Physical Domain:
When children are young, they want to perfect skills that they have just learnt to control. A variety of movements such as jumping, catching and throwing delight them. The middle school child, on the other hand, wants to learn more complex skills and get involved in team sports. This is also the best time to learn about rules and discipline in sport. The older school child is ready for more adult-like activities that need greater structure and discipline, like dancing, gymnastics, music classes etc.

Social Domain:
Young children are observing others and will be interested in games where they play the roles of family members. They develop short-term friendships and need an adult's presence to assure them. The middle school child is intrigued by society and will love trips to factories, public buildings etc. They want to know the 'how' and 'why' of things. The older school child is ready to learn about different cultures, food and customs. They want to do some amount of social work too.

Intellectual Domain:
Young school children will practice what they are learning. Middle school children want to learn more skills and will show interest in reading,

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drama and problem solving. The older school children are ready to research and probe. They enjoy getting a puzzle and pondering over it.

Any after school program needs to address the interests of the child depending on the category he belongs to. Knowing the children in your program and appreciating their needs and interests will help staff to plan and structure programs that are most useful to that group.

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