

Families Matter!

Choosing a Summer Camp

Summer camp can be a fun, growing time for many school-aged children. If you are thinking about a summer camp, here are some things to consider.

Talk with your child.

- Would he like to go to a camp?
- What kind of camp? For how long?

What do you and your child want to gain from a camp? New skills? New friends? More self confidence? Becoming more independent?

Consider:

What peers would be best for your child now?

Same sex? Coed? Same age? Similar background? Mixed age? Brothers and sisters might be part of the same "peer group" in some camps. Would that be good?

What are your child's interests and skills?



Some highly motivated children flourish in intensive soccer or baseball camps — while others are overwhelmed

by the concentration on one particular activity.

What is the best level of structure for your child?

Does she flourish under tightly structured activities or does she do best with a more loosely structured program that allows free time for day dreaming and imaginative play?

Talk with neighbors and friends.

- Which camps have they had good experiences with? Do they know which camps to avoid?



Try to choose a camp that includes a well balanced selection of activities, even though it may have a specific theme — such as horseback riding or aerospace.

If possible, visit possible camps with your child.

Talk with the director and teachers or counselors, if possible. The attitudes of the teachers or counselors are key.

- What is their attitude about campers? Do they treat campers with respect?
- Would the camp staff be good role models for your child?
- What is the director's age and background? How long has he/she run this camp?
- What is the hiring process for camp staff? Are they screened for criminal records? What training do staff have?
- What expectations do they have for child behavior? How do they help children learn positive friendship and leadership roles?
- Will the program encourage your child to try new things?
- Are they available to talk with parents regularly?
- How do they handle misbehavior? What is their philosophy of discipline?
- Can they provide names of children in your area who have attended the camp before? You may be able to contact the parents to get their thoughts about the camp.

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What is the camp atmosphere?

- What does a daily schedule look like?
- How do campers get assigned to activities?
- What is the balance of time between active activities and quiet activities? Between group activities and individual activities?
- What values are taught?
- What kinds of foods are served at meals and snacks?
- How big is the camp?
- What is the adult/child ratio? How many campers are in each group?
- For overnight camps, how much "bedroom space" does each child have?
- Will you be able to contact your child in case of emergency? How can your child contact you?

Is the camp meeting safety and health standards?

- Ask to see the camp's licenses and certification. Is the camp meeting safety and health standards? Is the camp accredited by the American Camping Association?
- Are medical examinations required? Immunizations?
- Does a certified nutritionist plan the meals?
- What is the policy on sodas, gum and candy? Is it available at a canteen?
- Is a fulltime nurse/physician on staff?
- What is the procedure in case of emergency?
- Are all staff trained in CPR?
- What are the qualifications of the staff bus or van drivers?
- If your child has special health needs or requires periodic medications, how well can the camp meet those needs?



Be clear about the costs.

- What "extra" charges will there be?
- Will the down payment be refunded if you change your mind?



Kids need opportunities for:

- Building positive relationships
- Safety and belonging
- Exploring and skill building
- Expressing themselves and reflecting
- Getting involved in service
- Building skills for work

~ Harvard Family Research Project

- What clothing is required? Will you need to purchase special clothing?
 - How will your child get to and from camp? Will you provide transportation or is it provided in camp tuition?
 - For overnight camps, Are there laundry facilities at camp, or do you need to provide clothing for the entire camp period?

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For more information, check out

- The American Camping Association: <http://www.acacamps.org/>
- Jeremy's Camp Safety Guide for Parents: <http://www.campsafetyguide.com/>
- The Extension Cord at <http://ag.udel.edu/extension/fam/> — connecting citizens with University research and knowledge.

Or contact your county Extension office: New Castle: 910 S. Chapel Street, Newark, DE 19716-1303, Tel. 302-831-8965; Kent: 69 Transportation Circle, Dover, DE 19901, Tel. 302-730-4000; Sussex Research & Education Center, 16684 County Seat Hwy., Georgetown, DE 19947, Tel. 302-856-7303.

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