



Summer camp tips: Finding the best fit

Options For Summer Camps

- Posted on Apr 15, 2009 1:31 PM by Vicki Salemi
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Experts and parents alike say summer camp is a great way to keep your child busy and engaged. Whether you're considering day, special-interest or sleepaway camps, the options are endless. Here's how to pick the one that's just right for your child.





Picking the right summer camp for your child requires knowing the options and which will best fit with your child's personality and interests.

General or specialty camps?

Adam Jacobs, executive director of Kids Creative, suggests asking yourself what kind of camp you are looking for. "It all begins with the family and the child," he says. "Location? Staff? Mission? Activities? Do you want your kids to be close to home, close to work or go away for the summer?" Based in New York-based, Kids Creative is a non-profit organization fostering confidence, creativity, conflict resolution skills and a strong sense of community through arts education in after-school programs, summer camp and workshops.

While general day camps include a variety of activities such as sports and arts and crafts, specialty camps may be more appropriate for your child if he's enthralled with one particular activity, such as band or cheerleading. Another option: Combine the best of both worlds. For instance, the six-week program at Kids Creative lets kids spend half of each day in traditional activities such as playing sports and in the sprinklers, and the other half in arts education, to help them gain key skills in theater. Their campers work together to brainstorm stories, create characters, compose songs, write scripts and perform their musical at the end of camp to family and friends.

Is your child ready for sleepaway camp?

As your child rocks out to the concept of camping, how do you know when it's time to ditch day camp and opt for sleepaway instead? Beth Feldman, creator of RoleMommy.com and author of *Peeing in Peace: Tales and Tips for Type A Moms*, knew it was time when her 10-year-old daughter approached her. "My daughter is a free-spirit and she's incredibly independent. She said, 'Mom and Dad, I want to go.'"

Joel D. Haber, PhD, "The Bully Coach" and author of *Bullyproof Your Child for Life*, says Rebecca demonstrated one of the key readiness signs for sleepaway camp. Additional signs include positive experiences of your child's friends at sleepaway camp and your child's successful sleepovers at friends' houses. "Summer camp is known for its ability to help kids learn new skills, become more independent and grow emotionally and physically. Knowing your child is the first step to seeing if she is ready for camp, especially an overnight camp."

He cautions that you must add parental anxiety into the equation: Your kid may be ready, but *you* may not be. "Do you as a parent, feel comfortable and confident that your child will be okay without you? Can you show him, with little anxiety, that the separation from you will be successful?" In fact, Beth jokes, "I think it's going to be harder than us than it will be on her!"

Do your research

All anxiety aside, savvy parent Beth started researching specific camps and narrowed them down to three. "I do what I normally do," she says. "I used my network." She contacted people she trusts and started looking into it by meeting with camp directors, getting references and watching videos, to name a few things.

The Feldmans decided upon Camp Echo in Burlingham, New York. Jeff Grabow, owner/director of the camp, says, "Our goal is to help the child out of the nest. Incredibly strong bonds develop at camp. They're friends for life. That's my goal: To see my kids from camp go to each others' weddings."

Cut back, don't cut out

While the lifelong friendships, independence, creative thinking and emotional growth are priceless, let's not forget that each camp has a price tag. Jacobs reminds us to research all options thoroughly. "Many camps offer shorter programs," he points out. This way, you're not skimping altogether, just tightening the purse strings a little while still giving your kid a memorable, albeit abridged, experience.

Read more on summer camps:

- [Summer camp alternatives: Budget-friendly options](#)
- [Tips for parents: Prepare your child for camp](#)
- [Real Moms Guide — Teen Travel: Flying solo](#)

Vicki Salemi

Vicki Salemi is passionate about writing. As a regular contributor to AOL, MSN and numerous sites and publications she also blogs regularly for CNBC European Business, Women for Hire and Manhattan adventures on her website www.vickisalemi.com. As for her areas of expertise? Entertainment/pop culture, style/fashion, careers/education, and health/wellness. She has interviewed Angelina Jolie, Ben Affleck, Sarah Jessica Parker, Jennifer Hudson, Hilary Duff, Kanye West and many more celebrities. Vicki rocks out to living and working in New York City!

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ANGEL REMY • JULY 12, 2009 • 8:02 PM

I did alot of research when I was looking at what camps to send my children. I finally found one close to home and the counselors are great! They gave me many tips on how to prepare my first time campers. One of the best things that they suggested was getting them a prepaid phone called the Motorola W376 from TracFone. Service is as little as \$7 a month for the minimal contact needed to be in touch. They have a feature called the double minutes feature which gives you 120 minutes for under \$20 for 3 months. This is great because this is all they're going to need in order to keep in contact with me while they're at camp. The phone must have been designed for children. I bought it for them and as they described it..."ITS SO COOL, MOM!" It has a camera (so they can send me pictures throughout the summer), and it comes in built in games for the plane rides. They love it.

CAROL CRAWFORD-JONES • JULY 01, 2009 • 11:48 AM

American Camp Association accredited camps have passed rigid standards and must undergo re-certification every three years. Standards (both written and applied) include Site and Food Service, Operational Management, Health and Wellness, Transportation, Human Resoureces, Program Design and Activities, Program--Aquatics, Program--Adventure/Challenge, Program--Horseback Riding, Program--Trip and Travel. When one selects and ACA Accredited camp, one is making the best choice.

KENNOLYN CAMPS • APRIL 16, 2009 • 5:05 PM

"He adds the importance of adding parental anxiety in the equation; your kid may be ready but you may not be." We get this often here at Kennolyn. Many times the parent will call and, after talking to them a few minutes about their child's potential anxiety, it becomes clear that the parent is the one who needs a little reassurance.

MARLA COLEMAN • APRIL 16, 2009 • 3:13 PM

Good content; suggest you utilize the American Camp Association as a resource on stories about camp. (Joel Haber is one of many experts who consult with this nonprofit organization, a community of camp professionals.) Check out CampParents for loads of important information on how to choose a camp and many other related topics. I also write a blog that draws heavily on camp experiences, Bedtime Stories for Parents (MarlaColeman).

ERIC NAFTULIN • APRIL 16, 2009 • 9:01 AM

Great article. I run a specialty beach and surf camp in Los Angeles, so I read these types of articles all the time. Yours is definitely one of the best. Keep up the great work!

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