



Choosing a Summer Camp

It is getting warmer, the days are getting longer, and the kids are getting happier, that must mean school is almost out! And that means it is time to start thinking about what your kids are going to be doing all summer long. We have already been thinking about how kids spend those long summer days, and have come up with this handy dandy guide to choosing a summer camp.



Who should choose the camp?

As busy adults, we often make important decisions by ourselves as quickly as we can... which is not the best way to choose a camp for our kids. Even a quick search for camps will show that there are hundreds of different camps in every location to choose from. So unless you wish your child to be exposed to a specific point of view or exercise, choosing a camp will likely be a difficult choice. Added to the number of camps available is the difference in perspective that exists between parents and children. In short, what you think your child will enjoy is not necessarily what they would choose if given the option. So, whenever possible, bring your child into the process as early as possible.

What are the differences in camps?

There are four basic types of camps to choose from for your child: day programs, sleep-away (also called residential), day programs with trips, and special needs. These types of camps are further divided by gender (girls only, boys only, or co-ed), and by age group. Additionally, camps often focus on specialties that include: adventure, art, computer, dance, music, religion, horse riding, sports, theatre, and others. Basically, if you can think of a subject, there is probably a camp that specializes in it.

Where on Earth do I find all of the camps?

So if there are so many different types of camps, where do we find information about them? The answer is... just about everywhere. As children today are often more internet savvy than parents and guardians, a fun activity for your child may be to search the internet (either at home or at the public library) or go

through other resources and make a list of potential camps. Then go through the list together and choose the one you feel is most appropriate.

In addition to your public library, there are many local sources of information about summer camps, such as:

- Schools
- Churches
- Community centers
- Sports teams
- Clubs/Activity Groups
- Museums

Similarly, online resources are abundant and growing in number all of the time. Some examples of online resources about summer camps are:

- American Camping Association – www.acacamps.org
- Camp Page – www.camppage.com
- Camp Search Page – www.campsearch.com
- National Camp Association - www.summercamp.org
- Public Library - <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/librarysearch>

Now that I know where to find the camps, how do we choose between them?

The camp experience will have a lasting impact on the child, so there are a number of issues that should be seriously considered when choosing a summer camp. Some questions you should ask yourself are:

- What do you and your child hope that they will get out of going to camp?
- Is there a specific topic (religion, sports, and arts) that you hope they will gain ability and experience in?
- Would it benefit your child if they interacted more with the opposite gender?
- If you have more than one child would they benefit from attending the same camp?
- How far from you and for how long would your child be comfortable. If you think that your child may not be ready for residential camp, choose a local one in case you end up making a late night pickup.
- How much are you willing to pay? Four weeks at a good private residential camp will cost anywhere from \$3500 to \$6500, and eight weeks will range from \$4000 to \$7000. Non-profit camps often range from \$1200 to \$3000 for four weeks and \$2500 to \$5000 for eight weeks. Specialty camps can range from \$500 to \$1000 per week depending on the program. Take time to consider what you can reasonably afford.
- Does your child have any special needs that need to be accommodated? While most camps are equipped for campers with disabilities, not all have staff trained to work with children with attention deficit disorder, learning disabilities, or special medical problems.

Once you have narrowed the field to a few choices, another set of questions should help you choose which camp is the best one for your child.

- What is the director's background?
- How long has the director run this camp?
- What facilities does the camp have and how convenient are they for campers to get to?
- What is the camper-counselor ratio, age, and training required of the staff?

- What is the schedule like? Is it a structured program or one that emphasizes a lot of free choice?
- What percentage of campers return each year?
- Are there any extra costs that may arise, like equipment fees?
- How does the camp insure the safety and security of its campers?
- What medical facilities are available and what medical staff is on campus?
- Is there a refund policy if the camper leaves early?

These questions are a good starting point in your quest to find the right camp for your child. If you spend the time needed to research your options and include your child in the decision, he or she will most likely have a memorable experience that provides them opportunities to grow as a person, while having fun and making new friends.

Source: Federal Citizen Information Center (FCIC). (2004). Choosing a summer camp. Retrieved March 2, 2005, from <http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cfocus/cfcamps04/focus.htm>

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