

CHOOSING a summer camp

There are many different kinds of summer camps. Traditional camps offer a little bit of everything, while specialty camps focus on one main area such as academics, adventure, creative arts, sports, or faith-based activities. Some camps cater to children and youth with special needs, such as those living with a serious illness or a physical disability.

A few things parents and caregivers should consider when choosing a summer camp:

- Are you interested in a day camp or a sleepaway camp? Consider your child's age and maturity level as well as your family's schedule and budget.
- How far away is the camp? If there is a problem, how long will it take you to get to the camp and pick up your child? What is the refund policy if your child is unable to attend or must leave early?
- What is the duration of the camp? Do day camp hours fit within your family's schedule? If you need a camp that lasts two, four, or six weeks, will you sign up for multiple sessions at the same camp, or send your child to a few different camps? If your child is under 12 and this will be his or her first time at a sleepaway camp, four or five nights away from home is probably long enough.
- How big is the camp? Would your child prefer a big camp with lots of kids and a variety of activities, or a smaller camp with just a few dozen campers who will do most everything together?
- What activities would your child enjoy? If your child is a good swimmer and would really love to go canoeing, swimming, and fishing, then you'll want to look for a camp that's on a lake and offers those activities. If arts and crafts are more important to your child, then look for a camp that has these programs and don't worry so much about a lake.
- Is the camp co-ed or single sex? This may not matter to everyone, but if your child has a preference, or you want your son and daughter to attend the same camp, it will affect your choices.
- How structured is the camp experience? Some camps fill up the days and nights with scheduled, structured activities, while others allow campers more free time. Which type of atmosphere is better for your child?
- What can you realistically afford? Camps run by non-profit or community organizations may be less expensive. Many camps offer scholarships or financial aid to deserving campers, so be sure to explore this option too!

The best way to proceed with your comparison and to narrow your choices is to take a careful look at some of the promising camps you have identified. Review the brochures and videos with your child. Then you can choose the ones you're most interested in and arrange to speak or meet with the camp directors or representatives. They'll give you more detail and you can ask specific questions like:

1. What is the director's age and background? How long has the director run this camp?
2. What are the camp's goals and philosophy?
3. What kind of camper is most likely to have a good experience at this camp?
4. What facilities does the camp have and how convenient are they for campers to get to?
5. What is the schedule like? Is it a structured program or one that emphasizes a lot of free choice?
6. What is the camper-counselor ratio and what are the characteristics of most of the staff?
7. What kind of staff training is provided?
8. What percentage of campers return each year?
9. What is the total cost of the camp including extras?
10. What are the sleeping arrangements and what toilet and shower facilities exist?
11. What is the swimming instruction program like?
12. How does the camp ensure the safety and security of its campers?
13. What is the food like and who prepares it?
14. What is the policy about food packages, letters home, TV, trips to town, and so forth?
15. What medical facilities are available and what medical staff is on campus?
16. Is there a refund policy if the camper leaves early?
17. Will the director supply references?
18. What happens when the weather is bad?
19. How does the camp program meet individual needs and differences?
20. What kind of insurance coverage is there?

References:

<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/summer>

<http://www.summercamps.org/guidance/pamphlet.html#camp/article3.html>

For more information to help you find a camp

that provides activities that are of interest to your child and meets your family's needs, check out the following websites:

National Camp Association's

CampQuest:
www.campquest.org

American Camp Association:

www.acacamps.org

My Summer Camps:

<http://www.mysummercamps.com/>