



Child Care Referral Service

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PREPARING CHILDREN FOR THE SUMMER CAMP EXPERIENCE

While summer seems so far away, parents are already considering where to send their child for summer camp. Before camp begins, there are some preparations to consider that may make the child's camp experience more fun and rewarding.

"Summer camp is more than a vacation for children," says Bruce Muchnick, Ed.D., a licensed psychologist who works extensively with day and resident camps. "At camp, kids learn to appreciate the outdoors, develop companionship, and pick up skills that enhance self-reliance, cooperation, and interdependence. These skills will remain with them into adulthood."

Parents should consider the following suggestions to increase their child's opportunity for a rewarding camp experience:

- **CONSIDER CAMP A LEARNING EXPERIENCE.** This is an opportunity for a child to explore a world bigger than his/her neighborhood and a chance for parent and child to practice "letting go." Letting go allows children to develop autonomy and a stronger sense of self, make new friends, develop new social skills, learn about teamwork, be creative, and much more. This time also allows parents an opportunity to take care of themselves so that they feel refreshed when their child returns home.
- **PREPARE FOR CAMP TOGETHER.** Decisions about camp—where to go and what to pack—should be a joint venture, keeping in mind the child's maturity. If a child feels a part of the decision-making process, the chances of having a positive experience will improve.
- **TALK ABOUT CONCERNS.** As the first day of camp nears, some children experience uneasiness about going away. Talk about these feelings. Communicate confidence in his/her ability in dealing with being away from home.
- **HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.** Camp, like the rest of life, has high and low points. Every moment is not filled with wonder and excitement. Encourage children to have a reasonable and realistic view of camp. Discuss both the ups and downs the child may encounter. Make sure the child does not feel pressured to succeed at camp. For the child, the main purpose of camp is to relax and have fun.

Once your child arrives at camp, they may experience some apprehension related to the fear of the unknown and/or the fear of failure in new situations. Some refer to this as "homesickness," which can take the form of stomachaches, headaches, occasional misbehavior (in hopes of being sent home), or even statements about "hating" camp. "Most kids need a couple of days to adjust to life at camp and being away from home," say Muchnick. "They miss familiar surroundings, parents, pets, and friends. Overcoming homesickness, upsets in the cabin, and learning to care for oneself are important challenges that can be faced at camp."

Founded in 1910, the American Camping Association is a national community of camp professionals and is dedicated to enriching the lives of children and adults through the camp experience. ACA is the only organization that accredits all types of camps across the United States verifying compliance with up to 300 individual health, safety, and program quality standards.

Information taken from: <http://www.acacamps.org/media/prepare.htm>

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