



A Parent's Guide to Finding a Good Summer Camp



If you have questions or need assistance,
Call (914) 761-3456 ext 140
Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm



How to Choose a Camp

Camp Program

It is important to know children's personalities and identify what camp programs will benefit them most. When looking at camps, include your child in the decision-making process. By working together, you and your child will find a camp experience that will be cherished for a lifetime.

Some camps have structured programs where camp staff schedules all campers' activities. Others are more flexible, allowing campers to choose some or all of their daily activities.

Most camps have a wide assortment of outdoor activities, sports, and games. Many camps offer specialized programs in aquatics, hiking, horseback riding, and the performing arts.

Types of Camp

- **Resident Camp** -- Children stay for extended periods from one week to eight weeks. They sleep overnight in cabins, tents, tepees, or another form of shelter and participate in a variety of supervised activities.
- **Day Camp** -- Many offer a variety of programs for children ages five to fifteen. Most are coed and their programs are similar to resident camps, but without sleeping quarters. Campers may be transported, often by bus or van, to the facility each morning and returned home in the late afternoon.
- **Sports Camp**--Sports camps are specially designed camps to provide training to children in a wide range of sports and athletics such as baseball, basketball or tennis.
- **Travel and Trip Camp** – Allows kids and teens to travel throughout the world. Some camps have participants move themselves to sites by hiking, horseback, canoeing or other self-propelled means.
- **Persons with Disabilities** -- While camps provide facilities and services for a broad range of children, there are some that provide specialized services for persons with disabilities.

Session Length

Camp can fit within any family's busy schedule. Sessions run anywhere from one week to a full eight-week session. Some facilities are in operation year-round and others offer special seasonal programs throughout the year. However, some camps may or may not run a full eight-hour day.

Cost

Camp remains a very affordable option for anyone regardless of background or location. Fees vary, but could range from \$75 to \$650 per week.

Assistance offered from camps:

- Some camps offer special discounts—for everything from early registration, full-season, or multiple enrollments from one family.
- Many camps offer "camperships"—partial or total scholarships and financial assistance. Parents should not assume their income does not qualify.

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Other Financial Assistance:

- Income eligible parents can receive child care subsidy fund to pay for camp. To see if you are eligible contact our Subsidy Support Services at 914-761-3456 ext. 140 or go to <http://www.childcarewestchester.org/services/parents/paying-for-care>
- A Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account allows parents to be reimbursed on a pre-tax basis for child care, including camp, expenses for qualified dependents that are necessary to allow parents to work, look for work, or to attend school full time. <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p503.pdf> or http://uc.conexisfsa.com/Dependent_Care_FSA_Guidelines.html for more information.
- Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit: The IRS allows an income tax credit for dependent care expenses. The amount of the credit is based on your adjusted gross income and applies only to your federal taxes. This applies to qualifying day camp expenses as well. <https://www.irs.gov/Credits-&-Deductions> for more information.
- In certain circumstances, day care expenses, including transportation by a care provider, may be considered dependent care services and paid with pre-tax dollars. Visit the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or www.irs.gov for more information.

Questions to Ask the Camp Director

When you are looking for a camp, every item you can think to ask about is important. Before you talk with a director, make a list of questions. If possible, try to visit the camp when it is in operation before you make your final selection. This will give you and your child the opportunity to see the program and philosophy of the camp in action.

Here are important items to consider when you meet with the camp staff. Some of these questions come from the American Camping Association's *Guide to Accredited Camps*. Many of the answers are based on the American Camping association's standards program.

What is the background of the director? The camp's director should possess a bachelor's degree, have completed in-service training within the past three years and have at least 16 weeks of camp administrative experience before assuming the responsibilities of director.

What is the camp's philosophy? Many camps promote competition and healthy rivalry among camp teams, as reflected in team sports. For many this is pure fun. Some parents feel learning to be competitive at an early age teaches essential survival skills. However, other parents and educators are in favor of cooperative learning. Noncompetitive methods have been shown to encourage young people to learn more, retain it longer, plus develop greater self-esteem and appreciation for others. Knowing your child's personality and learning style are valuable in selecting the right approach.



What is the ratio of counselors to campers? The ratio should be based upon the ages of the children and must take into account the special needs of the campers. For severely mentally disabled campers, a ratio of one staff to one camper is required. For non-disabled resident campers, ratios can range from one staff for every six campers ages 6 to 8; one staff for every eight campers ages 9 to 14; and one staff for every ten campers ages 15 to 17. For day camps the ratios are: one staff for every eight campers ages 6 to 8; one staff for every 10 campers ages 9 to 14; and one staff for every 12 campers ages 15 to 17.

What is the transportation system? Campers are usually transported by vans or buses. Find out what types of vehicles are used and how often they are inspected by qualified mechanics. Ask the director to describe the camp's driver training and ongoing safety awareness programs.

What are the ages of the counselors? Among the counseling/program staff, 80 percent or more should be 18 years or older. Any counselor under 18 must be at least two years older than the camper they are supervising.

What percentage of the staff return each year? Some staff turnover is natural due to college graduation, etc. Most camps have between 40 and 60 percent of staff return each year. If the rate is lower, find out why.

How are special needs handled? If your child has special requirements, ask about provisions and facilities. Is there a nurse? A designated place to store insulin or allergy medicine?

Are references available? Generally, this is one of the best techniques of checking on a camp's reputation and service record. Directors of ACA Accredited Camps are happy to provide references.

Is the camp accredited by the American Camping Association? Many of the questions above, plus some 300 more, are answered before a camp can become accredited by the American Camping Association. Every camp, which displays the ACA Accredited Camp logo, is committed to the highest operating standards for the industry. These standards were first established in the late 1930s and are continually updated to reflect the current consensus of camp professionals on practices and procedures considered basic to a quality camp experience. ACA Accredited Camps are visited at least once every three years by a team of two or more trained camp professionals. These professionals compare the camp's operation, while it is in session, with the industry's standards. By selecting an ACA Accredited Camp, you can be assured that many important questions have been asked and answered appropriately.

Remember It's All About the Kids!

Summer camps are not just a way to keep your children occupied but are opportunities for children to indulge in a variety of activities, acquire new skills and also a healthy way to interact with other children.



Summary of Things to Consider:

- Think about your child's age, personality, independence and ability to deal with new situations.
- Locations, duration, transportation and the camp focus.
- Look for a safe, healthy environment with adults who understand and care about children.
- Group size, ratio of counselors to campers and counselor selection and training
- Examine the equipment and facilities, making sure that they are safe and provide for a varied summer experience.
- Special activities, theme days and field trips offered
- Rainy day policy and activities
- Special amenities for working parents
- Scrutinize fees and expenses
- Speak to other families or call references

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS & CONTACTS

- The Department of Health licensed camps in Westchester County: To verify the licensing or report a complaint. 914-637-4700
- Better Business Bureau: To check into or report a complaint. 914-428-1230 (fee of \$5 plus tax) website: www.newyork.bbb.org (free) or www.bbb.org nationwide information