

Selecting the Right Summer Experience

Start your camp search the summer before your child will attend camp!



Positive camp experiences begin with the **right match** between a child's needs and interests and a camp's philosophy, program and other offerings.

No two children are the same and no two camps are exactly alike either—even ones with similar activities, approach and appearance.

Match Matters Most!

Recommended camp search steps from the American Camp Association, New England. Good luck and remember, we are only a call or click away! www.acane-camps.org (781) 541-6080

- 1. Choose Summer Camp!** Camps are amazing worlds created especially for children — full of fun and learning.
- 2. Choose a camp that is ACA Accredited.** ACA Accreditation is the best evidence that a camp is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment.
- 3. Consider and list camp expectations (yours and the prospective camper's).** The ideal camp experience for your camper includes what? YOU have to fill in the blanks here. Parents, guardians and children themselves are the experts on what's needed to round out the school year; relatives, coaches and counselors often assist.

Consider the personal definition of camp adults and children may already have. Adults who are former campers, remember to think about your own camp experience and if something similar would be right—or not—for this prospective camper. Children who are experienced campers often know what they want.

Ask these key questions of yourself and the child and make lists:

- What/who is driving the camp search? Unparalleled fun and learning? New experiences, skills and friends? Need for child care? Family tradition? Encouragement from friends?
- What are your leading camp search criteria? Which are "non-negotiable" and which are "preferences"?
- What **type** of camp are you looking for? (see page 5)
- Which of your family's **values** should be reflected in the camp philosophy? How religious? How competitive? How diverse? How much camper choice? Camps are intentional communities. **What** they do and **why** is reflected in the staff members they hire, the schedules they follow, the activities they offer, **and** their materials.
- What **activities/programs** interest you and your child? What level of intensity are you looking for? Are you looking for opportunities to try new activities, to play, to advance current skills, to practice, to compete or to specialize?
- What kind of **facilities** will your camper consider? Discuss electricity, bathrooms and dining.
- What **session length**, from 8 weeks to a few days, is comfortable for you, for your child and for your family's summer schedule?

The most common session lengths are: full season (7-8 weeks), half season (3-4 weeks), two weeks and one week.

Remaining flexible about session length can increase your camp options.

- What camp **clientele** do you want to consider?

There are camps for boys only, girls only, coed, brother/sister, religious groups, under-served populations, and children with special needs.

- What is your budget for camp **tuition**?

Camp remains an affordable option for most everyone. Some camps offer financial assistance. Financial aid procedures vary from camp to camp, so be sure to ask and to read brochures and websites carefully.

4. Explore options that might meet your search criteria.

Attend Camp Fairs. Meet camp directors and staff face-to-face and learn what a camp has to offer.

www.campfairs.org

Search Online. Use your "CAMP expectations" lists to search online and request camp marketing materials. Carefully consider the source of online camp information. Most online directories are *NOT* comprehensive and camps often have to pay to be listed.

www.acane-camps.org/camp/findcamp.php • www.campparents.org

Ask folks you know and trust. Relatives, friends, coaches and school counselors may have suggestions of camps that might work for your child. **CAUTION:** Just because someone had a great experience at a camp doesn't automatically make that camp a good match for **your** child!

Consult professionals. There are a variety of camp consultants and referral agents who can help point you to camps they represent that might meet some or most of YOUR camp search criteria.

Look carefully at how camps present themselves to the world in print, in photographs and in person! You can gain a more comprehensive understanding of each camp by reviewing a variety of their materials and by speaking with camp representatives, especially the camp director.

5. Decide! Examine finalist camps closely; then go with your gut.

Involve your child as much as possible in the decision making process so that he or she will look forward to camp.

**Make a camp fair part of
your summer camp search!**



Information and resources about camp fairs in New England

www.campfairs.org



The Region's Leading Source for Camp Information

Review camp materials and compare camps to your lists of expectations.

Tour the camp when it is in session or **attend** an open house.

Speak with camp directors or camp representatives.

Request parent references from camps and check them. Ask people in your community, also.

Go with your gut! There is no such thing as the *best* camp, only the *best camp for your child*. You will have to make the final decision since you are the expert on your child.

Select a camp and send in your registration materials early to avoid being wait-listed.

6. Prepare for camp together.

Preparing for camp together helps ensure that you and your camper have a successful experience.

- Families should create progressive opportunities to prepare children for camp.
- Encourage day and resident campers to practice caring for their belongings and for their bodies independently.
- First time resident campers should practice being away from home by spending overnights or weekends with friends or family.
- Discuss strategies for coping with homesickness. (See box below.)
- Pack only what is on the packing list sent by the camp. The camp knows what your child will use and need. Overpacking can lead to lost or damaged items.
- Find out the recommended method of communicating with your child at camp. Send a letter or postcard a week ahead of time so that it is there for the first mail delivery.



Homesickness Happens: How to Help Campers Cope

Of course campers sometimes miss home! Both day and resident campers do at times. Talk about the possibility of missing home while at camp. Create a plan before the camper goes off to camp—just in case homesickness strikes. Here are the facts:

- **Homesickness is normal.** Most campers experience it and quickly work through it. It's a GREAT feeling to overcome homesickness—very empowering for children.
- **Homesickness, IF it happens, is usually not a big deal.** It goes away quickly for most people.
- **It can help to pack a photo or small reminder of home.** This can be comforting and reassuring.

Some strategies to encourage children to try when homesick feelings happen:

- Do something active to keep yourself busy
- Talk about it with a counselor
- Write a letter
- Take a moment to look at your photo or reminder of home
- Remember how soon you will be home
- Make the most of the moment you are in. Jump into what's going on around you!

Remember that you can survive homesickness. Your family knows so, too! **Camps know what to do if a camper gets homesick.** They have a plan also. **Serious homesickness is rare.** If it happens, camp professionals are trained to help your family through.

For more resources, visit www.campparents.org/homesickness.php
Adapted from Dr. Chris Thurber's *The Great News About Homesickness*

Questions to ask camps under consideration:

- Is your camp accredited by the ACA? What other regulations does your camp follow?
- What training does the staff receive on safety, supervision, counseling, problem solving and other issues unique to working with children?
- Is the price all-inclusive or are there extra charges for . . .
Registration • Uniforms • Horseback riding • T-shirts • Waterskiing • Group photos • Field Trips
- Is transportation available and what are the specifics? Is there an additional cost?
- How will the camp meet my child's special dietary or physical needs?
- In what way may I communicate with my child while he or she is at camp? With the staff?
- How does bad weather affect the daily schedule?
- Are there family visiting days?
- What is unique about your camp?

To conduct a Zip Code Search for day camps in your area, log on to www.acane-camps.org/camp/daycamp.php and click on Zip Code

Questions for Day Camp Searches

- Is before/after camp care available? If so, who cares for the children and what do they do? What is the additional cost?
- Are meals provided? At what cost?
- How and where do I drop off or pick up my child?



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