Choosing a summer camp

As you start planning your summer, you may want to review the range of different camps that are available in the community you live in. There are two types of camp commonly available:



Day camps

Most day camps run from two to eight weeks during the summer. They offer the advantage of a full day for your child to enjoy activities and learn new skills, while continuing to sleep at home. Transportation is often provided to and from the campsite. Day camps usually operate from 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., with extended hours of care sometimes available.

Residential camps

Residential camps can operate for periods of one to eight weeks. Campsites may be located in distant locations, allowing children to experience a completely different environment. Food services, accommodations, activities, philosophies and budgets vary from camp to camp.

Both day camps and residential camps are offered by a wide variety of organizations and groups. Choices may include:

- **Religious affiliated camps.** Some camps incorporate religious studies into their daily programming while others may represent a religious philosophy in their programming.
- **Private camps.** Individuals, groups, private schools or organizations may offer private camps. The camp's staffing, program decisions and site development are often closely associated with the philosophy of the owner/operator.
- **Municipality-sponsored camps.** Many municipalities operate camping programs, which are usually run in school locations or recreation complexes. Typically, these are day camps.
- **Agency sponsored camps.** A wide variety of social service and publicly funded organizations maintain a camping program as an extension of the services they offer the community.
- **Special needs camps.** There is a good range of camps designed to serve children with special needs. General camps are also often able to accommodate some level of special need.

Programs offered

Some camps offer a general outdoor camp experience while others cater to specialized interests. These may include:

- Athletic camps
- Nature camps
- Arts camps
- Computer camps
- Sailing camps
- Riding camps
- Drama camps
- Music camps
- Language immersion

Assessing your child's needs

Take some time to think about your child's personality, likes and dislikes:

- Is your child competitive? Does the camp offer competitive activities?
- Does your child need quiet time during the day? Does the program allow for this?
- Does your child prefer indoor or outdoor activities, team games or independent activities?
- Does your child have special interests or needs?
- Will any of your child's friends be attending the camp?
- Does your child suffer from motion sickness? How far is the daily journey from home to camp?
- Does your child have any dietary or physical restrictions? Can the camp accommodate these?

Is your child ready for residential camp?

Involve your child in the decision. If he or she is eager to try a residential camp, you are off to a good start. However, if your child is reluctant you may want to delay the experience for another year.

Selecting the camp

If you can, try to get recommendations from other parents about camp options for your child. If at all possible, try to visit the camp and ensure site facilities meet your standards, and consider approaching senior camp staff to determine:

- Is the camp accredited by the provincial camping association? Who owns or manages it?
- Is there a registered nurse or doctor on call or on-site?
- What training and experience do the staff have?
- What is the counsellor/camper ratio?
- What are the ages of the counsellors?
- How is discipline handled?

Remember that many camps fill up quickly. Try to begin your selection process as early in the year as possible, but with some care and thought as to your child's needs and enjoyment, there are many fun and rewarding camp experiences available.