

Children Need Camp

The five reasons your child needs camp, and where to go for the answers to your camp questions

There's no doubt that summer camp is fun. Kids get to sing silly songs, play funny games, swim in lakes, and tell spooky stories around a campfire. This is the image of camp that has been captured and memorialized in films, books, and television programs for the past fifty years. But there's much more to camp than just a good time. For nearly a century, the American Camp Association® (ACA) has worked to provide children and adults the opportunity to learn powerful lessons in community, character-building, skill development, and healthy living – lessons that can be learned at camp.

Camp will forever change your child... for the better. ACA research has confirmed that camps build skills necessary to prepare campers to assume roles as successful adults. Campers said that camp helped them make new friends, get to know kids who are different from them, feel good about themselves, and try things they were afraid to do at first.

Camp provides children the opportunity to try new things and participate in human powered activities. According to surveys by both the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, an American child is six times more likely to play a videogame on any given day than to ride a bike. An estimated 22 million of the world's children under the age of five are already considered obese. According to research conducted by ACA, 63 percent of children who learn new activities at camp tend to continue engaging in these activities after they return home. This leads to continued physical exercise that lasts a lifetime.

Camps understand the critical role they play in helping young people learn and grow. Many offer programs that help reduce summer learning loss, bolster academic enrichment and socialization, provide opportunities for leadership development, and ensure that campers achieve their full potential.

Camp is a great way for your child to unplug from the iPod® and plug into the world around them. According to a study by two Cornell University environmental psychologists, being close to nature can help boost a child's attention span. Additionally, a study conducted by the University of Essex in England concluded that nature can help people recover from pre-existing stresses or problems, has an immunizing effect that can protect from future stresses, and helps people to concentrate and think more clearly. In some instances, camp may be the only time a child is in contact with the natural world.

It's true; kids do sing silly songs and play funny games at camp. Children are allowed to play in a safe and nurturing environment, and are allowed *to just be kids*. Play is a powerful form of learning that contributes mightily to the child's healthy physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. According to an American Academy of Pediatrics report, creative free play protects a child's emotional development and reduces a child's risk of stress, anxiety, and depression.

But how do you go about finding the right camp experience for your child? CampParents.org, ACA's parent site, is a valuable resource for families.

CampParents.org provides expert advice on child development and parent-child relationships in addition to camp-related advice such as the benefits of camp, coping with homesickness, and preparing a first-time camper. With information broken down by age group, parents can review developmental milestones, what is "on their child's mind," relationship building tips, and advice on how to get the most out of the camp experience. Parents can also sign-up to receive *Camp e-News*, ACA's bi-monthly parent e-newsletter on child and youth development, the camp experience, and timely issues concerning today's families.

CampParents.org offers parents and families insight into the importance of a first-hand relationship with nature, online environmental resources, and family fun activities to "get green." Families can also access

information on health and safety issues such as bullying, sun safety, avoiding and treating poison ivy and poison oak, developing healthy lifestyles, and [teen specific issues](#) such as driving safety, information on underage drinking and drug use, and online safety.

Of course, CampParents.org also allows parents the opportunity to use the [ultimate camp planner](#) and ACA's [Find A Camp](#) searchable database. By using these camp resources, families can find the perfect camp experience, see research and information on the benefits and essential quality of camp to a child's development, visit camp Web sites, find information on financial assistance, and read helpful camp tips.

For additional information on the perfect camp experience for your child or to request our parent presentation, *Camp 101*, please contact ACA, Indiana at info@acaindiana.org or 574-457-4379.

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