

Ready, Set, Camp!

Finding the Right Camp for Your Child

You are considering a summer camp, but how to choose? There's a camp that is ideally suited for every child, providing a summer of growth and fun whether your child attends a day or overnight camp, a specialized or traditional camp. With a little help from the camp professionals at the American Camp Association, here's some sound advice that helps parents sort through the choices and benefits that camp delivers. When spring approaches, parents and children look forward to planning for the future—a future that includes the opportunities for exploration and discovery that arrives with summer camp.

How to Decide When Your Child is Ready for Camp

Children are ready for new experiences at different stages. Parents know their children best and these questions can help gauge whether this is the summer your child will start camp.

What is your child's age? Children under age seven may not adjust easily to being away from home. Consider the day camp experience to prepare them for future overnight camp.

How did your child become interested in camp? Does your child talk about camp on a sustained basis? How much persuasion is necessary from you?

Has your child had positive overnight experiences away from home? Visiting relatives or friends? Were these separations easy or difficult?

What does your child expect to do at camp? Learning about the camp experience ahead of time allows you to create positive expectations.

Are you able to share consistent and positive messages about camp? Your confidence in a positive experience will be contagious.

A Camp for Every Child—The Perfect Fit

Camp can last for just a few days or stretch to all summer long. It's well worth the trouble to investigate the variety of choices offered by camps before your child packs a backpack. These questions help you consider the options.

Near or Far?

Where do you want your child to go to camp? Locally or far away? While each camp experience has something unique to offer your child, this is an opportunity for families to assess what they value for their campers.

Go to [Find A Camp](#) on this site and click individual Alabama counties on the map to find camps near you.

Benefits of Camp Nearby

Easier to evaluate and visit

Friends and family are likely familiar with camp

Minimal travel costs

Likely contact with classmates or children from same region

Benefits of Camp Far Away

More choices

Different experiences, different geography, e.g., mountains or oceans—even different languages

Promotes independence, particularly for early and late adolescent campers

Diversity of campers

Chance for family to visit and vacation at close of camp

Session Length Offers Another Choice

Camps offer widely varying options to help parents and children reach their goals for summer fun and exploration. Talking with your child about the goals you both share helps determine which choice is right for you.

Benefits of Short Sessions (one-three weeks)

First-time or younger campers have a chance to learn new skills

Bonds develop with other campers and staff

Great exposure to camp experience with less expense

Minimizes homesickness

Benefits of Longer Sessions (four-twelve weeks)

Strong sense of belonging to camp community

Chance to learn new skills

Development of specialized skills

Multiple opportunities for learning and enrichment

Lifelong friendships

Opportunities to contribute to camp culture

Boys Only, Girls Only, or Co-ed?

Now may be the opportunity to explore the choices and benefits of all boys, all girls, or co-ed camps.

Benefits of Single Sex Camps

Breaking gender stereotypes—girls interact with women in position of authority and boys interact with men who act as nurturers

More opportunities to “be yourself” without impressing or competing with the opposite sex

Camp philosophy may be tuned into gender strengths and weaknesses

Brother or sister camps may share activities

Benefits of Co-ed Camps

Breaking gender stereotypes—girls interact with women in positions of authority and boys interact with men who act as nurturers

Mirrors and prepares campers for everyday living in a co-ed world

Allows families with a boy and a girl to attend the same camp

Offers diverse points of view

Breaks through rigid divisions set up in school when campers participate in equal footing

A Camp for Every Child—Traditional, Specialty, and Special Needs

Choices abound when it comes to camp programs. One may highlight a wide variety of activities geared to campers of all ages and skill levels, others, because of their setting and expertise, may concentrate on one or two activities while providing traditional activities as well. Parents of children with special needs are pleased to learn about the range of camp activities that help kids be kids first.

Benefits of Traditional Camps

Wide variety of activities

Chance for campers to try new activities

Exposure to more campers and staff at varying activities

Benefits of Specialty Camps

One or two specialized activities (often combined with traditional offerings)

Expectation for increased proficiency during camping session

Deepens knowledge and skill in particular area of interest or ability

Benefits of Special Needs Camps

Activities geared to campers' abilities

Knowledgeable staff with expertise to understand campers' strengths and challenges

Supportive and fun atmosphere to share with others

The Value of Camp for Every Child

What happens when you make the decision to choose camp? You open up a world of discovery and learning for your child, a world that values children for who they are and who they will become. Camp gives each child a world of good.

For nearly one hundred years, the American Camp Association has been serving the camp community and families considering camp. Please visit our family resource Web site, www.CampParents.org, to learn more about the camp experience, search the Find a Camp database, and explore the world of child and youth development.

For more information about ACA camps, contact:

American Camp Association

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1-800-428-CAMP (2267)

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