

Seven ways to take the stress and worry out of sending your child to summer camp

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Of all the things that can get in the way of summer camp, one of the biggest is not just anxiety among children worried about what camp will be like, but rather [parental anxiety](#) over whether the camp will be caring and safe for their child.

Separation, along with related worries like an inability to communicate

with their child and the need to place trust in [camp](#) directors and staff they don't know, may be difficult barriers for a parent to overcome.

As [scholars](#) of [summer camp](#), we believe there are steps parents can take to ease their anxiety about whether a particular camp will provide a good experience. Here are seven:

1. Find an accredited camp

The American Camp Association sets health and [safety standards](#) for the camp industry. The association offers [camp accreditation](#) through onsite visits and a review of camp policies and procedures. Only camps that implement recognized standards can earn this accreditation. These standards address such matters as what campers learn and the condition of the places they learn it. It also touches on screening and training staff and what staff must do to provide campers with safe experiences.

One easy way to determine if a particular camp is accredited is to search for the "Accredited" logo in camp promotional materials. To double-check a camp's accreditation status, use the American Camp Association's [Find-A-Camp](#) resource website to verify the camp is accredited. Filter for type of camp and the results will clearly show the logo if the camp is accredited.

2. Learn how camp staff are trained and prepared

High-quality camp experiences begin with [properly prepared staff](#). For instance, parents may ask how many hours or days of pre-camp training staff receive. Often they get at least five days for residential camp, but that number could vary based on staff position.

Ask what percentages of camp staff are returning from the previous

summer. Typically, 40% to 60% or more of staff return. If it's lower than that, parents should ask why.

Inquire about the ratio of staff to campers, which is typically 1-to-8 but can differ based on the age of the campers, with a 1-to-5 ratio common for younger campers ages six to eight years old and a 1-to-10 ratio common for older campers ages 15 to 18 years old.

If your child misbehaves, struggles to understand camp rules or has unmet needs, you want to understand how staff will treat your child. Parents can also ask directors how campers are supervised, how [camper](#) behavior is managed and how staff are prepared for these important roles.

3. Prepare your child for camp

If you want peace of mind with a child attending overnight camp, make sure the child is ready for an extended stay away from home.

Parents can use [several strategies to prepare their child for camp](#) and reduce the likelihood their child will become homesick or experience anxiety.

Those strategies are:

- Involve your child in the decision to participate in the camp. Explain the purpose and activities of the camp.
- Allow your child to practice spending time away through other overnight experiences like sleepovers or short overnight stays at the homes of friends and relatives.
- Discuss the camp sleeping arrangements and meal options with your child. Many camps offer live or virtual tours to help parents and prospective campers become familiar with the camp

facilities and accommodations.

- Help your child pack appropriate clothing and gear, and be sure they are prepared to take care of their medical needs, such as taking required medications or bringing along assistive devices, such as inhalers.
- Let your child know it's normal to feel anxious about leaving home to go to camp. Reassure your child about being ready, and encourage a positive attitude.

4. Discover a camp close to home or ask about transportation options

Many kinds of overnight camps are located within city limits, just outside the suburbs or even in rural wilderness areas. Finding [a camp near you](#) can help ease challenges associated with travel, as many camps require that parents transport their campers to the site.

If you are unable to bring your child to the camp you choose, ask the camp about transportation options, as some camps offer bussing services that pick campers up at central locations closer to densely populated areas. Your child may be able to start their camp experience from your town, with a camp bus staffed by trained counselors. Carpooling with other families, or some other form of ride-sharing service, may also be an option, and the camp may be willing to help families coordinate ride-sharing.

5. Learn how the camp supports camper well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic brought mental, emotional and social health to the forefront of issues camps are addressing in campers and staff.

Forthcoming research shows that in light of pandemic-related disruptions and changes, [children](#) are exhibiting a greater variety of these

sorts of issues and potentially concerning behaviors that require support from the camp community, including increased rates of anxiety and difficulty regulating their emotions when they get upset. Camp counselors who are educated about the [importance of mental, emotional and social health](#) and have been properly trained on managing these issues among campers can help your child have a safe and rewarding camp experience.

Parents may also wish to educate themselves regarding the role they can play in [supporting their child's mental, emotional and social health](#). Parents need to communicate any existing concerns to camp leaders to ensure their child receives the care and support needed to thrive.

6. Find out how to keep in touch

Not being able to communicate with a child attending overnight camp is another major stressor for parents. Parents accustomed to regular smartphone chats with their child may wonder how they can keep in touch during camp. It may surprise parents that research indicates [campers don't think smartphones belong in camp](#), because they create a type of barrier that makes it harder to build camp friendships.

Communication policies differ from camp to camp. Some allow sending or exchanging handwritten letters and care packages, but not always. Some allow email or a messaging service provided through the camp or a third-party service. Some allow scheduled phone calls.

Many camps are active on social media. Parents can follow these accounts to get a glimpse of what their child is doing and see how camp is going. Some camps use photo or video services and then post these images to a third-party site accessible to parents.

It's important for parents to remember that while it's natural to miss a

child who is away at camp, it's also important to provide space to develop independence. Be supportive and positive and avoid expressing worry or anxiety. This type of support helps your child feel confident and secure while away.

7. Search for ways to reduce the cost of camp

The [cost of camp](#) can factor heavily into the decision to send your child to camp. If affordability is a concern, consider options that can [reduce the camp fee](#).

These options include camps with fees based on income and discounts associated with membership in an organization, such as the YMCA or Girl Scouts. Additionally, some camps offer free or heavily discounted rates for campers from military families, or for campers from families that meet income requirements for camp scholarships.

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