



PHOTO COURTESY OF THINKSTOCK

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE CHOOSING A SUMMER CAMP

COURTESY OF METRO NEWS

Though February does not often elicit images of youngsters building campfires or playing games in the pool, the month more synonymous with the Super Bowl and Valentine's Day is a great time for parents to start thinking about summer camps for their kids.

Summer camp is often something kids look forward to, and something they will fondly recall long after they reach adulthood. For many kids, summer camp provides a first taste of independence, as youngsters spend significant time away from home without their parents for the first time in their lives. But as great an experience as summer camp can be for youngsters, it can be just as difficult an experience if parents don't find the right fit for their children. That's why it behooves parents to start thinking about summer camps for their kids in winter, before camps start filling out their rosters, which tends to happen in early spring. The following are a few things parents should take into consideration when seeking a summer camp for their kids.

STAFF

The right summer camp staff can make all the difference. Many children are understandably shy when arriving at a summer camp, as their friends from back home might not be joining them. That can make kids hesitant to participate in activities or less enthusiastic about those activities. But a good staff will know how to make kids feel welcome, which should help them come out of their shells and make the most of their summer camp experiences. The quality of staffs can vary significantly depending on the camp, so it's important that parents ask camp representatives about their staffs before making any commitments. Ask how long the staff has been together and the types of training new and even veteran staff members undergo before the start of camp season? Does the training include first aid and emergency medical training and certification?

It's also good to ask about the vetting process the camp employs before hiring new staff, including the extent of its background checks. Are criminal background checks conducted? How many references must potential staff members supply to be considered for employment? A good camp will be forthcoming with answers to all of your questions, so eliminate those that appear hesitant to share information about their staffs.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

When vetting camps for kids, parents should ask what a typical day is like once the season hits full swing. Many parents want their youngsters to have a well-rounded experience, while others might want their kids to attend a more specialized camp, whether it's a sports camp focusing on a particular sport or a music camp devoted to helping kids become better musicians.

Regardless of the type of camp parents are considering for their kids, they should ask about what daily life at the camp is like. Ask to see schedules and how strictly camps adhere to those schedules. When considering specialized camps, ask the staff representative if kids will have the chance to simply have a little fun and which types of recreational activities are planned to give kids a break from what are often rigorous schedules.

CAMP GOALS

Another thing parents must consider before choosing a summer camp for their kids is the goals of each individual camp. A camp should be dedicated to ensuring kids have fun, even when kids are attending more specialized camps that tend to be more strict. In addition, parents should look for a camp that wants its attendees to foster relationships with their fellow campers. Camp can be lonely for some youngsters, especially those attending summer camp for the first time, but a summer camp that strives to promote friendship among its campers can reduce, if not eliminate, any feelings of homesickness.

Late winter is when parents should start looking at summer camps for their kids, and there are a host of factors moms and dads should take into consideration during the vetting process to ensure their youngsters have as much fun as possible.

"SUMMER VACATIONS ARE SOON TO ARRIVE, AND PARENTS CAN BE ARMED WITH A LIST OF ENJOYABLE — YET INEXPENSIVE — WAYS TO KEEP KIDS BUSY."

