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R E P O R T



Parenting for High Potential, March 1997 National Association for Gifted Children

Questions to Ask When Researching a Summer Camp

by Rachel Knox

With the summer season just around the corner, parents and kids alike are beginning to think about how they may spend a portion of their time off. Will it be summer camp this year? Once you have decided on an appropriate option for your youngster (see President's column, page 3), you will need to make sure that the facilities, environment, personnel, and camp philosophy are also suited to your child's needs. Here are some questions to ask:

Camp Policies and Background

- *What is the camp's philosophy?* Find out if the values of the camp are in line with your family's values.
- *What is the competitive nature of the camp?* Some camps promote competitiveness while others focus on cooperative learning. Be sure to match your child's personality to the camp's program.
- *What is the director's background?* Ask how he or she decided to become a director and what kind of training he or she had in child development. What is the director's experience?
- *Is the camp accredited by the American Camping Association?* The American Camping Association is a national association that evaluates a camp based on 300 health, safety, and program criteria. The ACA examines the living areas, food service, emergency preparedness, program practices, health care, personnel, transportation, and administrative procedures. However, just because a camp is not accredited by the ACA does not necessarily mean it is not a good camp. Be sure to inspect the camp thoroughly and find out why it does not have ACA accreditation.
- *What are the procedures for medical routines and emergencies?* For specific information, ask about the last medical emergency and how it was handled.
- *What are the policies on sexual misconduct?* Ask how an incident between a staff member and a camper would be handled as well as an incident between campers. Find out if there have been any problems at the camp in the past.
- *How does the camp handle homesickness?* Ask about the policy on parent contact and if there are any rules on when a parent can call a child. Even if a camp frowns on calls from

parents to their child, camps should have no problem with a parent calling to ask the camp staff how their child is doing.

Counselors

- *What is the camper-to-counselor ratio?* According to the ACA, a camp should maintain a ratio of one counselor to every six campers ages 7-8, one counselor to every eight campers ages 9-14, and one counselor for every ten campers ages 15-17. For day camps, the ratios are slightly higher.
- *How long are counselors on duty before getting a break?* You want to make sure that counselors have enough time off so that they are alert, energetic, and even-tempered when they are with the campers.
- *Are counselors hired for specific talents or expertise in an activity?* The more a counselor knows, the more he or she can pass on to campers.
- *How are the counselors trained?* Ask about the counselor orientation program. Is it spent cleaning up the camp or in training (first aid, water safety, etc.)?

Campers

- *What is the percentage of returning campers?* A large percentage of returning campers is a good sign that kids really enjoy the camp.
- *Where are the campers and counselors coming from?* Are they from all across the country, around the world, or just a localized area? If you live in rural North Carolina and send your child to a camp in upstate New York that has lots of campers from New York City, your child might feel out of place.
- *Finally, be sure to ask for the names of campers and counselors that you may contact.* A former camper can provide a kid's perspective on the camp. If the camper you contact will be returning, he or she might be a familiar name and possibly a first new friend for your child.

Resources

- American Camping Association: 800-428-CAMP
The American Camping Association publishes a yearly guide to summer camps (\$16.95). You can also call to obtain numbers for regional branches of the ACA.
 - National Camp Association: 800-966-2267
 - Kids' Camps, <http://www.kidscamps.com/>
 - Peterson's Summer Programs, <http://www.petersons.com/summerop/>
- <http://www.nagc.org>

