

JULIE COLE'S
**ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO CAMP**

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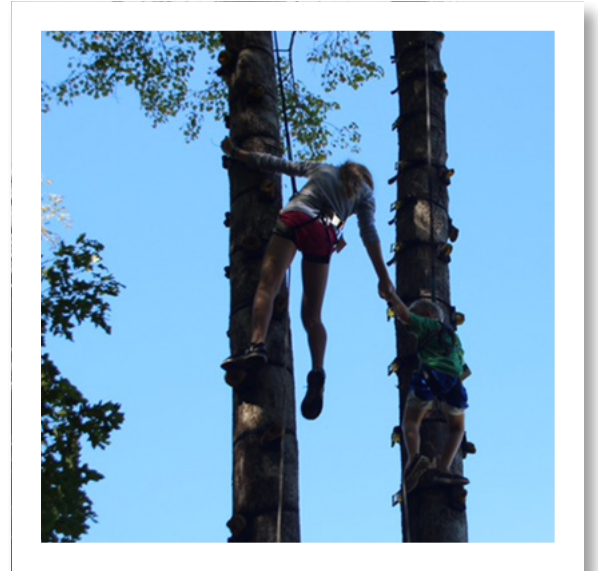


JULIE COLE'S ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CAMP

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INTRODUCTION

As soon as I started my research for this book, it became clear that there are a ton of resources on camps, including many excellent guides on what parents should look for—and just as importantly avoid—when choosing a summer camp for their kids. I've noted many of these in the Resources section and have no intention of retracing that well-worn trail. So what makes this guide different? Well, move in closer to the fire, stick a marshmallow on the end of that stick, and I'll tell you. I share with you the perspective of a parent of six young kids. This doesn't make me an expert on camps, but it does mean I've gained a fair bit of insight into the way kids think and have a few years' experience figuring out how to find camps that fit.



Each chapter in my book is inspired by one of my kids because, like yours, each is unique in how they see themselves and relate to the world around them. For example, the chapter on special needs was inspired by my first-born child. He happens to have been diagnosed with autism and as his over decade-long advocate, I've gathered a few nuggets of wisdom that I'd love to share. The overnight chapter was written with my two eldest daughters in mind, who plunged into their time away at camp with a vengeance. Hopefully you'll recognize snippets of your own kids' personalities and the information provided will offer a fresh and/or reassuring perspective.

I want this guide to be read in the spirit of one parent talking with another (let's pretend you're busy eating a s'mores so I can't hear your side of the chat). I firmly believe that most often we're the experts on our own kids and innately know what's right or wrong for them. This knowledge should, ultimately, be our guide.

Julie Cole

CHAPTER ONE: FINDING THE RIGHT CAMP FOR YOUR KID

We all want the best for our kids and for many of us, choosing a camp is filled with all kinds of emotional as well as practical decisions. We want our kids to have fun—this is summer break after all—but we also want some bang for our buck. Striking this balance takes some planning and the earlier you start your research, the better. The best camps fill up fast, often over six months in advance, and you don't want to have to send your kiddos to The Mad Artist Camp when they had their hearts set on Fun With Test Tubes.

Get online and start revving your search engines. Be as specific in your search terms as you can, (e.g. narrow down location, type of camp, co-ed or not, etc.) or you'll spend way too much time going down cyber roads to nowhere. Google the phrase "summer camp" and you'll net almost 30 million hits.

Another good way to source camps is to think of where the preferred activities are normally held. Your kid loves to act? Check out local theatre companies. Into science? Try a university engineering department. Lurk on camp chat boards (many of the larger camp websites have them) or better still, post a question or three. Other parents are your best source of non-biased info and tips.

Here are some key points to consider when selecting a camp:

Day camp or residential?

Or maybe a mixture of both? Some outdoor day camps end their week with a sleepover and this is a great way to introduce your child to being away overnight. You can take this concept further by having your child attend day camps for most of the summer and then let them finish off with a bang by spending one week away at an overnight camp.

Benefits of day camp

Opting for day camp shouldn't be seen as the less desirable of the two options. It typically costs considerably less and requires less gear than an overnight camp. It also allows more control over week-by-week programming; kids can enjoy swimming camp one week, archaeological camp the next, and so on. Depending on the programming, day camp may also make more sense—there's probably not much point in paying big bucks for your child to study something like computer programming just because classes happen to have a view of Lake Snapping Turtle.

Benefits of summer camp



7 Benefits of Summer Camp

Decided between a day/overnight camp? Now... which type of camp?

By interests

Consider your child's interests: sports, science, arts... or why not try a week or so of each? Or how about using camp to have them test out activities beyond their regular favourites? Kids can immerse themselves for a limited time in tennis or robot building or... fill in the blank. If they hate it, they need never lift a racquet/wrench again; if they love it, you've just opened the door to a passion that may otherwise have remained closed. Traditional overnight camps often have a broad range of activities and are great for introducing kids to a wide variety of games, sports, crafts and so on. These camps might fall short on specialized instruction and facilities though, so quality vs. variety is another consideration.

By needs

Also consider your child's needs: Is their year crammed with homework and after-school activities? If so, perhaps a traditional, fun, outdoor camp would be just what they need. Are they comfortable meeting lots of new people and experiencing a variety of new activities or would a smaller, more controlled environment be better for them? Do they have special needs? How will these be addressed? Don't assume what worked well for one kid will work for their sibling. I know someone whose husband and his brother attended the same overnight summer camp for years; one loved it, the other would beg to go home. Listen to your kids and stay tuned to their needs. Summer camp is definitely not a one-size fits-all deal.

Found some great camps? What's your budget?

Costs range from thousands of dollars for international camps to a few bucks for an afternoon at your local YMCA. Keep in mind; price is not necessarily an indication of quality.



For that, you should consider:

- Counsellor to kid ratio
- Qualifications and experience of camp staff
- Depth and quality of programs
- Appropriate facilities/location

Many camps offer subsidies and even fully-waived fees. These are often coordinated through social service agencies which put forward the names of eligible children, or by local church groups, community living organizations and other not-for-profits. Check out your local camping association for links and resources. You can also call the camp directly to ask about the process for selecting qualified children. Investigate family discounts for more than one sibling, or multiple week discounts.

Look for camps that allow you to take advantage of members' discounts: museums, art galleries, maybe even your alma mater. Or perhaps there's a student discount for camps held at your kids' dance or karate school.

Accreditation

Is the camp accredited? For example, in the province where I live (Ontario), accreditation by the **Ontario Camping Association** is a sign that directors and counsellors stay current on camp issues and meet certain standards. These are related to site, facilities, administration, leadership, safety, food and programming. While all camps must meet legislated standards, accredited camps meet those additional important requirements. Please see the websites below, decide if an accredited camp is a must and proceed from there. If you feel accreditation is essential: congratulations, you've just narrowed your search!



The Canadian Camping Association
American Camp Association



Special needs

At this point in your search, you've probably discovered many fantastic camps that could make for a memorable summer and likely you're hoping to grab a piece of the action for your kid. If you're waiting to take the leap because your child has special needs to consider—trust me, I know where you're coming from. Read on for my chapter on how special needs have their own place around the campfire and how, often, it's the same one the other kids are roasting their marshmallows on. In the meantime, grab a taste—more like a feast, really—of what's out there for your phenomenal kid by checking out the almost

1,000 special needs camps across North America at mysummercamps.com.

The end... kinda

There are countless things that will sway your choice when it comes to selecting a camp but ultimately, the only wrong choice you can make is one which doesn't consider the uniqueness of your child.

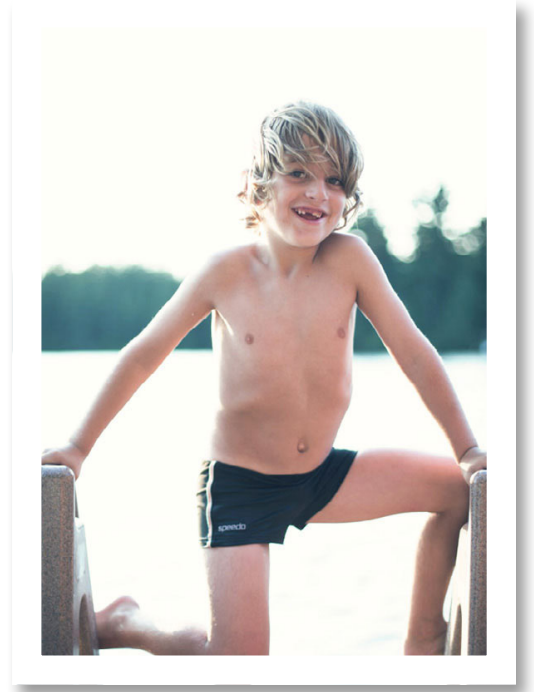


Video: Benefits of an accredited camp



CHAPTER TWO: DAY CAMPS

If your child isn't ready for, or interested in, an overnight camp, day camps are a fabulous and generally more wallet-friendly option. And they aren't just for younger kids. Day camps offer a great opportunity for older children and teens to perfect or learn new skills in an exciting and challenging environment—where they have license to re-invent themselves away from school friends or teachers and all the accompanying pressure to conform or succeed. Many day camps are held outdoors in conservation areas or parks, while indoor camps also find ways to work in field trips or outside activities. For most families, day camps are the way to go. The range of camps covers every possible interest—the ones already there and ones that are just emerging.



To get a sampling of what's available, visit camps.ca for a ton of American and Canadian camps.

Camps typically run in one or two week sessions, although recreation, community centres and local playgrounds may offer daily or even drop-in programs.

Although day camps are cheaper than overnight camps, there can be hidden costs that add up. Working parents without flexible schedules or accommodating support systems (of the nanny or grandparent variety) may find themselves drawn to the one-stop-and-drop appeal of overnight camps. Here are some things to consider about day camps:

Transportation: Is there a camp bus? Does its schedule/route suit you?

Schedule: Is extended care possible? What does it cost? Will you have to arrange pick up yourself? Is there more than one bus run?

Food: Overnight camps include meals; day camps typically ask you to pack your own. Not a huge factor but something to think about when comparing cost/ convenience—how motivated are you to keep the creative lunch-making juices flowing through the summer?

Supplies: At day camp, all supplies are usually included in the cost; at overnight camp, especially for first-timers, the cost of purchasing specific items all at once can be daunting.

Meeting new local friends: Chances are your kid will expand their network of local buddies, or run into existing friends at day camp. This is less likely with the long-distance aspect of sleep-away camp. Then again, having far-flung friends can be just as fun.

Many kids, many camps? If you have more than one child, are they happy going to the same camp or will you have to make separate arrangements? Would a sleepaway camp cover both their needs?

A Tip from Counsellor Julie

Found a great summer day camp? See if it operates during spring breaks or school PD days to try it out ahead of time.



Video: Benefits of day camp

CHAPTER THREE: OVERNIGHT CAMPS

As a child, I wouldn't go to a friend's sleepover, never mind overnight camp. In my mind, the only place for me was the comfort of my own home surrounded by loving family. Realizing, though, that my kids aren't me, I was careful not to project my issues onto them and packed my three biggies off to camp. They loved it! In fact, my eldest daughters wished it could have lasted longer.

If you're considering overnight camp for the first time, you probably have a lot of questions and maybe a few fears of your own. The truth is, though, that sometimes our kids like being away from us. So if they're ready for the step towards independence of an overnight camp, the real question is: are we? Here's a list of questions you might find useful.

Julie Cole's By-No-Means-Scientific "Ready for Overnight Camp?!" Quiz

If you answer "yes" to most of the following questions, it's a good indication your child is ready for overnight camp:

- My child has happy experiences at sleepovers with friends or relatives.
- My child is open to trying new foods and experiences.
- My child can wash and dress themselves independently.
- My child wants to go to an overnight camp.
- I want my child to go an overnight camp!*

* If you answer "no" to this, there's a chance your attitude and comments will negatively impact the readiness of your kid (in other words, the answer directly above likely matches).

If the majority of your answers are "no", go through the questions again next year, or the next. Or never again because there's no rule that every kid has to go to sleepaway camp! If you and your kid ARE raring to go...

Now what?!

Here's the rough order of how to proceed:

- Research overnight camps: decide what your budget is and find out the timelines for applying.
- Talk to your child about what sort of camp they're interested in. Is there something new they'd like to try or a skill they want to improve? Where, if anywhere, are their friends going? Is that somewhere they want to go, too? Or would they rather start fresh with the friendships?
- Request camp info and attend camp fairs: details of these are often posted on association websites.
- Visit shortlisted camps if possible or go through their websites with your child. Discuss the pros and cons of each.
- Select the camp in agreement with your child.
- Shop for supplies and pack well in advance; allow time for ordering and applying name labels to clothes and other camp gear.
- Mark off the camp start and end dates clearly on a calendar so your child has a clear sense of timelines.
- As the time approaches, talk about camp in a casual way and get answers to any questions that may arise.
- If you manage all the above, you're ready: relax!



A Tip From Counsellor Julie

Still feeling queasy about sending your little (or big) one off to overnight camp? Family camps are an option for all of you to test the waters. Typically, you and your kids bunk together in a cabin, with meals and activities provided. With any luck, your kids will start to imagine what a great time they'd have if you weren't there to cramp their style, at which point you can let them know how easy that is to arrange!



Video: First time at residential camp

CHAPTER FOUR: SPECIAL NEEDS CAMPS

My son with special needs has never been, and probably never will be, at a special needs camp. This is not to discredit in any way the importance of specialized camps. I know for a fact they can be life-changing, positive places. Camps for children who have suffered burns, for example, allow affected kids a rare chance to connect, relax and have fun with others who have been through the same ordeal, in a non-judgmental environment. Mabel's Labels, has sponsored one such camp and I have nothing but praise for the amazing people who run them and the impact they have on the children who attend. For children who would be uncomfortable or stigmatized at "regular" camp, specialized camps are definitely the way to go.

Kids with physical limitations can also benefit hugely from special needs camps, which will have specially adapted equipment and activities, trained counsellors and excellent child/staff ratios. Easter Seals, for example, offers some pretty awesome programming.



eastersealscamps.org (Canada)
easterseals.com (US)

Their policy not to turn away applicants due to lack of funds means there's no reason your child can't benefit from the camp experience. The respite may do you some good too.

The needs of a child with autism are less easy to address. For one thing, there are many levels of autism. I've asked the question: Should my son go to a camp for kids with autism, featuring specially trained staff to monitor their activities, offer therapy, and maybe provide a report at the end, summarizing their observations? Or should he go to a "regular" camp where there's a risk his needs won't be addressed and he'll feel lost, frustrated and possibly alienated from others? I decided to peek behind door #2 and it wasn't at all bad. Two key benefits of choosing a mainstream camp that can accommodate your child with special needs are:

1. You'll have a wider choice of camps.
2. Your child can participate in programs where the speciality is fun.

This last distinction is subtle, but what it boils down to is that some special needs camps expertly address the needs but fall short on the wants, i.e. the “no-reason- to-do-this-other-than-it’s-fun” kind of wants that every kid has. Meeting the demands of a group of kids with special needs is extremely demanding and can, in some cases, become the primary focus. Sometimes this level of expertise may be exactly what our children require. But needs can change so consider all options. Would a tennis expert tuned to the needs of your kid be a better fit this year than an autism expert who happens to play tennis? Again, this is not to disparage specialized camps; they’re vital resources. My point is the goal is to figure out what’s best for YOUR unique child. Sometimes grouping kids by what they can’t do isn’t helpful. I’m not all that hot on grouping kids before even meeting them, either. I am decidedly cool towards labelling people and think there’s a lot to be gained from having kids of varying capabilities meet each other and do stuff together. Autism encompasses a vast spectrum of characteristics and maybe your kid relates as well to kids without autism as they do to those with it. Whatever group your child fits in best with is the one that’s best for them and it may vary over time. Today, my son manages integrated programs but for years his behaviour needed to be closely monitored. The point, I feel, is to avoid limiting assumptions being imposed upon our kids. Seems simple, but for children with autism, securing this can be a

challenge. Remember, your child has a legal right to attend any camp and cannot be discriminated against based on (perceived) disability. Labels are for clothes. If you have a child with special needs, do not feel limited by the options presented to you. Discover what is possible just by asking. Talk to other parents, research like crazy and accept nothing less for your child than that which is rightfully theirs.



CHAPTER FIVE:

ARTSY KID CAMPS

Arts camps tend to fall into two broad categories: seasonal camps, where the organizers operate when school is out, often in sublet facilities (e.g. a kids' theatre camp in a local church basement); and camps that are part of existing programs or permanent facilities (e.g. acting camp at a professional theatre). One is not necessarily better than the other but the latter often have superior facilities and staff experienced in their field.

Keep in mind, though, that even the most talented of artists might be lacking in kid-negotiation skills. Clues as to whether your arts camp is of the nomad variety can often be found on their website. Some may not have a permanent online home, but that doesn't necessarily mean the camp experience would be a bad one. It might even mean promotion of their summer programs isn't necessary because they're so popular. Don't take a pass on these camps without taking a closer look; some are well worth discovering while other, higher profile ones, may not live up to the hype.

Keep your eyes and ears open, talk to other parents, scope out library bulletin boards and free community listings in local papers and so on. Some terrific camps have small budgets and don't put a lot of their dollars into advertising. Bigger isn't always better. Meeting the arts camp director, however briefly, can give you some insight into what their priorities are: giving kids a great experience or making some moolah on the side? This is not to say camps shouldn't be profitable, just that money shouldn't be their prime motivation. What is that camp director doing the rest of the year? Are they kid/education/civic-oriented? Also check how much hands-on involvement the director actually has—you may discover Wow Art Kamp for Kids isn't run by Madame Wow, but instead by lots of poorly trained high school students hoping for volunteer credits.

Top Places to Find Arts Camps

- Art gallery and museum websites
- Dance and music schools
- Theatres
- Universities and colleges

And, ta-da, art schools!



CHAPTER SIX: SPORTY KID CAMPS

If you have a kid who never seems to tire and doesn't stop moving until their head hits the pillow, a sports camp could be just the thing they—and you—need. The choices really are endless and for older kids, they can offer great opportunities to improve a skill or two. One-discipline camps also provide seriously sporty kids a chance to be amongst their peers and get a sense of how they rank in a casual, non-competitive way. Overnight sports camps can take that up a notch by mixing in young athletes from a wider area, including other countries. Sports camps are equally good for the mostly sedentary kid who thinks the wrist action of a video game controller counts as exercise. Forget virtual golf; get your kid out there swinging a real club. They might not make it to the pro leagues, but they'll get some much needed exercise and a healthy dose of reality along with that fresh air.



Sports camp falls into three broad categories:

Traditional (multi-disciplinary) camps: Mixed gender, mixed proficiency, multi-sports. Campers often play on teams and the focus is not just on sports but on a variety of activities.

Single-sport overnight camps: Often single gender and focused on improving skills, these can offer shorter sessions but more intensive training than traditional camps.

Single-sport day camps: Sometimes tailored to youth sports teams, these may bring in professional coaches and athletes to coach participants on their home turf.

Single-sport overnight camps: Often single gender and focused on

improving skills, these can offer shorter sessions but more intensive training than traditional camps.

The level of coaching expertise can vary so the camp you choose for your child will depend on how into the sport of choice they already are or hope to be. For me, the most valuable thing about sports camp, for younger kids as well as more competitive older ones, is the chance to improve the way they interact with others. Things like taking turns, cheering/consoling their friends and losing or winning gracefully are all skills that work just as well off the sports field as they do on it.



Top Places to Find Sports Camps

- Universities and colleges
- Karate and other martial arts schools
- Soccer, tennis, swimming, boating and other sport clubs
- Equestrian schools and stables
- Private schools

CHAPTER SEVEN: SMARTY-PANTS CAMPS

So you've got a kid who's always coming up with amazing questions and before you've had a chance to answer them, they're coming up with brilliant answers? Or perhaps they're heavily into computers and you'd like a way to channel that into more active or sociable pursuits? Maybe it's a mixture of both? An educational camp could be just what everyone needs. Not to be confused with summer school, these often have a more hands-on approach, with lots of interactive activities like experiments, project creation, debates and games. Best of all, they may allow your kid access to equipment and experts typically absent from school. Some specifically academic camps complement school curriculum—high school kids can use them to prepare for exams or sample college life and younger kids can brush up on skills in a way that doesn't feel like punishment. Whatever your focus; this is a growing area and there's no shortage of choices. Check out your local university, college or language school for day camp options. The most interesting ones seamlessly combine arts and science.



Educational camps to consider:

Technology camps: Computer programming, robot building, video game creation, engineering, animation and digital film production, graphic design, space camp...

Ecology camps: Combine outdoor with indoor activities and a range of programming tweaked to be more environmentally mindful.

Science camps: Areas can range from hands-on fun with chemistry and physics to more applied sessions on forensics or even the science of espionage!

Language camps: Kids can learn a new language, immerse themselves to brush up existing skills or master ESL. International programmes for older kids are another exciting—if pricey—option.

Film camps: Kids can be little multimedia marvels, trying their hand at producing, acting, writing, directing, camera operating, editing and creating musical scores.

A couple of educational camp resources (you'll find many more yourself, trust me):



ourkids.net
villagecamps.com

A Tip From Counsellor Julie

Gifted kids have special needs too and if your child's day-to-day schooling isn't matching their abilities, educational camp can be just what's needed to boost existing skills, meet peers, realize their potential and find out if they really do want to be a rocket scientist.

CHAPTER EIGHT: GETTING READY FOR OVER- NIGHT CAMP—PART ONE

This often involves emotional preparedness for both you and your kid. Let's deal with mama first.

Are you ready?

It's normal to be nervous and second-guess decisions, especially when it comes to our offspring. The best way to help overcome this is to have as many of your questions and doubts addressed ahead of time as possible. Grab a drink (we'll call it cocoa) and let's go through them together. Chances are your main concern is that your child will get hurt.



I don't have to remind you that your child can get hurt anywhere, home turf included. That said, your child's safety is an absolute priority. Accredited camps meet stringent health and safety standards, run criminal checks and so on, but you'll still want to talk directly to Camp Directors to get answers to the following:

- What's the camper to staff ratio?
- What are the staff ages and qualifications?
- What is the level of supervision? Is there a buddy system?
- What are the safety guidelines, around water for example?
- Are different age groups together for some/any activities?
- How do counsellors deal with discipline issues? Are they trained in conflict resolution or in identifying signs of bullying?
- Are camp staff ever alone, one-on-one, with campers?

Remember, thousands of kids have wonderful summer camp experiences every year and by employing a little vigilance there's no reason at all your child won't be one of them.

A Tip From Counsellor Julie

One of the most revealing questions you can ask a Camp Director is: "What is your camper return rate?" coupled with "What is your staff turnaround?"



Video: Preparation for safety at camp

Is your child ready?

Listen to your child and address their concerns in as casual and relaxed a way as possible. Have answers to their questions. Be realistic. Be optimistic. Be organized so there aren't any frantic last-minute shopping trips. Let them know you trust they're ready for this new experience. Tell them you can't wait to hear about it all. Mean it. That's all I've got.

CHAPTER EIGHT: GETTING READY FOR OVER- NIGHT CAMP—PART TWO

How & what to pack, plus what not to wear

Camps usually provide a list of essentials and if they don't, ask! There are often special activities or events that require specific gear and don't forget camp weather might be different from home so be sure you consider this too. Pack extras of essentials just in case stuff gets misplaced or left to moulder unnoticed at the bottom of a bag.

Essentials

Clothing: Will vary by camp but usually include items that can layer well, swim gear and waterproof outerwear. Plan for varied weather (hot, cold, rainy) and activities (boating, hiking, water sports). Don't forget the little things, which turn into big things if missed, e.g. lots of bands to tie hair back for swimming or running laps.

A Tip From Counsellor Julie

New gear won't stay that way for long and besides, camp is not a highfashion event. Go for comfort! If new clothes are a necessity, wash them before packing. This will make them feel fuzzy and familiar when your kid wears them, plus allows you to check for shrinkage. Also have your kid break in new footwear ahead of time to avoid blisters.

Toiletries: There's no need to take the bathroom cabinet but toiletries are one thing you don't want your kids going sharesies on. They will need soap (body wash avoids gloopy bar soap syndrome), shampoo/conditioner, deodorant, toothbrush and paste, hairbrush/comb and a suitable bag to keep them in. Check

if your camp requires biodegradable/earth-friendly products or be an eco-mama and buy them anyway.

A Tip From Counsellor Julie

Heavily scented body sprays beloved by many young teens will attract bugs and repel friends, so keep those at home.

Protection: Sunscreen; bug repellent and after-bite balm (as natural as possible); water bottle; sunglasses; SPF lip balm; hats (sun and rain proof); medications in original containers; EpiPens and inhalers if used, including extras.

A Tip From Counsellor Julie

Pack a couple of sunscreens in case your kid develops an irritation to one (real or imagined) and becomes reluctant to use it. They can also alternate between waterproof and lighter ones depending on their activities. Plus, having a choice, no matter how small, is one tiny way for kids to assert control and gain a sense of independence.

Equipment: For specialized camps you may need to buy hockey/baseball gear, equestrian equipment, etc.

A Tip From Counsellor Julie

Shop ahead of time to take advantage of off-season sales and equipment swaps. Shopping, or at least researching prices, online can also require more time than expected so start early and save big.

And another thing: If your kid wears glasses or contacts, make sure they have spares with them. You could also get their eyes checked not too long before they leave so you have a recent prescription in case you need to buy and courier them replacements. (Hope that last tip didn't cause a cold sweat. It just pays to be prepared because you know, the one thing you don't plan for, is the one that's bound to happen.)

The “love” stuff

A journal: Small enough to hide.

Stationery with pre-stamped envelopes: Special pens and stickers might help with inspiration. Taking along a notebook is great for jotting down contact details for new camp friends and collecting autographs and messages, making it a tangible souvenir that will last longer than any easily deleted electronic one.

Cell phones: Of course, older kids will probably carry (or want to carry) cell phones to keep them plugged in with far-flung buddies. Camp policies vary on this but the two main arguments against cell phone use are practical (it could get lost/broken/stolen, leading to bad feelings and stress all around) and philosophical (camp is about a slower pace, introspection and growing as an individual by adapting to new surroundings and people). As much as you may appreciate being able to reach your kids directly and vice-versa, it may be worth fighting the urge to do so for both your sakes. It also helps to cling to the “no news is good news” frame of mind.

A “lovey”: A stuffed animal/blanket/pillow (even big kids can have one!)

A disposable or cheap digital camera: To take photos and also to view and share saved photos of friends and loved ones. This is handy if your kids get lonely too. Small prints of family and pets are also good to have, maybe in a wallet-type holder.

Bright idea: A flashlight or small battery-powered lantern can add a sense of security for younger (and easily spooked older) kids, and are essential for late-night shadow puppet action.



Non-Essentials

If your kids can't possibly be parted from their Mp3 players and portable video game systems, identify them with name labels and keep a record of the serial numbers at home. Shockproof/waterproof cases are worthwhile investments too. Fine jewellery and expensive watches are best left at home. Pick up a cheap waterproof watch or better yet, ditch the timepiece altogether—it is summer, after all!



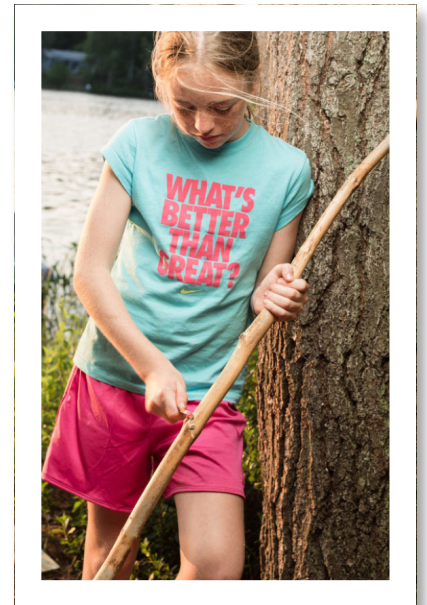
Video: One thing to bring to camp

CHAPTER NINE: ADJUSTING TO CAMP

There's much you can do to minimize homesickness and lessen its effects. Although most of these tips are for overnight campers, some apply to younger kids about to try their first day camp.

Before Camp

- Talk to your kids about how they're feeling.
- Don't remind them of what they'll be missing or say you'll be lonely without them.
- If your child has a hard time establishing friendships, have them go with a friend, sibling or cousin and arrange for them to bunk together. This can make all the difference to a very shy or insecure child who would otherwise never brave camp alone.
- Make sure younger kids have a concept of how much time they'll be away and have a way to measure it. Clearly mark the camp start and end dates on a calendar and highlight any especially fun days or events so they have specific things to look forward to and mark time with.
- Work with camp staff to create a support system for your child. This is especially vital if your child has special needs.
- Visit the camp beforehand, with your child, so they have a chance to familiarize themselves with it.
- Make sure your kid has realistic expectations and understands that they won't have the same level of privacy or "alone time" to unwind that they have at home. An article that touches on this psycho-social aspect of camp, written from a camp nurse's perspective, is here: [Association of Camp Nurses](#).



Keeping the Home-Fires Burning

Top 3 ways to keep in touch:

1. Write letters and encourage siblings and perhaps other relatives to do the same.
2. Send care packages.
3. If the camp allows email, use it!

You'll notice phones aren't on this list and the main reason is calls are hard to time and can be disruptive in more ways than one. Much as you may love to hear each other's voices, phone calls are best left for emergencies. Phone not ringing? Take that as a good thing.



Video: The biggest mistake parents can make

CHAPTER TEN: RESOURCES

This chapter could be as brief as saying: Go online and search “camps <insert state/province>”

The number of links and useful sites that pop up will dazzle and amaze. You will also note that a lot of the info is repetitive and in some cases, very similar. Camping association websites should be your starting point; they're invaluable when it comes to current, reliable information. Here are some to get you started and help keep you out of that labyrinth of look-alike mirror sites:

[The Canadian Camping Association](#)

[American Camp Association](#)

[Canadian Summer Camps Directory](#)

[KidsCamps.com: US, Canadian and international listings](#)

[YMCA Day and Resident Camps - Canada](#)

[Our Kids Camp Directory](#)

Specialized Camps:

[Our Kids Special Needs Summer Camps Directory](#)

[KidsHealth](#)

Other links off the beaten web path:

Search for camps on the websites of your local art galleries, museums, theatres, universities, colleges, private schools, dance academies, heritage properties, art schools, tourism farms, indoor playgrounds, karate schools, Scouts/Guides (links below), parks and recreation centres, swimming pools, places of worship, cultural centres, conservation areas, botanical gardens, zoos, science centres... you get the idea. Camps operate almost everywhere these days. Want to test that? Think of an interest, add your province/state and the word “camp” then hit “search”.

[Scouts Canada](#)

[Girl Guides of Canada \(Ontario site\)](#)

[Girl Scouts \(US\)](#)

A Tip From Counsellor Julie

Start your research early. It is not unusual for parents to enroll kids in summer camp the previous fall... or even sooner. Some visit shortlisted camps the summer before they intend to enroll their kids so they can see the camps in operation. Open houses and info sessions are in full swing in early spring and camp conferences and expos happen even sooner. Popular camps often fill up on the first day of enrolment so make note of those dates and start looking NOW!

CHAPTER ELEVEN: CAMP CHECKLIST

Even though this is an e-book, sometimes there's nothing like a good old fashioned paper checklist to print and check-off.

For comfort and safety, pack:

- ☐ clothes for a week
- ☐ waterproof jacket & boots
- ☐ broken-in sneakers
- ☐ hat/cap
- ☐ sun block & SPF lip balm
- ☐ insect repellent & after-bite lotion
- ☐ water bottle
- ☐ toothbrush & toothpaste
- ☐ liquid body wash/soap
- ☐ shampoo/conditioner
- ☐ bath towel(s)
- ☐ pajamas
- ☐ extra socks
- ☐ prescription medications
- ☐ spare eyeglasses

For activities, pack:

- ☐ 2-3 swimsuits & beach towels
- ☐ goggles
- ☐ backpack
- ☐ sleeping bag & pillow
- ☐ magnifying glass
- ☐ compass & whistle
- ☐ inexpensive watch with timer/alarm

For extra fun, pack:

- ☐ flashlight & spare batteries
- ☐ campfire blanket/fleece
- ☐ small musical instrument
- ☐ playing cards
- ☐ disposable or other cheap camera
- ☐ books/notebook/diary & pens
- ☐ stationery with addressed, stamped envelopes
- ☐ family & pet photos
- ☐ stuffed animal
- ☐ silly slippers
- ☐ pocket money for souvenirs, tuck shop, etc.

HAPPY TRAILS



I hope this book has been useful and helps kick off some wonderful experiences for you and your kids.

As one of the co-founders of a very kid-centric business, Mabel's Labels, and mom to my own gang of six, I've learned and am learning still, quite a bit about kids BUT no one knows your kid better than you. So when deciding on summer camp my message is simple: "Trust your gut". And if that fails, there are always indigestion tablets.