

# SHOULD YOUR CHILD GO TO CAMP ALONE?

It rolls around every spring. As the weather warms parents embark on a journey of mapping out their child's summer activities. One frequently pondered question parents wrestle with: "Is this the summer I send my child to overnight camp?"

Deciding to send your child to camp for the first time is exciting and nerve-wracking at the same time. One of the big questions parents ask is, "Does my child need a friend to go with them?"

Often when parents send kids to dance class or swim team, having a friend is not as concerning. But when it comes to sleeping over or simply being away for a week at a time, some parents want assurance that their child has someone with them that they know.

How important is it that your child have a friend at camp? Here are some things to consider.

## WHAT DOES THE CAMP DO TO MAKE NEW/SINGLE CAMPERS FEEL COMFORTABLE?

At Pine Cove, much thought and planning goes into making new and single campers feel welcome. First, consider that at Pine Cove almost half of all campers come on their own. Your child will be surrounded by LOTS of campers looking for a new friend and college staff who are very intentional about getting campers plugged in.

Before campers even arrive, Pine Cove registrars are praying for and assigning campers to cabins. In a cabin of eight campers, there will never be more than four campers who come as a group. This is very intentional! We want to make sure that campers will never be in a cabin as the only one who didn't bring a friend with them.

Another comforting thought? The ratio of counselor to camper is 1:2.4. That's a lot of amazing staffers who are ready and eager to make sure your child feels included. Our staff are well trained to create community and camaraderie amongst a cabin, and there is zero tolerance for bullying.

From day one of camp, counselors are intentionally building relationships and unity in their cabins. Each cabin eats meals together and does activities together.



## ARE THERE BENEFITS OF GOING ALONE?

Yes! Children can actually benefit from going to camp alone. When a child goes into a new experience alone, they take the first step to becoming independent and being a more adaptable and self-confident person. When you have a friend from home as a safety blanket, it could deny them that growth opportunity.

Going to camp with a friend could potentially hold your camper back. If your child is having a great time at camp, but her friend isn't, your child might feel responsible for her friend. Consider putting your child in a different cabin if she goes to overnight camp with a friend, which can help put some separation between the two.

Also, sometimes an extroverted friend feels held back by her introverted friend, or the more reserved friend becomes too reliant on her personable friend and never gets to spread her own wings. This can lead to someone feeling left behind.

Another benefit to going alone is that camp gives children an opportunity to reinvent themselves. Coming to camp alone, you can be different than you are at home. You can shed your long-standing school reputation as the shy kid and become the athletic child at camp. Many campers have said that at camp, they feel free to be themselves without judgement. But when you come to camp with friends from home, it could be hard to take on a different role.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Ultimately, each parent must decide what is best for their child. Even among siblings some children are confident going alone, while their brother or sister won't step foot out of the house without the assurance of a buddy. Our observation is that even campers who are initially nervous to arrive without a friend quickly warm up and jump into the experience with both feet.

Is it okay to send your child to camp alone? Absolutely! Time and again, parents are happily surprised that the child they pick up from camp is more confident, secure, and strong than the one they dropped off.

*This was our first time sending our youngest son to overnight camp. I was nervous because he is an introvert and didn't have a friend to go with. But from the first day of seeing pictures of him on the app, I could tell he had already made friends! The counselors were so intentional about making sure he connected. His letters home were short and sweet, so I knew he was feeling confident and having a good time. It was so good—he was sad to leave. I realize that sometimes my fear has kept me from pushing him out of his comfort zone. He was so glad we did! He begged us to sign him up for the 2-week experience next summer! My only regret is that we didn't do this sooner!" -Alyson R., Camper Mom*

