

The Art of Child Rearing: Guidelines in Choosing the Right Summer Opportunities for your Child

Child rearing is full of defining moments. Passing on your values, teaching how to be a good winner and not a sore loser, and helping learn how to navigate social relationships and friendships are just a few of these critical moments shared with our children. Another is choosing the right summer opportunity for your child. There are many questions that must be asked as you review the many diverse summer experiences available for your child. Will my child make friends? What happens if my child does not want to participate in a specific activity? How will it be handled when he is disappointed in his athletic performance? What will happen if my child can't pass the swim test? Will my child be safe? Be sure to choose a program that aligns with your values and meets your families' financial, programmatic, and emotional needs. Make it a priority to meet the director, an open and honest communication is a key component to success. Share both your concerns and your expectations, inviting dialogue from the director in order to decide together if the program is the right fit. The following 10 important topics should be considered before making any program choice.

Top 10 topics to discuss with the Director

1. **Enrollment Options-** What is the length of the program offered? Is there flexibility? What is the length of the day? Is transportation available? Ask and understand why the programs being offered have been designed at any particular length.
2. **Program Quality/Diversity-** Are you looking for a traditional well-rounded experience or a specialty program? What activities are must have's for your child? What kind of teaching experience does the camp activity leader have? How long is each activity? What kind of choice is available to my child?
3. **Cost-** We all know that price matters! Ensure that you are comparing apples to apples when looking at programs (we all agree that the welfare of your children is not the place to cut costs). What is included in the base price? Are there a la carte fees? What is the program's overall value (not simply financially but programmatically and emotionally)?
4. **Staff Composition-** Who is caring for my child? Ask about; age, experience, pre-season and on-going staff training, child abuse training, background checks, the interview process, retention rates, and camper-staff ratios.
5. **Safety Procedures-** Ask about the safety measures that are in place. These can include inquiring about medical personnel on property, emergency plans (i.e. evacuation, inclement weather), and facility security management, staff screening procedures, instructor qualifications, and operating rules of specific programs.
6. **Mission/ Values/ Philosophy –** Does the program reinforce your family values? Can the director easily explain the programs mission statement and goals? Ask the director about the type of child that is a successful participant in their program.
7. **Sensitivity to Camper Needs-** Understand the training given to staff regarding camper needs including diversity training, behavior management, position on bullying, and navigating friendships. Additionally,

if your child has a special need (i.e. allergy, ADD, ADHD, Aspergers, a physical limitation) be up front and open with the director. Ask about the camp's ability to meet your child's specific needs.

8. **Accreditation-** Find out if the program follows a nationally known accreditation process. Ask for those standards to be outlined. Find out if their camp program is inspected each summer by the Westchester Department of Health. Understand what it means to be Accredited by the American Camp Association (The "ACA" is the only national organization which establishes uniform standards for reviewing camps) and ask if the program has chosen to participate.

9. **Friends-** Will my child make friends? Ask what is done to help cultivate friendships, manage the rocky roads in relationships, handle cliques, and ensure that new campers are welcome.

10. **Fun-**All summer programs should be anchored in a spectacularly FUN and memorable experience for your child. What special traditions does the program have? Special events?

The good news is that there are tons of diverse summer choices for your child. The bad news is that choosing a summer program can be overwhelming. Being confident that you have chosen the right summer camp for your child can be a defining parenting moment. I know that my camp is not the right summer experience for every kid, nor can we accommodate them all; but it my hope that all children have a true camp experience that is safe, fun, and memorable. I hope that this top 10 becomes a resource tool for you. You should feel comfortable discussing each of these topics with the camp director and anything else on your mind, after all, you are entrusting your child to their care.

Submitted by: Jamie Sirkin, Director of Summer Trails Day Camp