

SUMMER CAMP 101

Which Camp Is Right For Your Child?



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Every year, millions of parents send their child off to summer camp in order to help make the most of the time they have out of school and ensure that parents are not run ragged dealing with childcare issues 24/7 for ten to twelve weeks until the new fall semester starts.

Summer camp has for many years been a popular and affordable option for childcare and fun for the kids, but a whole new generation of summer camps has been developing recently which offer more options than ever before. Every parent wants their child to have a great camping experience. Doing research and matching the right kind of camp to your child/ren can make all the difference between delight and disaster.

Let's start with a look at the benefits of sending your child to summer camp.

WHY SEND YOUR CHILD TO SUMMER CAMP?

There are many reasons to send your child to summer camp. The first is a practical one - unless you are a teacher yourself, you will not usually have as long a summer vacation as your children will. If you are not a stay-at-home parent and can't work from home regularly, your child/ren will need to be supervised during what would normally be school hours until you can get home to care for them. You can take some vacation days to coincide with them being out of school so you can spend quality time with them, but otherwise they will need to be supervised, kept entertained, and fed. A summer camp can offer all of these benefits, and more.

Another key benefit of sending your child to camp is the social skills they will learn mixing with new people. You might send them to the same camp as their siblings and perhaps even friends and neighbors, in which case they will spend time with people they like, and meet more. If they are going on their own, they will learn a whole new set of social skills.

This is particularly true in relation to sleepaway camp. Depending on the age of the children and the type of camp, they might stay for two weeks or the entire summer. Children at day and sleepaway camps who show themselves to be capable and mature for several years in a row can also be permitted to attend a counsellor in training (CIT) program when they are old enough. The compensation for this might range from a deeply discounted fee for the whole summer, to going for free, or even getting paid. It all depends on your child's age (usually teens) and the type of camp - for example, YMCA versus private camps.

Depending on the camp you choose, your child/ren will be able to access facilities that they might not otherwise be able to enjoy throughout the summer. The most obvious is a swimming pool, but it might also include tennis courts, horseback riding, arts and crafts such as pottery or drawing, or academic camps that will help them improve their skills in a certain subject, or get them ready for college.

Children are able to engage in fun activities all day at camp, and parents have the peace of mind of knowing where their child is and that they are being supervised, not at home alone (for older kids) or getting into trouble with their friends. Some camps also offer early morning drop-off and late pick-up for an additional fee, which may sound like a lot per week until you consider how much you would have to pay for a childminder for a couple of hours just to sit with them - let alone do all sorts of fun activities with them.

Children will become exposed to all different learning and life experiences, especially at a sleepaway camp. This includes learning how to get along with others, taking care of their things responsibly, camping out under the stars, and exploring a range of activities such as water skiing, diving, hiking, orienteering, and more. Read the fine print in relation to each camp you

are thinking of sending your child to in order to see which special activities they offer. Then compare prices to narrow down which camp/s might be right for each child you wish to send.

Now that we have gone over the benefits of summer camp for children, let's look in more detail at the most common types of camps.

THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF CAMPS

There are two main types of camp: day camp and sleepaway camp. There are also two kinds of camp in terms of activities: general camp and specialized camp.

Age Limits and Other Requirements

Day camps will usually cater for children aged five and above. Sleepaway camps will have different age limits depending on the type of camp, but generally start accepting children when they are eight to ten years of age; that is, old enough to be self-sufficient with regard to their personal care.

The age limit will also depend on the type of camp. At a general camp, the children will be organized into age groups in a similar manner to the grades at school. They might also cluster them as young children, tweens and teens, depending on how large the camp is.

At a specialized camp, the age guidelines might be much stricter, for various reasons. The main reason is that they want the child to be old enough to benefit from the instruction, enjoy it as well, and succeed at what they are trying to accomplish - not struggle with tasks that are way beyond their abilities.

At other specialized camps such as academic camps, they will gear the lessons towards children of particular ages and grades. At religious camps, the groups will usually be organized by age and perhaps whether they have already had communion or confirmation, for example. They might also work towards them, or their bar or bas mitzvah at a Jewish religious camp.

For sports camps, they will usually expect a certain level of attainment or achievement, such as at gymnastics camp or tennis camp. They might even need a recommendation from their teacher or coach to even be considered for the program.

Length of Camps

General camps will usually run for eight to ten weeks throughout the summer. Specialized camps will usually only run for a set duration, such as two to four weeks. Think of them as a mini-course to enhance your child's skill and abilities in a particular area.

Because there are so many kinds of camps to choose from, some parents opt for a combination of camps. They might send their child to general day camp for most of the summer, but give them a couple of weeks of sleepaway and specialized camp if they are old enough.

Timing Is Everything

The important thing to remember is that places fill up fast in the most popular camps and in specialized camps. Timing is everything when it comes to asking for special financial considerations as well, such as a scholarship or counsellor in training position. It is never too early to start looking at summer camps to find out when they will begin to enroll the children and offer scholarships. It is also a good idea to discuss the issue of summer camp early with the child/ren if they have never gone before.

Some children might be reluctant to go to camp and others might be eager, depending on what type of camp they can go to. Let's look in the next part at specialized camp options that might be perfect for your child.

SPECIALIZED SUMMER CAMP OPTIONS

With so many general summer camps to choose from, some camps have made the decision to offer specialized camps for a number of reasons. The obvious one is to attract more campers and paying parents, but this is not the whole story. In many cases, those who offer a specialized camp might do it because they:

- Are passionate and knowledgeable about the subject
- Possess a high level of skill in relation to the subject
- Are committed to the subject personally
- Have special facilities available in relation to the subject
- Have connections related to the subject that they can make the most of, to give campers the opportunity to access facilities and people to enhance learning

...and more.

Types of Specialized Camps

Some of the most common specialized camps to look out for are:

- Sports camps - baseball, gymnastics, swimming, tennis, equestrian, and so on
- Religious camps - Catholic, Christian, Jewish, and so on
- Arts focused camps, including cooking/food, writing, music, dance, performing arts, visual arts, and so on
- Special needs camps; day camps
- Underprivileged background camps with low fees, and/or which focus on urban children accessing the countryside for the day, or as part of a sleepaway camp
- Independent camps that are more exclusive in terms of offerings and pricing
- Specially focused camps such as weight loss camps for tweens or teens
- Single sex camps
- Academic camps, either to improve grades, or offer more advanced skills
- Career camps, to teach them what to expect from their chosen career, or allow them to explore one
- Enrichment camps, such as learning leadership skills, green issues, boosting their self-esteem, self-empowerment and so on
- Entrepreneurship camps, in which children will learn more about starting their own business, project management, leadership, managing money, and so on
- Pre-college programs/camps, such as ones run by the college itself to give prospective students a chance to experience life at that college themselves, or gain credit through short course or advanced placement tests they will get coaching for

These camps will usually cost more than general camps due to the higher level of instruction and often the cost of materials that they will offer as part of the camp - for example, art supplies or trips to the theater. They might also include fees for special excursions as a group, and so on.

As you can see, summer camping has changed a lot since you were a kid. With all these options available, how can you choose the best summer camp for your child? Let's look at a few ways in the next section.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST SUMMER CAMP FOR YOUR CHILD

Day versus Sleepaway Camp

We all want the best summer camp for our child, but there will be a number of deciding factors involved in making the choice. The first is day versus sleepaway camp. This will depend on their age, and on the number of day camps you have near your home to choose from. If you don't have many choices, you will have to consider sending them to a sleepaway camp if and when they are old enough.

General versus Specialized Camp

The second consideration is if a specialized camp might be the right choice for them based on their interests and needs. The most important step is to discuss the idea of camp with your child first. They might be hesitant, or they might think it a golden opportunity to do something different this summer.

General camps will be the cheapest, but offer a range of activities most children will love. There are day and sleepaway camps available. Specialized camps will be more expensive, and also have day and sleepaway options. In most cases, though, they will not run for the entire summer, but only a set number of weeks because it will be more like a mini-course.

Depending on your child's age and your budget, you might choose all three. If your child is old enough for specialized camps on the topic they are interested in, they might go for two to four weeks. If your child is old enough, they might wish to try sleepaway camp for a couple of weeks. For the rest of the time and the schedule of the camp nearest you, they could go to day camp.

When considering a specialized camp, check the age requirements, features and duration of the camp. Also consider the end value of the camp. If your child will be learning valuable skills or earning advanced college credits, the extra cost of these camps versus general camp might be well worth it.

Also pay attention to things such as whether or not lunch/meals are included, and whether or not it is a day camp or sleepaway which will have special requirements such as equipment and so on. Also see if they have a counsellor in training program, because this would be a good paying opportunity once your child is old enough to start the training.

Your Child's Personality

Last but not least, consider the personality of your child and what they are most interested in. If they bounce from subject to subject, the cost of a specialized camp might not be worth it. On the other hand, if they are really struggling with math, or know exactly what they wish to major in once they get to college, the camp could be a stepping stone to a better future.

Do your research and compare the prices. Involve your child as much as possible in the process of narrowing down the camp to find the right one. If they have siblings who would also be going, consider sending them together - they will often offer discounts. Also check with friends and extended family; maybe they can all attend camp together and get a discount too.

Most parents and children wonder what to expect at a day camp and sleepaway camp. Let's look at these two topics in the next sections.

A TYPICAL DAY AT A DAY CAMP

A typical day at summer camp will look a lot like a typical day at school. Campers will usually have a daily or weekly timetable of activities to make sure they are not bored and are getting the most from their summer camp.

In most cases they will go swimming at least a couple of times a week at a local pool. If their facility has a pool on site, they will usually be able to swim every day. Some camps will start the morning with a swim, while others will wait until the end of the day and send the children home wet but tired.

The daily activities will be structured into broad categories such as:

- Sports
- Adventure
- Aquatics
- Arts and crafts
- ...and more.

There will also usually be whole camp activities for children of all ages, including the very popular color war. During color war children will be given a range of challenges that are age-appropriate. They will win points for the whole team through their efforts.

A typical day at summer camp will start and end with an official drop-off and pick-up time, which will vary from camp to camp. Estimate that it will usually be along the lines of normal school

hours and plan accordingly. Sometimes the camp will offer extended hours, such as 4 or 4:30. It is important to make sure that you understand exactly what the timetable is and your responsibilities regarding your child getting back and forth to camp.

It is also important to know what the lunch options will be for your child. In some cases they will be expected to bring lunch. In others, lunch will be provided. Check to see what is included in the fees.

The camp day will also be determined by how old your child is. Younger children will not be expected to participate in as many athletic activities as older children. They will probably also not engage in more dangerous activities such as horse riding, climbing wall and so on. Their activities will be more structured, such as teaching them how to swim rather than allowing them a free swim.

In relation to arts and crafts, the materials will usually be supplied for them to create a wide variety of items. Arts and crafts will also include drama, plays, skip, and sometimes even musical tuition.

For a specialized camp, think of it as a continuing education course. In most cases, the lessons will be structured carefully to achieve particular goals or standards of achievement. The goals will be dependent on the focus of the camp.

For example, sports camps should help advance the skills they already possess. Enrichment camps will usually stretch their abilities and intellect. Academic camps can add to their knowledge or serve as a crammer to achieve a certain standard of performance in math, science, and so on.

One thing's for sure; day camp will keep your child busy all day with a range of stimulating activities which they would not be able to engage in if they were at home on their own. You might try to organize their summer days like that yourself, if you have the free time and money, but if you are working full time outside of the home, day camp is one of your best options for summer childcare and entertainment.

Now that you know what your child can expect at day camp, in the next section we will outline what they can expect at a sleepaway camp.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT A SLEEPAWAY CAMP

A sleepaway or residential camp will involve your child being away for a set period of time such as two to eight weeks, depending on their age, and your choices and budget.

Sleepaway camp will be similar to day camp in terms of its structure and timetabling. The obvious difference is that they will be living away from home in various forms of accommodation and will eat all of their meals there as well. This means they have to be old enough to attend to their personal care such as showering and getting their clothes washed, folded and put away. They will also have to maintain a decent standard of hygiene in their bathrooms and the cabin as a whole, with regular inspections to make sure everyone is cooperating with one another and their counsellors.

Living with other children and their counsellor who will be supervising them can be a challenge for children used to their own company and being waited on by their parents, but this is one of the reasons sleepaway camp helps build character.

In terms of meals, they will have three meals a day plus structured snacks. They will usually have a small amount of free time to themselves, such as after lunch or dinner. There will usually be evening activities as well, and then a set bedtime which will depend on age, and on their breakfast time the next morning. They will have set meal times and be required to show up on time, unless they have a good reason for being late, such as staying behind to help staff clean up, getting ready for the next activities, and so on.

On weekends, the schedule might be a little bit more flexible and allow them some individual free time to write letters home, get their laundry done and so forth. They might also get to choose their activities, and camp staff will ensure they are supervised. Depending on the kind of camp, they might also engage in religious observations at the weekend. Some camps might permit them to leave the campsite in small groups to go shopping, or take excursions or hikes.

Most sleepaway camps will also organize at least one opportunity to camp out in nature. This will usually involve taking tents, sleeping bags, and food supplies, and hiking and possibly also orienteering to find their way back to the main camp.

Learning how to make a camp fire, telling stories around it, and cooking s'mores are all an integral part of the sleepaway summer camp experience.

Sleepaway camps will naturally cost more, but offer good value because they are all inclusive, with everything usually included in one price. It also gives parents a break from daily childminding and offers them "me time" and even romantic time together alone in the house.

If you have more than one child and one is still not old enough to go to a sleepaway camp, you won't have an entirely empty house, but you will usually have one very tired but happy day camper at the end of each day, and one or more away making new friends and expanding their horizons.

Sleepaway camps are also seven days a week, so you won't have to struggle to come up with things to do at the weekend, which can all add up compared to one price for everything for the camp.

No matter which type of camp you choose, your child will usually have to bring a few important things with them. Let's look at the essentials in the next section.

WHAT SHOULD YOUR CHILD PACK FOR CAMP?

Children will usually be given a list of things to take with them for both day camp and sleepaway camp, so they will be happy and comfortable when they are away from their own home.

In the case of day camp, they might or might not have to bring their lunch. They will usually need a swim suit and towel, and perhaps a spare set of t-shirts, shorts, socks and underwear depending on how messy they are likely to get. They should have a camp cubbyhole to store these items so they do not need to carry everything back and forth each day except for wet swimsuits.

For sleepaway camp, the natural temptation is to pack everything except the kitchen sink. However, there are a number of reasons why this is a bad idea. The main ones are the accommodation is going to be compact, in a shared space. The second reason is that kids are supposed to be "getting away from it all," so this includes not bringing a lot of computer gear with them, and other things they usually do home. The third reason is that they should never bring anything that might get lost, damaged or stolen.

Camp is not going to be like a prison, but in most cases, it is not going to be the height of luxury. A more pampered and spoiled child might have trouble getting used to living without their creature comforts. On the other hand, it may be just what they need in order to not take all they have for granted, especially when you work so hard for it. Some kids love roughing it as well.

They should be comfortable and have all they require, without stuffing the cabin full of things they will probably not even need, or will use only once. Check to see how frequently the laundry

is done so they will have enough changes of clothes and bedding to last them until their next laundry day.

What to Pack

Here are some essentials they should pack:

Medications

Send medications in the original bottles in a clear zippered storage bag, along with dosage instructions, to the camp nurse. Your medical release form should list all medications. If your child carries an inhaler or EpiPen, be sure that is indicated and pack extra in case one of more of them gets lost or used up. Communicate with the camp regarding any special instructions for the medicine, such as needing to refrigerate insulin.

Health records

Provide any important information about your child's health before they leave. They will usually need to pass a physical exam in order to attend camp, but it pays to highlight any specific concerns to the head of the camp, who can pass it along on a need to know basis to your child's counsellors and supervisors.

List of limitations

If your child has asthma, for example, there might be things they should avoid doing. If this is the case, ask the counsellors if they can come up with other options so your child will not feel left out.

Bedding:

- Sleeping bag
- Ground sheet
- Sheets
- Pillowcases
- Pillows

Towels:

- Beach towel/s
- Bath towels

- Hand towels

Shower clogs or flip-flops

Toiletries in a bag or caddy:

- All-in-one body wash
- Toothpaste
- Toothbrush
- Hair comb
- Hair brush
- Deodorant if they are old enough

Clothes:

- Camp uniform, if issued
- Shirts
- Shorts
- Sweat pants
- Hoodie
- Long-sleeved shirt to cover up from the sun
- Long skirt to cover up from the sun
- Long pants or jeans for boys and girls, for horse riding and hiking
- A sweater in case it gets cold at night

Laundry marking pen or name tapes to sew into everything

Rain gear:

- A small foldable rain poncho
- Hat
- Waterproof shoes or boots
- Rain pants for really heavy rain
- Umbrella

Other essentials:

- Good sneakers
- Good socks
- Sunscreen

- Lip balm
- Insect repellent

Equipment for in and around the camp:

- Umbrella
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Digital camera with extra memory cards
- Mobile phone, but remind them that they have to follow the camp rules with regard to phone calls and being online
- Canteen or reuseable water bottle, such as a stainless steel one
- Pre-addressed, pre-stamped postcards or envelopes, since their net access and phone usage will be limited in most cases
- A book about and/or map of the area where they will be
- A compass

Pocket money

What Not to Pack

Now that we've covered the most important things to pack, here are the items you should discourage them from packing:

- Any media players
- Anything of cash value or sentimental value they would be upset to lose, have broken, or get stolen
- Too many snack foods, unless they have a health issue
- Fireworks of any kind
- Cigarettes and matches, lighters
- Expensive clothing
- Designer sneakers
- Lots of jewelry
- Lots of makeup
- Large amounts of cash

Don't hesitate to call the camp if you have questions about what they can and can't bring.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD HAS SEPARATION ANXIETY OR IS HOMESICK

We've all seen it - a child on the first day of school screaming, sobbing, and clinging to its mother's legs. This is a good example of separation anxiety in young children. It can also happen when you decide to send your child to summer camp.

Just because your child might be older does not mean going to camp will be any less terrifying. Just think of the first day back-to-school jitters most children have each year, especially if they are starting at a new school, and you will get an idea of how anxious a child can get each time they are put into a new situation.

However, summer camp is supposed to be fun, and in most cases they will enjoy themselves so much that they will look forward to going back each day for the rest of the summer.

In the case of sleepaway camp, however, the anxiety will usually be much greater because they will be leaving their familiar home for at least a couple of weeks, if not the whole summer. The biggest and the greatest question on everyone's mind will be, what if they don't like it?

It is important to note that children are not the only ones to suffer from separation anxiety. Some studies have shown that parents often have trouble letting go and sending their child to camp, rather than the child being upset about leaving. Most children are curious and like to explore the world, but parents can be, rightly or wrongly, concerned that their child will "get into trouble" or not be able to handle themselves in certain situations.

The whole point of sending them to summer camp is to broaden their horizons and expose them to new experiences. This is especially true of sleepaway camp. While it is true that they might be homesick for a day or two when they first arrive, in most cases they soon settle down and start to enjoy themselves. Parents might even find it upsetting that their child doesn't seem to miss home very much because they are having such a good time.

Tips for Helping Your Child

There are number of things parents can do to make camp less traumatic if your child does find it worrying. The first is laying the groundwork so they will know what to expect. Don't try to force them to go for the summer whether they like it or not. Be sure to discuss the pros and cons of camp versus them being at home all summer long before they have to go away to camp.

Tour the facility on one or more of the camp open days just to make certain they feel happy with the final choice of camp. On the open day, they will usually meet the staff and sometimes even

children in their age group, ones who have usually been to that camp before. This is a great way to make friends and get the inside scoop.

Day camp will usually be such a whirl of activities that it won't give them time to miss you. As mentioned earlier, it will have a structured timetable similar to what they are used to at school. Sleepaway camp will be similar in some ways. The main difference is they will be there at night and throughout the weekend as well. Some camps maintain a schedule all seven days of the week. Others might give the students a lighter day on Saturday or Sunday, and supervised free time to get laundry and shopping done, and so on.

In terms of sleepaway camp, the biggest challenge for your child will usually be that things are not exactly the way they are used to having them at home. A tour of the facility will get them used to the idea of living in a cabin, tent or teepee. Most of the camp staff are familiar with homesickness and adjustment issues, and the best ways to handle it.

In most cases, camps will have rules about mobile phone use and spending time online. It is discouraged because they want children to take part and interact with each other. In the case of sleepaway camp, they also want the children to become used to things and immerse themselves in the camping experience. They will often ban communication with home for the first week to help with this.

The cellphone and media ban may worsen the homesickness. On the other hand, it might also stop both parents and children from getting into a tizzy over how different things are from home. Children will probably complain about their bed, food, the weather, and other things that might make the parents feel guilty or powerless to help. But parents should also keep in mind their child's personality. Are they generally picky about their food, or like to have things just so? In this case they are probably going to complain about things no matter what.

If they are used to having their own room at home and everything done for them, having to share a cabin or tent with others and do their own laundry and other chores might be a real shock. However, it can also be a real blessing - teaching the child responsibility and not to take everything for granted. It also teaches them the importance of cooperating with others in order to create and maintain a harmonious living environment.

There's not much you can do about the weather while they are away, but if you have packed carefully for all contingencies, your child should be safe, comfortable and warm if the weather is cold or cool, and protected from the sun if the summer weather is extremely hot.

Helicopter parents may find the thought of sending their child away to summer camp almost unbearable, but after the initial shock to the system, they will usually start to appreciate just how

much freedom they will gain from their camp-going child being away from home and exposed to a range of new and interesting experiences.

A specialized camp in particular will be expensive, but will also give the child a lot of individualized attention and increased skills that parents themselves might not be able to offer if the child stayed home with them.

Any parents who have ever been to summer camp themselves will usually recall their experiences fondly. Your child might have separation anxiety and/or homesickness, or be painfully shy, but trained staff are always on hand who know exactly how to deal with these issues. In this way, your child will be able to make a gradual but successful transition into a well-rounded, independent and capable young adult.

Summer camp offers many advantages for children, but they do come at a cost. Let's look next at how to manage the expense of sending the kids to camp.

HOW TO MANAGE THE COST OF SUMMER CAMP

Some parents compare getting their child into summer camp to trying to secure them a college place. Depending on where you live, there might be very few choices for camp, and the spots available will fill up fast. This will be particularly true if you wish to apply for a scholarship for your child to attend.

Scholarships are based on financial need in most cases, but can sometimes be given to campers they would really like to have attend. This will often be the case with repeat campers they would wish to have return year after year, especially with a view to becoming a camp counsellor one day.

If your child is completely new to the camping experience, they might offer a partial scholarship as an incentive for them to try it to see how they like it. If you are sending more than one child, you should be offered a discount. If your child is going with friends, they could get a group discount.

Some camps base their pricing on the age of the children, with the younger ones usually costing less than older children. Older children use more facilities, get more excursions, and so on. Younger children will require more counsellors for more supervision, but they will often be given nap time and arts and crafts time rather than very vigorous activities. Check the pricing structure carefully and see if it is worth it based on how old your children are.

Some camps will offer assistance in tiers, from a small discount to full scholarships depending on need. At the Y, for example, scholarships can be made available thanks to donations from the public and from other parents as well. Campers who go back the following year will sometimes be given the same price as the previous year, since they are camp alumni so to speak.

Counselling in training or CIT programs can also make camp more affordable for your older, responsible teen. In most cases, they will offer a substantial discount off the usual fees. In others, they might waive the fee completely, or offer a weekly stipend.

If it is a sleepaway camp, this can offer a huge savings, since it represents accommodation and all meals for however long the summer camp will last, usually eight weeks. If your child really loves the camping experience, this can be an ideal way for them to have fun in the summer and get real work experience at the same time.

There are several other considerations which can add to or cut the cost of camping. Ask what insurance and other fees are required, such as for uniforms, photos and so on. Most camps will include these in the price, but if they are charged separately, you might be able to cut your costs and still ensure your child has a great time.

In terms of affordability, the Y camps offer good value. The prices vary from center to center depending on the facilities. They have now started offering specialized camps as well. In case you are thinking you might not be able to afford the perfect camp for your child, think again. Even the specialized ones may be more affordable than you think.

The main thing is to apply as early as possible once the centers start enrollment, for both a place and a scholarship. Even a partial scholarship can make camp more affordable.

One other important pricing factor will be early drop-off and late pick-up. Many camps run the same hours as school, or perhaps until 4 pm. If you want to drop your child off well before the start time and not pick them up until 6, this will add to the cost. However, it can be a lot cheaper than having to arrange for a childminder or run yourself ragged trying to get back and forth to work in relation to the camp times.

When choosing a camp, make sure you are clear about exactly what is included. Read reviews and compare each camp side by side. Don't be afraid to ask for a scholarship or discount — the worst that can happen is they say no. Weigh all your options, and you should soon be able to find the right camp for your child at the right price.

Summer camp is a childhood tradition for many - a chance to have fun, gain new experiences, and in some cases even make friends for life.

Depending on the kind of camp, your child might even be able to gain valuable skills that would give them a head start in life, such as college credit or job opportunities, even if it is only as a counsellor in training who will eventually be able to get a job as a full counsellor. Their experiences will look good on their first resume and college application forms. But above all, summer camp will teach them social skills, increase their self-reliance and boost their self-esteem.

If you haven't already starting looking into day or sleepaway camps in your area, run a few searches. Chances are you and your child will be excited by what you find.