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CAMPS & ACTIVITIES



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The world in which our children live is complex. Their daily schedules are often full with school, homework, team activities (athletic, academic, arts, theater, music, etc.), playdates, family visits, chores and, yes, cell phones/computers/video games.

BY GLENN SMITH

Just as we recognize and learn to accept this current world around us, we can, and should, remember a key element of physical and emotional well-being: moderation.

Moderation gives us the opportunity to sidestep overload, stress and lack of sleep — and those are just a few benefits. It gives our kids an opportunity to control the noise and control the demands on their time.

It gives them permission to unplug. Unplugging from technology allows our kids to be the story, not text the story.

While fall, winter and spring are dictated by schools and schedules, the summer presents an opportunity to recharge, energize and moderate the hectic life the rest of the year demands. It's a moment for interacting in real time, with real people, for real experiences.

Nicole M. Stern, Ph.D., a practicing licensed psychologist in D.C. notes that “camp provides a cell-phone free zone, meaning no social media, which is so freeing for these kids.”

We know that our kids live in a world that requires them to plug in maybe more than we would like. But, sleep-away summer camp presents that unique opportunity to change that part of their daily routine, even if only for a few weeks. It provides the

opportunity to not only have fun — but to unplug — and experience new activities and adventures in a safe and welcoming environment.

Plus, there are additional benefits.

Camp brings our children closer to nature, and encourages social and emotional development while encouraging independence, resiliency, empathy and adaptability. Alfred Adler, a noted philosopher and psychiatrist (1870-1937), stressed three things that are important to one's emotional health and well-being: the need to feel connected, to contribute to something beyond the individual and to feel capable. While he introduced these ideas more than 80 years ago, they are still true today.

Sleepaway camp addresses all of Adler's concepts. Children need to establish relationships and connect with peers and counselors as they navigate their day. Building friendships, learning empathy and caring for others all help create a strong emotional core. Helping clean the cabin, writing a camp song, paddling a canoe — all of these activities give kids a chance to practice contributing through teamwork and collaboration. Mastering the skill of

archery or wall climbing, through practice and perseverance, strengthen feelings of confidence and capability.

Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D., a pediatric and adolescent psychotherapist and the co-author of “The Whole-Brain Child,” was interviewed in the January ‘14 issue of *Camping* magazine. She noted the very real physical effect of growing these social skills by stating, “Bunks are good for brains ... promoting independence, confidence, friendship-building, resilience, thriving, character, grit, etc.” She further adds, “Experience changes brains ... it's like a muscle. When it's used, it grows and strengthens.”

Other benefits from daily cabin activities include the development of fairness, exploration and curiosity while maximizing intellectual, moral and physical development. With ample opportunities for kids to be their best selves, camp life provides countless new experiences for fun, happy and healthy personal growth in a safe and encouraging environment with friends and caring counselors.

Sleepaway camp is not only an extraordinary gift, but a life changing experience. Children learn to persevere

when challenged by unfamiliar experiences. They learn patience and confidence when connecting with others and the importance of working together for a positive shared experience.

When exploring a camp program for your child, you should consider developmentally appropriate and nurturing environments that promote self-esteem, leadership, independence, conflict resolution and team building. Understanding the camp philosophy, leadership and culture is imperative in finding the right program for your child.

Dr. Stern explains, “Camp provides an opportunity for children to learn and to grow ... for many children this allows them to try new things, voice new opinions and do things that they may never have been exposed to.”

Parents can help by choosing sleepaway camps that encourage children to experience new activities, form new relationships and integrate the camper into camp life in a nurturing, safe and fun environment.

The right sleepaway camp can be a wonderful life changing event for children — a treasured experience that lasts forever. ■

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SLEEPAWAY CAMP



Questions for Parents

According to the American Camp Association (ACA), below are some questions to ask yourself when searching for a sleepaway camp for your child:

1. What locale do I want to consider? (Mountains, oceanfront, distance from home, etc.)
2. Do I want a traditional camp that gives my child a wide-variety of experiences, or do I want to select a specialty camp that focuses on a particular activity or set of skills?
3. What size enrollment will make my child feel comfortable?
4. How structured do I want the program to be? Does my child like to have lots of choice in the activity schedule?
5. What session length will appeal to my child and to our family plans for the summer?

Questions for Camp Directors


Here are some important questions to ask camp directors before deciding on a camp:

1. Does the camp provide flexible programming and a nurturing environment?
2. Is team building a component of cabin life?
3. How are the counselors trained to handle conflict?
4. How are physical, intellectual and moral development incorporated into the camp program?
5. How does the camp optimize opportunities for independence and emotional growth?
6. What programs are in place to facilitate leadership skills?
7. How is the camp environment optimized for developing healthy self-esteem?

Glenn Smith is the owner and director of Camp Tall Timbers, an award-winning camp program, located in the beautiful foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains in High View, WV. For over 48 years, Camp Tall Timbers has been promoting independence, decision-making, socialization, skill building, confidence, creativity and self-discovery in a safe and nurturing environment.

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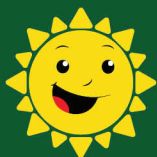
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