



As spring comes to a close and summer starts to heat up, kids can start to get restless sitting at home all day. A great way for them to get the most out of summer is to attend a fun and educational summer camp. But how do you decide which one fits your child's (and family's) needs? We spoke with camp counselors and seasoned summer camp parents to get their best research tips.

### **Determine which questions to consider/ask.**

When you're actually talking to a counseling or camp director, it can be easy to forget to ask some important questions about the camp itself. Determine and list the important questions you need answered ahead of time. [Catherine Whitcher](#), Special Education Advocate & Speaker, suggests a few to start with:

- What is the staff-to-camper ratio?
- What training does the staff receive?
- Is a nurse available?
- My child has special needs – can he/she receive a 1:1 counselor?
- What happens if my child doesn't want to, or can't, participate in a specific activity?

Lauren Kasnett, Co-Founder and [Summer 365](#) Counselor, adds a few more to the list:

- What is the session length and budget?
- Will my child be able to unplug and check their electronics at the door?
- How do you handle homesickness?
- How do you handle bullying?

### **Inquire about repeat campers.**

Repeat campers are an important part of the decision-making process, according to Sheridan Becker, travel blogger and experienced summer camp mom. "Be sure to discuss with the summer camp admissions office just how many repeat campers they have in their camps. Repeat campers are a sure sign folks are doing not just a good job, but an excellent job! If kids are willing to come back to the same summer camp for a repeat experience, then the camp is 100% right on in meeting the needs of their campers. I would not even consider a camp without a high proportion of repeat campers."

### **Involve your children in the process.**

Becker goes on to say that getting the kids involved makes the process better. “For my children, I provided three options for summer camp possibilities, with each camp offering a variety of locations, options and considerations. At the end of the day, I allowed the kids to select where they wanted to go and what they wanted to do. This gave the kids the power and the option to decide for themselves and, of course, be a part of the process. Who in the world wants to go to a summer camp without having input in the decision process, really?”

### **Identify your camp goals.**

Elaine Taylor-Klaus, [ImpactADHD](#), recommends, “The first place for parents to look is to identify what they want their child to gain from summer camp experience. Is it glorified baby-sitting? Is it independent life skills? Is it friendship skills? Is it ‘hard’ skills (like sailing or sports)? Before choosing a camp, it helps for parents to identify their goals — for themselves and their kids. Then, they can look at the messages from the different camps and pay attention to the benefits the camps say they offer.”

Nora Kramer, executive director of [Youth Empowered Action \(YEA\) Camp](#), adds, “Ask your son or daughter what they want to get out of this summer. Of course the first thing they’ll probably say is ‘have fun.’ All camps are pretty much guaranteed to have fun activities, so if that’s all they’re looking for, your family’s situation (dates, geography, money) is the key to choosing between countless traditional camps. Beyond having fun, maybe your child wants to use this summer to get better at a sport or a musical instrument, to make a difference in their community, or to meet people they share something specific in common with. There are summer camps catering to just about every niche, and the summer is the perfect time to explore interests that there may not be as much time for during the school year. Simply Googling ‘camp’ + their specific area of interest is a great place to start.”

### **Determine the refund policy.**

Although you hate to think about your kid coming home early, April Masini of [Ask April](#) reminds parents that it’s something that needs to be covered. “One of the best questions you can ask a camp you’re considering is what their refund policy is, and what happens if the child leaves camp mid-season. Even if you don’t like the policy, it’s always better to be forewarned than to find out after you’ve signed a contract. You can weigh the opting-out clause with your other factors about the camp and your child when making the choice.”

Last updated by [Briana Fabbri](#) at June 3, 2014.

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