

Faculty and Employee Assistance Program NEWSLETTER

Summer Camp Countdown

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Although we are still wearing long sleeve shirts, it is time to make decisions on summer camps. The choices range from day camps (which can last from one week to all summer long), to sleep-away or resident camps (one to several weeks) to family camps (for the entire family). Your child can attend a general camp that offers a variety of activities, or a specialty camp that focuses on one interest such as basketball, theater or computers.

A great resource to explore for all the local (Charlottesville and surrounding areas) camp information is <http://www.albemarlekids.com/> Click on Kids Events and Activities and then Summer Programs to find a vast array of possibilities to fill your child's summer. The website has information on full summer programs, week-by-week programs and by specialty area (e.g., arts and crafts, academics, adventure sports). They also have contact information and links to get more specific information about each program. Most school systems, private schools, and the University all provide summer camp opportunities along with many private camps, daycare facilities, gyms (e.g., ACAC, Little Gym), and other providers of children's activities (e.g., Wilson School of Dance). The website puts everything at your fingertips to ease your search process.

Another great way to find out about camps is to network with other parents for recommendations. Those are some places to find out information on summer camps, now here are some tips to help you as you make your choice on summer camp for your children:

CAMP COUNTDOWN

*The following information was taken from Camp Countdown by Karen Lindell
(<http://family2go.com/raisingkids/learn/activities/feature/lapt0300getready/>)*

To help you and your child better prepare for the camp experience, the following countdown will give you an idea of what you need to do months, weeks and days ahead of time, with tips from the ACA and Karenne Bloomgarden, the current president of KB Services, a free camp referral service.

THREE TO SIX MONTHS AHEAD

First, decide what type of camp your child wants to attend. Include your child in the decision-making process, then narrow your options to four or five camps.

For parents of children with special needs: Consider whether you want to mainstream your child at a regular camp or send her to a camp specifically for kids with physical or emotional disabilities. "If your child is in a special-needs classroom during the school year," Bloomgarden says, "mainstreaming at a summer camp might be a good transition." However, if your child has behavioral problems, she says, a specialty camp might be a better choice.



DO YOUR RESEARCH

Possibly the best resource is referrals from other parents and kids. Do not be afraid to ask camps you are interested in for references. Visit camps and talk to program directors before you make your final

decision. Of course, a visit is probably not an option if you're checking out a sleep-away camp across the country, but take the time if it's close to home--and bring your child with you.

ACA RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What is the camp's philosophy?
- What is camp director's background? Look for at least a bachelor's degree and administration experience.
- What is the ratio of counselors to campers? The ACA recommends one counselor for every six to eight campers ages six to eight, and one for every eight to 10 campers ages nine to 14.
- What are the counselors' ages? The ACA recommends that 80 percent be at least 18 years old.
- What percentage of counselors return each year? If the number is less than 40 to 60 percent, ask why.
- Ask about transportation, and how the camp handles discipline and any special dietary or medical needs.
- Apply for financial aid. According to the ACA, about 65 percent of camps offer some form of financial assistance. Aid is limited, however, so apply early.

ONE TO TWO MONTHS AHEAD

Visit the facilities with your child if you have not already, especially if he is anxious about going to camp.

"Practice" camp. If your child will be going to a sleep-away camp for the first time, set aside a Saturday for a simulated camp session. Schedule activities for each hour of the day, starting with "reveille" and "cabin cleanup" and ending with "lights out." No TV or computers allowed.

You might also arrange a sleepover at a friend's house "to deal with separation issues and see what it's like to sleep in a different environment," says Bloomgarden.

Go shopping. Hit the stores now so you're not fighting with other parents at Wal-Mart for the last available sleeping bag.

ONE WEEK AHEAD

Get packing! Avoid midnight runs to the drugstore for sunscreen by packing ahead of time. Sleep-away camps usually send a checklist of packing essentials, along with regulations about bringing food and money.

A few packing pointers:

- Make sure your child helps so she knows what she's bringing. (You do not want to hear, "What sweater?" when you're doing post-camp laundry.)
- Include plastic bags for wet and dirty clothing.
- Do not forget the sunscreen, but do forget the Pokemon cards.
- Do not forget to send a little love. Mail a letter or care package that will be waiting for your child when he arrives.

THE NIGHT BEFORE

Calm camp jitters. "Tell your child you understand her fears," says Bloomgarden. "Don't discount her feelings by saying, 'Don't worry, everything will be fine.' Tell her if she gets homesick, it's not anything to be ashamed of, and she should tell a counselor."

With careful planning, you and your child will be calm, cool and collected when C-Day arrives. Just enjoy wearing those short sleeves--and sending your child off to a great summer experience.



RESOURCES

American Camp

•For a free referral to an ACA-accredited camp, call (800) 428-CAMP (2267) or visit www.acacamps.org to search for details on 2,000 ACA-accredited day and resident camps throughout the U.S.

•The Summer Camp Answer Book. This free booklet contains tips on how to choose camps, what to pack, questions to ask camp directors and more. Available from the ACA.