

Choosing the right summer camp for your child!

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Choosing the right summer camp for your child is an important job! When selecting a summer camp for your children, three key factors should come to mind; Exceptional Staff, Quality programs, and a State-of- the-Art Facility. In my ten plus years of experience in the field of camping, these three factors have always separated good camps from great camps. I have toured dozens of camps all over the country through my tenure at the YMCA and have found the most successful camps focus on making their staff, programs and facilities stand out from the competition.

What makes the camp staff exceptional? First and foremost, a well trained staff is imperative. A good question to ask the camp director is “How much training does your camp staff go through prior to the first day of camp?” The American Camping Association is a nationally recognized authority on camping standards and guidelines. According to the ACA, camps should have a minimum of 30 hours of staff training prior to the first day of camp. Also, the camp staff should be quality role models for the campers. Another great question to ask is, “Would you let these counselors watch your children?” The answer should be “YES!” The camp staff should be people that have good character and sound judgment; they should be safety conscious as well as warm, friendly and welcoming to campers and parents.

When it comes to quality programs a few things to keep in mind are program progression, variety in activities, and the opportunity to learn new skills. In terms of program progression, camps should offer programs that are age appropriate and developmentally challenging. In other words, the arts and crafts projects that the 3rd graders are doing should not be the same as the 7th graders are doing. Also, camps should offer some sort of “stepping stone” program progression where the older you get, the more options and choices you have. The camp should also offer a wide range of activities that will encompass a variety of interests; sports, nature, art, music and more should be available to choose from. The activities should give children the opportunity to try new things and develop life long skills.

With the right leadership, all camps have the potential to have exceptional staff and quality programs, but what sets the great camps apart is also having a state-of-the-art facility to compliment the staff and programs. This should be evident within the first few minutes of driving into the facility. Is it well maintained? Is there good signage? Does it feel welcoming? Are there unique features that set it apart from the competition? These are some of things to ask yourself as you tour the facility. Other areas to pay close attention to are the waterfront or pool areas, the bathrooms, and the first aid area. Another great question to ask the camp staff would be “What new features or developments are happening at the camp this summer”? This will let you know if the organization is reinvesting money in the camp on an annual basis. This is something that all great camps do regularly.

Your kids deserve the best; make sure you take the time to research the best summer camp program for your children. If other parents in the community are saying positive things about the summer camp then that is a sure sign the program has exceptional staff, quality programs and a state-of-the-art facility. If you would like more information on choosing the right summer camp for your child, please feel free to contact Mark Pooler or Patrick Connelly at www.ctcampguys.com

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