

## **Camp Friends – Like no other friends you have!**

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As the summer comes to a close and campers turn back into student in our community, I like to reflect back on some of the things children learned at summer camp over the last few months that they may not have the opportunity to learn in school. Sure, some may have learned to swim, while others may learned a new skill like archery and some may have improved their basketball game; but the most important thing that a child can get out of a camp experience is learning how to build relationships and making friends. In fact, the “camp friends” a child makes over the summer, are like no other friends they will have.

What exactly is a “camp friend”? Quit simply, it is a friend that you meet at camp, but it goes way beyond just that! Camp friends are friends you will keep for life. There is something magical that happens when you spend a an extended amount of time together with a fellow camper and experience all that summer camps have to offer. You learn each others likes and dislikes - you play together, you sing together, even laugh and cry together, but most importantly, you grow up together. Some of the best friends that I have in my life today are from camp. These are the people that understand me the best and love me unconditionally. They have supported me through thick and thin; they have been there to help me through tough times and celebrate with me during the good time. These are the type of relationships that thousands of children make each summer at camps all across the country. In fact, many people who have attended summer camp call their camp friends, a second family!

You can see how strong these relationships are at the end of each summer. Campers both young and old get butterflies in the stomach knowing that camp is coming to a close and they may not see their camper friends until next summer. The tears begin to flow, promises to keep in touch are made and memories of the good times they shared all summer are talked about right until the last camper goes home. It is also evident on the first day of camp, when kids who have not seen each other all year long, greet each other with a high five or a hug and rekindle their friendships as if only a weekend had passed. According to Gary Forster, National Camping Consultant for the YMCA of the USA, the number one reason why kids go to camp – is to make friends!

In this day and age of technology, where kids rarely play outside after school and neighborhood games like hide-and-seek and kickball are becoming a thing of the past, learning how to build a relationship and cultivate a friendship are skills that we must teach. As great of a tool as computers and the internet are, they have taken much of the face-to-face relationship building out of our daily lives, for both adults and kids. As adults, many of us have already established these relationships and friendships throughout our childhoods; childhoods that were not filled with computer games, emails, text messages and instant messaging that. We must recognize the importance of kids getting outside, playing with each other and developing friendships. That is what being a kid is all about, not playing computer games inside the house after-school or all summer long., but making lasting friendships with people that will be there to support you throughout your life.

That’s what make summer camp so important, not just the activities and new skills that a child may learn, but the lifelong friendships that they develop! If you would like more information on

opportunities for your child and teens to develop camp relationships both in and out of camp, feel free to contact Mark Pooler at [mpooler@ctcampguys.org](mailto:mpooler@ctcampguys.org)