



Six Tips for Preparing Children for Camp

Going to camp is a way for children to learn new things, create memories, and relax. Although a fun experience in many ways, some children have a difficult time with new situations, people, and schedules. This article includes ideas for preparing children for day or overnight camp.

1. Visit – Unfamiliar places and situations can be very stressful for some children. Visit the camp in advance to prepare your child for what to expect. Try to meet the child’s counselor and other staff members. Use this as an opportunity to answer any questions you may have about the camp schedule, policies, and activities. For overnight camp, ask about sending care packages, policies about calls, and other important information that might make it easier for your child (and you) to be separated! If there is an open house this is a great way to introduce your child to other campers. Take a camera and get pictures of different areas including a picture of the schedule if it is posted. These pictures can be used to create a story about what to expect.

2. Visually Prepare Children - Although it’s nice to create a book about camp with pictures from a trip there, additional resources also can be helpful. Prepare children for camp by showing them websites, brochures, or any other available information. Pictures of lodging, dining areas, activities, and children having fun at camp are helpful for setting expectations and giving children a feel for how camp looks when everyone is there.

3. Involve Kids in Planning – Let children help pack their backpack for day camp or suitcase for overnight camp so they know what they will have with them. Use this as an opportunity to discuss the weather and appropriate clothes for activities. If there are choices for activities on camp enrollment forms (e.g. swimming, horseback riding), include your child in decisions about activities when completing the forms. Be sure they are interested in the activities provided and will enjoy the experience. Sometimes a ‘new’ activity sounds fun, but signing up a child who has never seen a horse in person for horseback riding may create a stressful situation rather than an enjoyable one.



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4. Create a Sense of Familiarity - Remember children’s familiar possessions when packing for camp. If a child reads a favorite story before bed, carries personal items in a backpack, or uses a stress ball, be sure to pack these items and let staff know when your child likes to use them. A family picture or pictures of family members and pets can be nice for children to have while at camp.

5. Set Expectations – Be sure children know what to expect from you. When will you pick them up at day camp? What day does overnight camp end? Will you be calling, writing, or sending packages? Where will you pick them up and how will you be dropping them off? If you create a schedule or story for them, this information should be included to reduce their anxiety.

6. Create Memories – Camp is fun and exciting, but children often forget the details of what they did while there. Camps often take pictures of children and email them to parents. These pictures are a great resource for creating a memory book to enjoy or a story to remind children about camp for next year.

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