

## **Why Kids Need Camp**

Stay away, overnight summer camps have always been great, fun experiences for kids. And in today's world, I think camps are more important than ever before. Let me explain.

I have several concerns about the way kids are being raised today. One is the inordinate amount of time kids spend in organized, adult directed activities, be they sports, band, scouts, accelerated learning programs or after school day care. When most of us parents were growing up, we spent a lot of time riding bikes; wondering in the woods, and skating on ponds, sometimes being gone from home all day. During these unsupervised times, we were given opportunities to lead, initiate, create, decide, make choices, and take care of and be responsible for ourselves and our friends.

Most parents today are too scared to allow such freedoms, but we are thus challenged to find other opportunities where kids can learn these skills. Summer camp is one place where kids can be away from their parents, take responsibility for themselves, and explore new experiences and friendships.

Camp can also be a time to slow down your pace of living. Kids today feel hurried and stressed out about trying to fit everything into their busy lives. Hopefully, most camps allow a more relaxed, less structured schedule so that kids can relax and slow down.

Another concern I have is that our prosperity has caused us to spend most of our family time in front of complex home entertainment systems and computers, and thus less and less time out in nature. We've always known about the many benefits of spending time outdoors, i.e. feeling more calm, grounded and relaxed. Camps allow kids to get dirty, watch sunsets, star gaze, build camp fires and take long, unhurried hikes. We've all experienced how relaxed and grounded we feel after spending time in nature.

Lastly, I'm concerned that too many kids and teens today feel disconnected from the important adults around them. Many kids live in different towns than many of their relatives. The majority of kids today live in a home where both parents work, and also in single parent homes. Kids also are much less connected to neighborhood adults than we were.

Camps can help in this area as well. Living together at camp for a week or two allows close friendships between campers and staff, be they adults or older teens. In the slower pace of camp life, there is plenty of time for long walks, being heard, and getting one on one time that allows kids to feel special and important. These connections with camp counselors can make all the difference in the world to a kid who lacks adequate adult connections at home and school.

So, besides the getting away from your annoying little brother and the fun of camp, there are some very important functions that a good summer camp experience can

provide for today's kids. A sense of connection, time in nature, a slower pace, and opportunities to be self-responsible are just some of the gifts of going away to camp. Make sure these elements are going to be part of your child's camp experience when you are looking for the right camp fit for your child. Good luck in your search and have a great summer!