

## ***Camps for Little Folks***

By  
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If your youngster is already restless and bored from lack of activities since school is out, perhaps you have been on a mad search on activities to fill the time. If camp sites for children is on your agenda, perhaps a few helpful hints will guide you along the decision making process. The items listed are pointers to use in assessing any summer camp program or child care facility, regardless of the youngster's age. Later in the article, several options of creative camp experiences will be suggested per age groups.

With many parents working, the concept of leaving your little one at home alone, or with relatives that provide little attention, specialized programs are available. For pre-teens and teens the prospect of going to camp all summer is a bit more complicated. Older children often have specific interests and tend to gravitate toward one thing or another, but they are no longer simply happy to be at a typical school camp setting or anything that is remotely like baby sitting. That is why the parent of an older child must be a bit more diligent when seeking summer activities that will keep your youngster challenged and out of trouble.

### ***Check out camp credentials before registering your child***

First, of course, one might want to check out myflorida.com website to see if a list of schools or summer programs are registered or licensed. Once you find your camp of choice, check it out thoroughly so that you feel comfortable with the persons who will be influencing your child. Ask what type of personnel screening is used to hire staff or camp counselors. Also, ask what the typical age group is in any one setting. After all, a large gap in skills and abilities exists between a ten-year-old and a fifteen-year-old. If the campsite is for younger children, ask what type of nap time or time-out is offered during the day, how outdoor activities are supervised, what is the ratio of staff to children, and what type of nursing or medical assistance is on site in the event that any scraps or bruises occur while playing around.

If you are looking for a play camp ground, with outdoor activities, also ask how children are supervised from walking or straying away, while they are swimming, or if climbing or jumping steep lengths. Don't hesitate to ask what safety nets are in place in the event it is an adventure camp. If your child requires special medications or has a history of allergies or asthma, then be sure to inform the administration with specific instructions to administer medication. If your child has any history of former illnesses due to unexpected encounters with bees, spiders or snakes, be sure to bring that up too. Be sure to write up special needs, child's physician's number, and how to proceed in emergencies. Obviously, you would always want to register your child with any cell phone information, to quicken contact time if emergencies occur. If you are planning to vacation away while your child is at camp, be sure to leave permission slips for guardians or family members to call in your place. Remember, no one can administer medical care without parental permission, unless of course, if the injury was of severe magnitude. Don't worry, not very likely to happen. Most kids have wonderful time when learning to be independent from parents. The greater question is, 'Can you handle leaving your child in some else's care for several nights or weeks?' Don't forget, most camps do not allow phone calls the first week, just so the temporarily homesick blues sets in, which it often does. But it only takes one new friend to lighten the mood and make camp an unforgettable rewarding experience.

### ***Specific Activity Camps***

Okay now for specifics. Perhaps your child has a special talent or interest to embellish upon such as filmmaking, journalism or acting. If so, then it is time to get to the Internet and research in your area for school specialties. For instance, if it is filmmaking that wets their appetite, then many small private schools offer week long courses, that may be sufficient to keep your child filming all summer once new skills are acquired. One school in St. Petersburg is the Poynter school of journalism and communications media. Also, University of New York is sponsoring a Filming with Disney course this summer for 14 to 17 year-olds. Yes, it is on the high end interims of costs, but it can serve your youth well during school projects, etc. A week long class may be sufficient to break the monotony of summer, yet till keep your child off the streets as talents and skills are honed. Just watch out if he comes around the corner filming the whole family one day.

If it is acting, then by all means check out short term acting classes, like morning or evenings, depending on means of transportation available for your children. ActorsVenue is one such school that runs teens and pre-teens classes at reasonable costs run by Corrine Broshette, an Acting Studio trained veteran who really knows her stuff. Any performance type activity is always rewarding for teens, so for sure, you will gain their interests if you go that route. But a word to the wise, check it out thoroughly before you even bring it up, or if your teen brings it up, still check it out thoroughly using the tips supplied above. Sports camps are also there for the highly talented athlete or gymnastic performer, but by teen years, they may already have special schools in place.

### ***A little pre-planning goes a long way***

For families with less funds to manage one or several children, do not despair. A little creativity can still provide an equally enriching experience for your child. Local public schools and libraries often have free activities and book stores also have story hours for children. No matter if you work, with a bit of planning, you can organize a parent car pool in the neighborhood and take turns driving the happy readers to the next event. But this kind of schedule usually requires more input from parents in regard to scheduling, work schedules, etc. Sources of information on camps can be found at local guidance counselor offices, career newspapers, or of course, the Internet. The main point is, a bit of extra research on parent's part, can make all the difference in the world if your child has an enriching summer or a diminishing summer, such as when they sit home alone all day and begin to sink into a dark mood, if not get into trouble of some sort. So, the wise parent will do the foreground research to find just the right arrangement that is financially feasible, transportation convenient and age appropriate for your child.

So there you have it in a nutshell. Overall questions to explore for camp functioning and credentials, and specific type camps that may be short but of greater worth to your child. Don't forget the teens, they can research the Internet far quicker than you can, so let them join in the decision making or search for special interest groups while you are at work. Remember, that old saying that still rings true, "A busy child is less likely to get into trouble." Experiences greater self-worth by achieving new skills or making new friends, and yes, it is a good thing, if a child can leave home and function appropriately in other social settings. After all is said and done, all adults wish the same, that is, may all children have a safe and happy summer experience. So a little extra effort in the early summer, allows parents to sit back and watch your child blossom by the end of the summer. In the meantime, enjoy the space you share with your loved ones. I'll be back next month. ***Dr. Mom.***