

# Why Your Child is Ready for Sleep-Away Camp

Kaylen Alexis

Sending your child away to summer camp can feel like a scary proposition.

Will my son or daughter succeed at camp?

Will they make any friends?

Won't they miss home?

These are normal questions. Read on to find answers and gain valuable tools to determine if your child is ready for camp...plus, discover camp's Greatest Gift.

## Common Concerns

These are some of the most common concerns parents have when considering sending their child to camp for the first time:

1. My child is too young.
2. My child is not very "campy" - they prefer indoor activities like video games, board games, books, etc...
3. My child is just plain shy! I worry about their ability to make new friends.
4. My child will be so homesick -- they don't even like me leaving them alone with a babysitter!
5. **I'm** not ready to let my child go.

Let's address **#5** first, because in fact it may be the most common of all Common Concerns.

5. **I'm** not ready to let my child go.

Parents, it can be hard to differentiate between your own worries and your child's worries, but it's important to separate them when evaluating your child's readiness for summer camp.

Having honest conversations with your child about camp is an excellent way to assess their readiness. Make sure you initiate these conversations in an environment where they feel safe. A lazy weekend breakfast is a great time for this discussion; bedtime, however, is not. Children are often more anxious before lights out...you don't want to leave your little one fretting when it's time to sleep.

Here are some good ways to approach this conversation.

- If you have a specific camp in mind, pull up some pictures or videos of the facilities (pick activities your child likes) and look at them together.
- If you, the parent, went to sleep-away camp, tell them stories about how much fun you had!
- Always express **confidence** in your child, even if you aren't feeling 100% sure yourself. If you get excited about camp, your child might too. As you well know, when your child gets into something, so do you. It's a **positive feedback loop!**
- Don't be discouraged if your child gets anxious. It's perfectly normal for them to feel some apprehension about leaving home for a few weeks.

Let's take the rest of the Common Concerns in order:

1. My child is too young.

This one can be tricky, because sometimes children simply are too young. However, as a general rule, over 90% of 8 year-olds (2nd grade graduates) are ready for camp, although many parents do not realize this.

If you are concerned about your child's age, find a camp that takes special care of the little ones. A good camp website will spell out its different programs: perhaps they devote extra resources to welcoming first-time families, or run an entirely different schedule for their youngest campers.

If you prefer a more direct approach, call and have all your questions answered from the most knowledgeable person there. Camps are eager to help you feel comfortable and are happy to talk for as long as you need.

Lastly, camp is a **superb** place for your child to grow. If you've done your due diligence and found a truly amazing camp (maybe it's the same one you attended many moons ago), place your trust -- and child -- in their care. You'll pick up your little boy or girl and marvel at their maturity. It's amazing what camp can do for personal growth!

## 2. My child is not very "campy."

### ***The children who struggle the most at camp exhibit the greatest gains.***

That's a bold statement. Let's examine why it's true.

Some children are shy, or prefer video games to sports, and there is nothing wrong with either. With that in mind, consider what summer camp could do for your child: camp has a miraculous ability to make timid kids more outgoing, and equip children (especially those who spend many hours-per-day on their devices) with boosted social skills and even a love of the outdoors.

Admittedly, camps have an image of loud, crazy places with lots of spirit, "ra-ra," and noise. It's true: songs, cheers, dances and games abound. Yet many camps have a softer side to them. The best camps know how to mix and match between fast-paced, sporty programs and more leisurely classes, like pottery or painting. Some camps even offer a library -- complete with a sophisticated check-in and check-out process -- for the book lovers! The point is, children are encouraged to try new things, while still having a

familiar activity (basketball, swimming, archery, etc...) at which they already excel...unless that activity involves a screen!

Camp is one of the few places left in the world where people live without tech and interact face-to-face with peers, build meaningful relationships, and learn skills that will help them succeed in all walks of life. Sleeping in a cabin with other kids requires constant communication and collaboration. Sometimes all it takes is one friendly bunkmate to bring a little boy or girl out of his shell...and make his phone, tablet, or TV a distant memory.

Like a muscle that needs targeted exercise, the very reason why some children struggle at camp is the very reason they need camp the most and show the greatest benefit afterward.

### 3 / 4. My child is too shy / My child will get homesick

Perhaps your future camper is clingy, doesn't like you leaving them alone with a babysitter, and hasn't had a sleepover yet. No wonder the idea of sending them away for two weeks makes you balk!

Even if your child is an introvert, camp is a place where they can thrive. Camp also expects your child to be homesick -- the very best programs train their staff extensively to deal with campers missing home, and they understand that homesickness can be a good thing. To triumph over it is a great victory that builds strength and resilience.

## **The Greatest Gift**

Many might say it's "friendship." After all, camp fosters powerful relationships - campers often end up in each other's weddings and stay in touch long after they've outgrown camp.

And yet.... camp's greatest gift is helping children become the **best versions of themselves**; campers will leave **confident, competent, and independent**. They will learn how to succeed on their own, and isn't that the ultimate wish of every parent?

There is no dress rehearsal for life; successful people take leaps of faith and figure out how to prosper. Going to camp for the first time is a leap of faith. It may seem like jumping into the deep end of a swimming pool. But a great camp has swim instructors waiting with open arms to receive each child and teach him/her how to swim. A great camp sees children step into new -- and sometimes challenging -- environments and flourish.

This opportunity, this gift, knows no price tag.

Of course, your children will be so excited to see you again at pick-up...

...and of course they will continue to love you dearly...

...but their newfound autonomy will benefit them at every turn: school, college, even Tuesday nights with the babysitter!

-Kaylen Alexis