

Is Your Child Ready for Camp?

You've made your decision. This is the year. Your kid's going to camp. Resistance is futile. Or perhaps it's the other way around: Your child is saying that now is the time, and you're the one with doubts. In any case, there is no scientific formula to determine a child's camp readiness. Every child is different, and parents can't forget to take into consideration their own needs and circumstances, as well. Try tossing around some of the following questions to see if the timing is right for everyone.

How old is your child?

- **Children under 7** often have a hard time adjusting to being away from home, so consider a day camp where kids come home every night.
- **Children 7-12** are usually good candidates for resident camps, or "sleepaway" camps. Whatever their age, it helps if kids have overnight experiences at a friend's or relative's house before camp.
- **Teens (and 'tweens)** who are "too old for camp" can find cool activities in travel, adventure, sports and Counselor in Training (CIT) programs, among others.

Does your child want to go to camp?

If your kid's already talking about camp, you're way ahead of the game. Your job as a parent is to figure out just what it is your child expects the camp experience to be, and make sure that you're both on the same page as you start researching possibilities.

Does your child have specific interests?

While most camps have a variety of styles and activities to appeal to different interests, specialty camps such as computer camps, arts camps, environmental science camps, film-making camps and rock music camps are always a draw for a kid who's hooked on that "one thing." Many camps accommodate special needs and help children who want to improve skills in a certain area, whether academic or social. Even with a specialty focus, these camps provide a well-rounded experience which enriches a child's development, emotionally and physically.

What was last summer like?

Did your kids spend eight or more weeks last summer complaining about how bored they were? This is definitely a sign to look camp as an alternative. Involve your child from the get-go, and discover what's out there—it's far from boring.

Do your children's friends have summer plans?

The last thing you want is for your child to be left at home with nothing to do, and no one to do it with. So make summer camp plans when other kids will be away, or think about sending friends to camp together. It's great for anxious, first-time campers.

Will your child care program take a vacation?

Before it's too late, check with your child's regular child care provider about scheduled summer breaks. If there are any, a camp could fill the gap.

Could your child use a change, or a challenge?

Maybe your child needs different kinds of activities than your child care arrangement provides. You might want to introduce a child who is timid or uneasy to new experiences. Also, kids are often ready to expand their circle of friends without realizing it. Camp can work wonders in these situations.

Could you use a break?

If your role last summer was as the "town taxi" or "entertainment director," maybe you're ready to play "devoted parent at a distance," and to give your child a taste of independence. If so, share your tales of positive camp experiences and start to explore today's possibilities together. Research camps online and take virtual tours of camps, attend camp open houses and get all of the information you need to find a camp that really fits all of your family's needs.