



Guide For New Campers

Welcome to the new adventure that your family is about to embark on! As a new “Camp Family” be prepared for change – when your child goes off to camp for the first time, everyone in the family grows from the experience, not just your happy camper!

You have made a big step in choosing to send your camper to YMCA Camp. Camp is a wonderful place for your child to grow and develop. They will learn new skills like canoeing, kayaking, archery (and much more) but the biggest benefits will come from the opportunity to learn independence, develop new friendships and discover new talents and strengths; all of which will contribute to positive self esteem. When your child returns home the true benefits of camp will be apparent: you will find them more self-reliant, self-sufficient and self-confident. What an amazing opportunity to give to your child!

We understand that although you know this will be a great experience for your child, you are possibly apprehensive. We understand that nothing takes more trust than giving your child over to the care of others. Taking the step in trusting us to care for your child is a big step; sharing this trust with your child and encouraging them to embark on this new adventure takes courage.

So take comfort in knowing your child is about to enter a safe place that will help him or her widen horizons, develop greater coping skills and become more resilient – just as it will you!

The following information will help you and your child to prepare for this new adventure. Please read it carefully. The more time you spend preparing for camp, the more likely the experience is a successful one.

Winter - Registration

Brochures come out at the beginning of January and registration for residential camps starts in the first week of the New Year. Registration for day camp begins the first week of February. Camps can fill up quickly so early registration is encouraged to guarantee your spot!

Spring - Preparation

- Read through the information with your child and talk about all the different activities.



- Find out what he or she is most interested in (nature, canoeing, archery...) and get some books from the library on those topics.
- Review expectations of camp experience with your child, this could include what camp might be like, what behaviour is appropriate or what they will need to pack.
- Attend Healthy Kids Day. Take a tour of camp, meet the staff and orient yourself to the facility. Allowing your child an opportunity to see the camp with the comfort of his/her family makes it seem safer on the first day.
- Talk to the camp director, find out what to expect on the first day and discuss this with your child.
- Talk about what it's like living in a cabin with nine other kids and ways he or she might go about making new friends.
- Have a friend sleep over and sleep in their sleeping bags.
- Focus on the positive - all the new skills they'll learn plus building confidence in the skills they already have.
- Talk about ways to solve problems at camp, like talking with their Group Leader, Section Director or the Camp Coordinator.
- Most importantly: share your enthusiasm and commitment for your child's upcoming camp experience! It is important for campers to know that someone at home will be thinking about them but is excited about them spending the full session at camp.

Summer - Getting Ready For Camp

- Final payment should be made one month before the start date if you haven't already done so.
- Give yourself plenty of time to pack gear - review the checklist online.
- Send some letters to camp for your child to receive during their stay - mail in time for letters to reach camp before your child's arrival.
- Bring your child to camp - allow plenty of time to pack and travel to ensure relaxed start to the week.
- Acknowledge that you will miss each other but avoid comments like: "I hope you'll be ok" or "what will I do without you?" A more positive send off could be: "I know that you're looking forward to a lot of the activities at camp. I can't wait to hear your stories!"
- Tell him/her you will write and that you hope he/she writes back (two or three notes is sufficient and 1 tucked into your campers toiletries is great).

At Camp

- During your campers stay ask about new friends and experiences when you write. Use your judgment when dispensing the latest news, if a pet dies for instance; wait until you see your camper to tell them, this is not good news to get while you are away from home.



- When writing an email or letter be aware that writing about exciting things you are doing (like parties or special events) might make them more homesick.
- If you receive an unhappy letter from your camper, try to remember that children can be dramatic for a moment and then back to laughs and smiles in 5 minutes. If you receive a letter like this we ask that you call the camp director to discuss it. This allows us to have a casual discussion with your camper and their counselor about how things are going, and then get back to you.
- Call camp and speak to the director to check on your child if you are nervous or apprehensive. This is a great way to check in without disrupting your child's camp experience. The camp director will follow up with you and this can be better than a phone call to your child which can sometimes spark homesickness.

After Camp

- Pick your child up from camp - show enthusiasm for their return and ask plenty of questions about their camp memories/highlights.
- Follow up with the camp experience by completing the survey we send at the end of the session or giving feedback on your child's experience to better equip the camp to serve your child's needs.

