

# How Do You Know that You Are Choosing the Right Summer Camp for Your Family?

By Grace Tummino, LINX Marketing Specialist

This is the time of year when many families make the decision on which summer camp best fits their family's needs. Maybe you've already attended a local camp fair and you're trying to make a decision between two or more camps. Perhaps you are new at this and don't know where to turn first for answers. One thing is certain; you want to feel confident that you are enrolling your child in the best possible summer camp to fit the needs of your family.

Before you start the search, ask yourself these basic questions. The answers will be your camp requirements.

- Am I looking for a full-day or half-day camp, or is my child ready for sleepaway camp?
- Is my child interested in many varied activities or is he/she more focused on one activity or sport? Are you looking for your child to learn a new skill? Many camps focus on specialties like STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education), sports, dance, theater, arts and crafts, nature, outdoor adventures, etc.
- Is my child most comfortable in small or large groups?
- Does my child have a food allergy or situation that may require special attention?
- Is my child more comfortable in single sex or coed activities?
- Is bus transportation important to me?
- Do I need a flexible drop off and pick up schedule?
- What is my budget?

Once you have finalized your list of camp requirements, listen to recommendations from friends and family, attend a camp fair, search online using keywords that describe what you are looking for in a camp, and look for online reviews from your favorite local sources. You should always, of course, contact a camp directly. Here are some important factors to consider as you are learning about different camps.

## **Environment:**

It's important to get a feeling for the camp. Is the staff happy to see or hear from you? A good camp will partner with parents by making an effort to teach respect and kindness, and this will shine through when you converse with them. Listen to your instincts when you visit the camp or make a phone call. No matter how you contact the camp, pay attention to the way you are treated. If you feel rushed or they are unable to answer your questions, then it is probably not the best choice for your family. A good camp representative will always make time for you and treat you with the respect you deserve.

Staff and the right camper to counselor ratio are important for a positive experience, especially for children who are most comfortable in small groups. You want to know that the staff is nurturing and patient. Many young children are experiencing camp for the first time, and they need extra guidance from an experienced and caring professional. If this is important in your choice, you might want to look for a camp that hires teachers and/or college students studying to become professionals in the field of early childhood development.

Integrity and teamwork – You want to know that your child will be part of a team environment where failure IS an option. When the focus is fun and learning, and not competence or failure, the child is free to learn, take risks, and grow at a faster pace. A great camp will give you the feeling that your child's emotional safety is top priority. A camp that rewards a child who tries his best in any sport or activity, no matter the outcome, is a camp with integrity.

When a child has a sense of belonging at camp, he/she is free to explore new activities and interests without fear of rejection from other children. Does the camp have a bullying prevention policy? As a parent you will want to know the camp's procedure for prevention as well as actions taken if a bullying event should occur. Please take a moment to read [Eradicating Bullying](#) an educational article written by LINX Camps' Vice President and Executive Director, Josh Schiering.

Some parents favor a more traditional environment where the camper will feel like he/she is part of something bigger. If this is important to you, then find a camp that has an inclusive environment where campers take part in opening and closing ceremonies or camp-wide games.

### **Safety:**

CORI (Criminal Offender Registry Information) and SORI (Sex Offender Record Information) background checks should be completed for every adult leader or volunteer. This is a requirement, enforced by the local Board of Health, of all staff and volunteers who will be in contact with campers. Is the staff CPR and first aid certified? Is there adequate access to EMTs?

Many camps have a plan for dealing with food allergies, other allergies, and

medical issues. Check out the policy each camp has in place. You will want to feel confident in the event of an emergency situation. According to [Foodallergy.org](http://Foodallergy.org), "Having a written food allergy policy in place ensures that staff members are well-equipped to care for children who experience food allergy reactions while at camp." You will find extensive [guidelines](#) for camps on this website.

Instructor competence should be a requirement. If you have your eye on a specialty camp, be sure an expert in the field leads it. Specialty camps, in areas like science and sports, should be staffed with experts in the field for obvious safety and instructional reasons.

### **Communication:**

Is the staff of your camp choice willing to take your calls at any time of day? Are you free to drop in and see your child at camp any time you wish? There should always be complete open communication between parent/caregiver and camp staff. You should feel free to talk with counselors at the end of a camp day if you have a concern or just want to chat about your child.

### **Cost:**

Discounts and specials can help work your favorite camp choice into your budget. Does the camp offer a sibling or a multiple camp week discount? Are there any other benefits that come with the price? Summer camp is an investment, and when it comes down to it, you want to know you are getting a lot for your money. There is a vast amount of camps out there competing for your dollar, so make them work for it!

With all of this in mind, your camp choice will help define the camp experience for your child. Whether it is a first time experience or one of many, I hope you find the ultimate camp to meet the needs and expectations of your family. The results will show in your child's self-confidence, increased independence, friendships, and willingness to try new things.

For more information on summer camp best practices, contact LINX at [information@linx-usa.com](mailto:information@linx-usa.com)