

## **Things to consider when sending kids to summer camp**

Summer camp is a wonderful summer experience that kids and adults can equally enjoy. Whether your camper is off to a week or multi-week overnight camp or a day camp, opportunities for growth and learning are unmatched. There are countless opportunities to exercise independence and create valuable relationships that last. Authentic summer experiences are as important to a child's growth and development as being in a classroom. As a parent you can help your camper get the most out of their experience by helping them to reflect on the summer experiences. Here are some ways, suggested by Alan Jaros of Michigan State University Extension, to engage in reflection with your children.

### **Keep a Journal**

Reflection is a key indicator to intentionally build life skills. Having your camper keep a camp journal, your camper will have a structured opportunity to think through events and activities of the day. Try sitting down before camp and coming up with probing questions to inspire topics to write about. One important development domain is positive identity. Use a probing question such as, "Today I felt confident when..I." This encourages your camper to recall a time when they felt good or accomplished a challenging task.

### **Request a letter with a purpose**

At camps where they are away from home activity involves sending your camper a letter and hoping for one in return. For some kids, they are having too much fun to sit down with a paper and pen to send back a lengthy letter. When you write your letter and send your care package, include a self-addressed stamped envelope with a few smaller sheets of paper with purposeful questions. Find out about a time they took a healthy risk by asking, "What new activity did you try that you have never done before?"

You can also find out about their social comfort level at camp by asking, "Tell us the name of new friend you have made? Their favorite to do at home is..." You can gauge a lot about your campers' experience and gain confidence they are growing as individuals while having a ton of fun.

### **Sit down and review pictures, either on the camp blog or on their camera**

These days most camps have blogs or photo sites where you can see activities your camper does on a daily or weekly basis. While it may be fun to review the blog on your own, use it as an opportunity to connect with your child and their experience. They will be proud to tell you all the wonderful activities and new things they have learned at camp. Being a good listener and asking questions will give you a sense of their decision-making skills. Many activities are self-directed and give campers a chance to exhibit leadership skills. You may be surprised at the stories you hear.

Camp is a great opportunity for your child. If your child is signed up or has attended camp this summer, congratulations on making an excellent parenting decision. Camp will help them grow and develop on their journey to adulthood more than you realize.

For more resources on camps in this area or more information on the value of summer camps, visit the American Camp Association website, [www.acacamps.org](http://www.acacamps.org).