

Off to Camp

As we ease toward spring and dream of summer, many Minnesota kids are looking forward to camp as part of their summer fun. But how do you choose the camp that's right for your child? And how can you help make sure your child's camp experience is the best it can be? Here is Marti's guidance:

I. Underlying issues: Why is camp such a valuable part of a child's development?

- Opportunity for new adventures beyond their familiar environment
- Good practice for being more independent
- Opportunities to build very close relationships with peers

II. Four things parents need to do to ensure the best camp experience possible

- 1) Make sure your child is developmentally ready
This means your child should be comfortable being away from home overnight, able to express needs and feelings clearly to adults, relatively at ease around new people and interested in the adventure of going to camp.
- 2) Involve your child in choosing the camp and planning the schedule
Does your child want to explore something completely new? Or how about strengthening skills in a familiar activity? Or, as a change from school and electronics, a traditional outdoor camp experience with a wide variety of activities can be an especially healthy and fun experience for many children. For a young first-time camper or a very shy child, day camp often is a good place to start.
- 3) Talk about what to expect at camp
Get as much advance information as possible about the schedule and rules of the camp. Talk about things that can arouse anxiety for children. For example, what happens if a camper gets sick or is injured? What if your child wets the bed? If children get homesick (and most do, especially new campers), are they allowed to call home? What other strategies could your child use if he or she is feeling homesick?
- 4) Be positive and encouraging
Especially the first time parents send their child off to camp, they may let their own anxiety or sentimentality spill over to their child. So stay positive, emphasizing how excited you will be to hear about your child's adventures when he or she returns!