

Preparing Your Child For Camp

by Cheri Evans



“Mom, I’m home!” Weary, wearing a week’s worth of dirt and a T-shirt bearing the camp logo, a child bursts through the door only to be greeted by “Where’s your laundry?”

As a parent, you may consider yourself “set apart” from your child’s camp adventure because you aren’t in attendance. The success of the child’s experience, however, may very well depend upon your participation.

Preparing a child to attend camp involves a lot of time and effort. I remember my folks scurrying around to buy extra play clothes, attempting to tie a bedroll, loading film in my little camera, and checking to make certain the flashlight had batteries.

All of these are necessary, but I would like to suggest a few additional things you can do to enhance your child’s camping experience. Perhaps some of the following suggestions will help you be more involved this season.

Browse the Brochure

It is important that young people be involved in decision-making activities, so why not start with the selection of a camp? Your son or daughter will be interested in what activities are offered, who will be going, and how long he or she will be staying. You, of course, will be interested in the price.

Does the brochure say anything about a theme or focus for the week? If so, does it emphasize

the same values you have for your home? A camping experience should be a building of the family, not merely a building of the individual.

Pool the Pennies

Become involved as a team in helping pay for the camp experience. You may want to give your child certain responsibilities, other than those you require, for which he or she can be paid. Why not mow a lawn together or have a family car wash? Your child will be thrilled you considered it important enough to “combine the cash” for him or her to go to camp.

Talk about Threads

Involve your youngster in selecting clothes. Do the packing together so your child is aware of what is in the suitcase. The “favorite clothes” should go to camp. They will make it home if he or she likes them.

Many parents spend a lot of money on new clothes for camp. I suggest sending the old stuff; save the money for new clothes after camp or before school. Place a plastic bag for soiled laundry in the suitcase and explain its purpose.

Prepare the Postage

Parents, like campers, always want to hear from their

children, and are disappointed if they do not receive a letter. Why not take your child shopping to select some notes or postcards? Help address and stamp the cards before your camper leaves. Some counselor will love you for it!

Mention the Money

Know what activities your child wants to participate in and how much each will cost. An extra fee is sometimes charged for certain activities. If the money is limited, be sure your child knows that before arriving at the camp “bank.”

Many times children sign up for several “extra-cost” activities, and are left with no spending





money for the week. This may seem like a small problem, but the peer pressure of today makes being without spending money an uncomfortable situation.

Prepare for Pictures

Many camps have a camp picture taken sometime during the session. For some, the cost of the picture is included in the overall price, but for others it isn't. Discuss the pros and cons of buying the picture before your child leaves home. The picture will hold many memories in years to come, so buy one if possible.

In addition to the group photograph, why not buy an inexpensive or disposable camera and give it to your child to record his or her memories?

Sidestep the Separation

Do not suggest to your child that he or she can call home if homesick. That is a statement a child never forgets. The policy of telephoning home is different in each camp. Know what the policy is at your selected site

before you make a verbal commitment to your child.

Do not highlight a conversation about "homesickness" in your preparations. If it happens, the camp staff will deal with it, but don't set your child up for it.

Gear up for the Goal

Consider why you are sending your child to camp.

Camp is an excellent place to establish wholesome friendships for life, to develop respect for the world God created, and to help your child learn to make decisions. Christian camps want to help children learn how to live for Christ in all situations.

With some of these goals in mind, talk with your child about what to expect in all areas, particularly the area of spiritual emphasis and development. Let your youngster know you are interested in what will be happening and will be anxious to know what he or she has learned. Christian parents need to be involved in the spiritual development of their children, instead of dropping it in someone else's hands and forgetting about it.

Last, but not least, pray with the young person about what will happen. Encourage your son or daughter to share any concerns or fears he or she may have so you may pray about them.

Now that you have sent your child off to camp, you will probably want to relax and enjoy a little freedom. While your child is away, however, consider the following.

Push the Pen

Write to your child. Don't highlight big events he or she is missing. Let your youngster know you are proud he or she is there. The ideal days for a child to receive mail are the second, fourth, and sixth days of a seven-day camp.

Assuming the camp extends

from Sunday through Saturday, Monday is an excellent day for mail because not everyone gets a letter that day, and mail is a relatively new activity. It gives special attention to your child, and makes him or her feel good because you wrote on the first day. (That letter would need to be mailed before the youngster leaves for camp.)

Wednesday is sometimes difficult because the light at the end of the tunnel, Saturday, is not showing through. It is also exciting for your child to receive mail at the end of the week; it provides assurance that you are looking forward to him or her coming home. Returning home can be an extremely anticlimactic experience. A letter may help balance that feeling.

Purpose to Pray

You are responsible before the Lord for the spiritual development of your child, and what happens at camp can make a significant contribution. If you learn the focus of the camp, you can be praying about the spiritual goals in relationship to your child's particular needs.

Pray for safety and health so he or she will not miss out on anything; for friends (who will have a positive or negative impact on your child's life); and for the counselor and other camp staff. You will probably be aware of other needs as well.

Hearken the Homecoming

Do something special for the homecoming. You might want to prepare a favorite meal. I suggest this be done the second day home as opposed to the first night. Make a "welcome home" sign for the garage door, or make or buy a small bulletin board or scrapbook, and place it on your child's bed accompanied by a note of welcome.

Last, but certainly not least, is your responsibility after your child comes home from camp.

Welcome the Weary

Plan the day of your child's arrival at home. Be aware of pick-up times and be prompt! It is devastating to

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a child who is exhausted to watch other campers be greeted by family, and be the only one left behind.

Be prepared for your child to be out-of-sorts and tired. Camp days are high-level activity times. Facing home and a sudden change of pace often causes one to turn from a near-perfect angel into an A-1 grouch.

Your child may not be as delighted to see you as you are to see your child. Besides going home, children are saying goodbye to counselors they had as well as friends they've made.

When you arrive home, be sure to provide extra time for rest and sleep. It is nice if a child can be excused from chores for an additional 24 to 48 hours before joining the rat race of a normal household. Expecting a child to leave on vacation immediately, or to be involved in a family outing that first day or two will often be too much.

Listen with Love

Listen diligently as your youngster shares what happened. For the child who is especially expressive, be cognizant of good and/or bad things that happened. Be aware of any problem areas that might have occurred with peer and/or authority relationships. Later, you may be able to help your child mature in the area of getting along with others.

Ask questions and be interested, but don't probe. For the child who is quiet, reserved, and doesn't open up easily, allow time for him or her to do so. It's fun to share what the family did while the child was away, and then to ask your child to share in return.

Some other lead-in questions might be, "Tell us about your favorite person at camp...your favorite activity...or your most difficult day at camp."

Fun with the Family

Often youth groups have a camp highlights night. Why not have one as a family? This is easy to do if the child has taken pictures.

Some activities for such a family night might include looking at

the pictures, having a favorite camp meal, participating in the child's favorite camp activity as a family (swimming, canoeing, archery, horseback riding), or working on the bulletin board or scrapbook you gave your child when he or she arrived home.

An evening of visiting about camp can be fun. Decorate a "Question Box." Place questions such as these in it to stimulate conversations:

- ④ How did you feel when you arrived at camp?
- ④ Describe one activity you felt strongly about.
- ④ How did you feel when you left camp?
- ④ Pretend you are a counselor at camp and are responsible for 10 kids. List three things you would do to help them feel comfortable and get along with others.
- ④ Describe a gift that you would give a camp staff member—speaker, counselor, lifeguard, best friend.

Identify the Idealistic

Your child may come home with an attitude of everything being ideal at camp. Such statements may be voiced: "Our youth group's dead, but at camp..." "I don't want to go to Sunday school. My teacher's not like my counselor at camp." "There's no one cute at our church like so-and-so at camp."

Patience wait out the comments. Things will die down. Allow your youngster to write to the people he or she "fell in love with." For younger children, it is often their counselors; for older teens, it is other campers. Encourage them to share with these people, and give it time. Eventually things will return to normal.

Letters to Leaders

If you find your child mentioning one particular staff member who was an excellent role model, or one he or she especially

enjoyed, encourage your child to write and thank that person for what it meant. Many a camp staff member has been greatly encouraged to go on another week because a camper of a previous week wrote a note of thanks. Maybe your youngster can even e-mail them at camp.

Decipher the Decision

Be interested in what decisions or commitments your child may have made at camp. Allow time to share these decisions without giving your young person the third degree. Upon arrival home, he or she may be on a spiritual high. Help your son or daughter realize that whether he or she is up or down on the spiritual roller coaster, the commitment stands.

For the quiet, reserved child who doesn't easily share decisions, you might ask a question such as, "What did you think about the messages or stories?" Remember, do not push.

Sometimes a counselor may write and tell parents about a decision, or the youth pastor may share with them. If this happens, do not attack your child because

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Pray and plan, believing that God wants to use these efforts to benefit your child for life and eternity.

you learned about the decision through other sources.

Highlight the Heavenly

In each area of preparation, prayer has been involved and certainly is a part of this time. Begin anew a prayer time with your child, and help him or her follow through on commitments. The realness of the time at camp will be much more a part of his or her life six months later if God is a daily part of the process.

The camping experience needs to be bathed in prayer during the whole time. If a child has made a decision at camp, he or she now needs to begin the growing process, and needs help doing it.

Some activities you can do to “highlight the heavenly” include having your child write a letter

about the decision he or she made and why. In the scrapbook, encourage him or her to write a little testimony about what led to the decision. Some points you may want to review with your child are:

- You have now been born into the family of God (John 3:1-3).
- Before, you had nothing in common with God because of sin, but now you have a new relationship with Him (salvation).
- In a sense you are a baby in this relationship, and in order to grow you must have the food that is in the Bible (Heb. 5:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:15; Jer. 15:16).
- You can have assurance of victory through Christ over temptations (1 Cor. 10:13).
- You can have assurance of forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

- You can have assurance of provision of needs and of help through difficult times (John 16:24).

All of the above things need to be covered together. This is an excellent time to stress the need for a daily quiet time with God.*



Well camp is over, and God has richly blessed your child. His or her life has been changed, but the job isn't finished. Spend time with your child during the growing process as your youngster learns some of the principles mentioned. Pray and plan, believing that God wants to use these efforts to benefit your child for life and eternity. ➤

* The camper's Pathlight Bible will help your child keep camp (and commitments made there) alive. For more information, go to International Bible Society's website at www.ibsdirect.com.



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