

Choosing the Right Summer Program

When do you start looking for a summer program or camp for your child (children)? With so many choices to choose from, the biggest challenge is selecting a program that fits both your needs and your child's needs.

You should begin your search and selection as early as March. Programs tend to fill up close to the end of spring or beginning of summer. You want enough time to research the program and not be rushed at the last minute because the program has limited space. There are lots of questions to ask; make sure that both you and your child (children) feel comfortable with the decision that you make!

Here is a sample of what to look for and what questions to ask:

Location: Is the program close to where you live or work? Will the times be convenient for you to drop off and pick up? Many parents will limit their search just from home and/or work. You also want to know if there is a medical facility nearby and if the facility is easily accessible so you can get to and from work and/or home with ease.

Cost of the program: Can you choose specific weeks and/or days for your child to attend or do you have to lock in to the whole summer? What happens if your family wants to take a vacation during the summer term? These are important questions you want to ask when choosing a camp for your child.

Two types of camps:

There are two types of camps: traditional and specialized camps.

Traditional camps are mostly center based such as those that child care centers like The Children's Workshop offer. Traditional camps offer a variety of activities which include field trips, arts and crafts, individual and team activities, swimming and outdoor activities. For instance, at The Children's Workshop, we have centers that have built in pools on site and large fields and/or yards to play softball and/or soccer. Traditional camps are great for children who like a variety of activities to keep them engaged and involved throughout the day.

Specialized camps usually focus on one activity throughout the day, such as horseback riding, tennis, basketball, or chess with some free time for swimming and other activities. These types of camps are best for children who are extremely motivated and can concentrate on one specific activity for long periods of time.

When you decide to actively start looking and visiting camps, keep these questions in mind:

- Will the program encourage my child to try new things?

- Which activities are required?
- How structured is the program?
- Are the counselors trained? Do they know CPR and first aid?
- In the event of inclement weather, what do the instructors do when it is raining or when the weather is too hot to be outside? How will they accommodate the children to make sure they are safe?

If your child is already enrolled in a school age program and they offer summer camp, this might be a great fit; don't forget to consider the potential stress on a child that comes with changing facilities, teachers, and schedules if you decide to change programs. Ask co-workers, friends, family and neighbors about their child's camp experience, what they liked or didn't like, and then visit each program on your list so you can make your own judgment and the selection that best fits you and your family's needs.

Most importantly, make sure to ask yourself what you want your child to get out of their summer program. Do you want them to learn a new skill, develop more self confidence, or become more independent? Make sure to select a program that has activities and personnel competent to help your child achieve success and reach goals – just because school is out for summer doesn't mean that learning and growing have to stop!

Don't wait too long summer will creep up on you when you least expect it!