

# Choosing a Camp for Your Child

by Elaine Vipler

Winter is here, but if you are a parent of a child between the ages of seven and 13, it is time to think summer. Now is the time to begin the process of searching for an appropriate summer program for your child.

Many parents begin the process by getting recommendations from friends and acquaintances. These recommendations can be helpful, provided that you ask specific questions based on your child's needs and interests. What may be a great camp for one child can be inappropriate for another. A camp that was lauded by relatives of mine turned out not be structured or athletically-oriented enough for my daughter.

Before looking at specific camps, get a clear sense of your goals (Is this to be a primarily educational experience for your child, or just four weeks of fun?) and a profile and true understanding of your child's interests, abilities, and personality. Chosen properly, a summer camp can provide your child with a rewarding lifetime experience.

The following questionnaire can be a handy tool in clarifying your priorities:

1. What size camp do you prefer?  
Small (less than 100)  
Medium (100-250)  
Large (over 250)

2. Do you have a preference as to geographical area?  
Northeast  
Southeast  
Midwest  
Southwest  
West

3. What kind of interaction between the sexes do you prefer?  
Co-ed  
Single-sex  
"Brother - sister"

4. What length term is preferable?  
Two-week  
Four-week  
Eight-week

5. Would you child do better in a more or less structured program?

6. Would you prefer a camp that encourages or minimizes competition?



7. Do you want a camp that emphasizes  
Sports  
Creative arts  
(drama, music, art, dance)  
Camping out, nature

The following list of criteria is helpful when meeting with the camp director:

1. **History of Camp**  
When was the camp founded?  
How long has it been under present ownership?

Is it accredited? (American Camping Association)

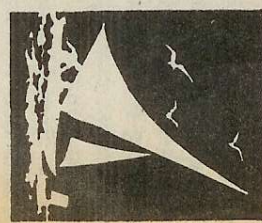
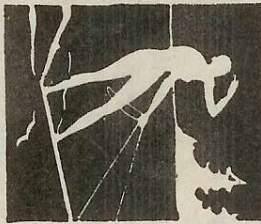
2. **Programs**  
What programs and activities does the camp offer?  
What are the special features of the camp?

Is there an emphasis on instruction, recreation or both?  
What is a typical day like?  
What provisions are made for new campers?

3. **Facilities**  
What are the camp's recreational facilities?  
What are the sleeping accommodations?  
Where are the shower and toilet facilities?

4. **Staff**  
What is the training and experience of the staff?  
What is the ratio of counselors to campers?

5. **Medical**  
Is there a resident doctor and/or resident nurse?  
Where is the nearest hospital?  
Is the camp approved by the Board of Health?



6. **Visitation and Telephone**  
What are the visitation policies?  
When/How often can campers use the telephone?

*Elaine Vipler is the Director of SummerScope and Scope, advisory services to help parents select appropriate camps and schools for their children. SummerScope and Scope services are available free of charge. For more information, call 534-6531.*