

MALIBU *Surfside* NEWS

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CAMP CAN DO

Remember the little engine that could? The one that said “I think I can, I think I can?” Guess what? That little engine probably went to summer camp.

As director of Camp Keystone, a summer camp in Agoura Hills, I’ve always believed that kids learn confidence and self-assurance from summer camp. Now new studies prove that they do, as a result of a principle called self-efficacy. If you believe you can do something, you probably will, and conversely, if you think you can’t, you won’t. That, in a nutshell, is self-efficacy.

Summer camp is so important in teaching kids self-efficacy because we offer a wide range of activities for them to try. If you sign your child up for tennis lessons, and he’s not particularly adept with a racket, he could decide he’s not athletic. At summer camp, he’ll try tennis, and hiking, basketball, fishing, volleyball, golf and a dozen other physical activities. He’ll have the opportunity to find a sport in which he’s both talented and interested. And more importantly, that interest may well stay with him for a lifetime.

But this principle isn’t just limited to sports. If your child develops a “can-do” attitude in one area, it will carry over into every aspect of her life. As a result, children who attend summer camp have been proven to have higher test scores, lower absenteeism, lower drop-out rates, better homework completion and higher grades.

Why is summer camp so key to self-efficacy? Researchers believe part of it is the exposure to different environments, different experiences and a wider range of individuals. Campers are confronted with new challenges but also provided with the skills to meet those challenges. Their confidence increases, and they grow more adaptable.

Although camp activities are designed to be fun, first and foremost, they’re also learning experiences. Kids are provided with opportunities to master new skills every day, whether it’s riding a horse or performing onstage. And because we work hard to ensure that camp is a positive, nurturing environment, kids develop a positive approach to learning.

That little engine believed he could climb that hill, and so he did it. As a parent, I want my children to have that same belief that they can meet any challenge, clear any obstacle. That’s why, this summer, my kids are going to camp.