

10 things you can't assume about summer camp

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When selecting a summer camp, let's face it, the pressure is on. Choose the right summer camp and you've given your child a lifetime of memories, lasting friendships and a set of skills that will set him or her on the road to independence. Choose the wrong camp, and your child misses out on all that and more. But how to decide which camp? As the director of Camp Keystone, too often I see parents making the wrong choices for the wrong reasons. They'd ask questions, but the wrong questions, or they'd assume too much about the camp they'd choose. Don't make that mistake. Don't assume anything, and in particular, don't assume these particular things about any camp.

1) All summer camps are accredited.

Actually, they're not. Accreditation through the American Camping Association is a painstaking process that requires strict adherence to their codes of safety, health and other vital issues, and many camps don't even try. If you have any questions about a camp, check the ACA website.

2) Accreditation isn't that important because the state of California has strict licensing procedures for summer camps.

Unfortunately, California doesn't have any licensing procedures at all for camps. That's why ACA accreditation is so important. To check out the ACA guidelines go to www.aca.com <http://www.ACAcamps.org/accreditation/>

3) You think that background checks are required by law for staff members who work with children.

Nope, the state of California has strict standards for pre-school employees, but there are no such requirements for staffers at camps. Find out what the standards are for the employees at any camp before enrolling your children.

4) All you need to know is the ratio of staff to campers.

Wrong. A camp could have a top heavy administration staff and not enough face-to-face supervision for the campers. To be certain about how your child will be supervised, ask about group size, and the number of counselors for each group.

5) You've seen the camp but your child doesn't need to.

The truth is your child will be more comfortable with an environment he or she has seen. Seeing a facility lets your child know what to expect. And, we often find that when kids tour the facilities here at Camp Keystone, for example, and realize exactly how much fun is in store for them, they're even more excited about coming to camp.

6) The camp's providing transportation, so of course their vehicles will have seat belts.

Definitely not. Some camps use buses which are not required to have seat belts. Many facilities insist on using vehicles that come equipped with seatbelts. Ask.

7) All camps have evacuation procedures in place in case of an emergency.

Unfortunately this is not true, and in Southern California, we feel this is vitally important. If they have a plan, ask to see it. It's not possible to be too cautious when it comes to your child's safety.

8) My child will love arts and crafts just like I did.

Not necessarily. That's why you should pick a camp that offers a variety of activities, so that if a camper doesn't like one, there are others to choose from. I believe being introduced to new experiences is an important component of attending camp. Your son may find out that he doesn't like arts and crafts, but he may discover a passion for an activity that he never tried before like martial arts or drama. Give him the chance to find out.

9) Gut feelings don't matter when it comes to choosing a camp.

I'm a big believer in intuition, particularly when it comes to your children. You know them better than anyone else, and sometimes we can't always articulate what it is – or isn't – about a camp that makes it a good fit for your child. Go with your gut.

10) My child won't get dirty.

Sorry, they're outdoors playing, swimming, riding, driving go-carts, learning archery, doing arts and crafts and a hundred other activities. They'll get dirty.

You can safely assume however, that if you choose the right camp, your son or daughter will have a great time. And I think I can assume that nothing will make you happier than that. Good luck at camp!

