

Evaluating Younger Children's Camp Readiness

A child's first camp experience is important because it helps shape the way they will feel about camp in the future. For younger children, especially those entering PK, TK, and Kindergarten, a full-day, outdoor program may be quite different from the school day that they have grown accustomed to. We offer the following information to think about as you consider camp for your child because we want your child's first summer camp experience to be a great one!

Is your child comfortable and capable of independently using the bathroom?

Campers are required to be able to use the bathroom facilities independently, including tearing and using toilet paper, without any assistance. Our camp bathrooms have private stalls and groups take frequent potty breaks.

Does your child normally take a nap during the day?

If you answered "YES" to this question, it is important to know that a full camp day is from 9:15 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Adding in your child's time on the bus or extended hours at camp means their day will begin even earlier and end even later. Counselors of our young campers work to balance their schedules to allow for active times and quiet times during the day. Each day is filled with non-stop outdoor fun so there is no time to nap.

Is your child accustomed to several snack times throughout the day?

Lunch is typically at 11:45 a.m. for younger campers, and campers are busy in activities all morning. Counselors ensure there is a designated snack time in the morning. At the end of every camp day, all campers receive a frozen fruit juice snack before afternoon assembly.

Are you comfortable with your child swimming at camp?

Swim and lunch are the only two activities that are scheduled every day at camp. Our 35–40-minute swim period is divided into a group lesson and free swim time. Swim is a great time for children to connect with fellow campers and staff all while trying new things and growing their skill set in a safe and structured environment. We take an abundance of caution ensuring that during swim, campers are under the care and supervision of 5 or more lifeguards, with 1-2 counselors in the water with them at all times. Each campers' swimming abilities are evaluated on their first day of camp by a certified lifeguard, and we use a wristband system to differentiate between swimmers and those who are not yet water safe. Children that are not yet water safe stay in the shallow end of the pool where they can stand, and can explore with the safety of a counselor, CILT, or lifeguard by their side. Rest assured that your child will be practicing and growing their skills and gaining confidence in their swimming abilities as the summer progresses. Before sending your child to camp, ensure that you are comfortable with them getting in the pool every day this summer!

Are you used to daily reports from your child's preschool or kindergarten?

Our staff are focused on the campers in their group from the moment they arrive in the morning until the moment they say goodbye. They lead the group and participate in everything with their campers, leaving no time to step into the office for daily reports. We know that young campers do not always remember what they did during the day or may simply not have the words to express it to you. We welcome and encourage you to call camp at any time to speak with your Leadership Team member to find out how your camper is doing. Our Leadership Team members spend all day with the groups they support and will have a good sense of how your child is doing at camp.

Have you thought about if your child can attend 5 full days a week?

The question to ask yourself is, "What is my child comfortable with now?" If your child is in school 5 days a week from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., do not assume that they are ready for 5 days a week in camp! Remember, the camp day is a longer and fuller day. However, there are some 4- and 5-year-olds who are ready for 5 days a week. You know your child best. Keep in mind that your child's first experience will shape how they feel about summer camp for future summers as well. We are aware that campers in this age group have different levels of energy, so we modify our programming for our Sparrow campers to allow for a little more flexibility to meet the needs of each camper. There will be options for campers that need a slower afternoon as well as options for those campers that have the energy for a full day program!

Is your child ready to leave you for camp? (Are you ready?)

Separation anxiety is normal and experienced by many children in new environments. In camp, we anticipate this and are prepared for it. To help alleviate some of your child's (and your) nerves, we encourage you to bring your child to an Open House in the Spring. It is also important to ask yourself honestly, "Am I ready to have my child leave me and go to camp?" Your child will pick up on your feelings and level of comfort, so it is important to know how you are feeling.

What if, after a few days of camp, I determine that my child really isn't ready for camp?

We want to do everything we can to help avoid a camper pulling out of camp early. It is better for a child not to start than to start and then stop. If you have any concerns about your child's social, emotional, or physical readiness, please call us today and discuss this in detail with a director. If you have concerns about your child's experience once camp has started, call camp immediately. The Leadership Team member that supports your child's group will discuss the situation with you. We will work with your child and their counselor to try to create success. For campers entering PK, TK, and Kindergarten, should we determine that your child is not ready, it is our policy to refund half of the unused tuition. The remaining half is not lost but instead kept as a credit for your child for the following summer when they will be more ready for a camp experience.

We hope that the above information has helped answer some of your questions. We welcome and encourage you to call us with any additional questions or concerns. Our job is to help ensure that each child has the best possible summer at camp.

