



# **PARENT AND GUARDIAN HANDBOOK**



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# **WELCOME TO CANOE ISLAND FRENCH CAMP**

Canoe Island French Camp was founded in 1969 by the late Dr. and Mrs. Warren Austin when they could not find a French camp on the west coast for their daughter. First established for just a few weeks each summer on Orcas Island, the French Camp moved to the Austin's beautiful new facility on the 47-acre Canoe Island located just off Shaw Island. The Austins continued to play a vital role in the camp's mission, program, finances and publicity until Dr. Austin's death in 1999.

In 1992 Dr. Austin established the camp as a 501(c)(3) non-profit camp and set up a modest trust to help maintain the facility in order to continue their dream of an island French camp. Today it is run by a board of directors and led by an Executive Director and Camp Director. The summer staff is made up of 10 counselors, both from France and the US, three chefs, facility manager, program management team, and volunteer assistants who are chosen from among mature past campers.

Because of the Austin's vision, today's youth have the opportunity to take part in this unique experience of living on a small island, learning about France and its language and culture, and participating in all the fun of a classic Northwest summer camp. The blend of fine arts, performing arts, language, culture, sports, and outdoor activities melds the activities of mind, body and spirit into the best of a liberal arts education.

Canoe Island French Camp is accredited by the American Camp Association, and is a member of the Western Association of Independent Camps, which means it meets the highest standards of camp excellence and is among the top 45 camps on the west coast.



## DAILY SCHEDULE

**7h00:** activité (optional morning activity)

**7h45:** première cloche  
(first bell: get up, take showers, get dressed)

**8h00:** deuxième cloche; mettre les tables  
(second bell, set the tables)

**8h15:** lever les drapeaux (raise the flags)

**8h30:** petit-déjeuner (breakfast)

**9h00:** ranger les tentes – campeurs (clean tents)

**9h30-10h45:** activités du matin (morning activity)

**10h55-12h15:** cours de français (French class)

**12h15:** mettre les tables (set the tables)

**12h30:** déjeuner (lunch)  
chansons française (French songs)

**13h30:** repos / courrier (rest hour, mail delivered)

**14h30-16h30:** activités de l'après midi (afternoon activities)

**16h30:** goûter (snack followed by counselor presentation, planned activity or free play time)

**17h30:** mettre les tables (set the tables)

**17h45:** descendre les drapeaux (lower flags)

**18h00:** dîner (dinner)



**19h30:** activité du soir (evening activity)

**21h15:** préparations pour se coucher (get ready for bed)

**22h00:** extinction des feux (lights out)

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD GET READY FOR CAMP?**

### **Missing Home**

Separation is generally harder on parents, as the campers have so much to do while they are at camp! Your job prior to departure is to provide a positive outlook on their time away from you and not on how much you are worried about them or how much you will miss them. Children need to know that you are confident that they will be happy and have fun in the few short weeks they will be away from you. Develop some coping strategies with your camper prior to their leaving for camp, but these strategies should not include a promise from you to come get them if they are not entirely happy at first.

Homesickness can occur, particularly first thing in the morning and during *repos* after lunch, and can inspire emotional letters home. It's important for you to remember that several days have probably passed since the letter was written and that the longings for home may have disappeared by the time you receive the letter. The Camp Director, nurse, and your child's counselor are prepared to help your child feel comfortable and good about being away from home. If your child tells you in a letter that he or she is homesick, we hope you will give your child the benefit of finishing the program and not rushing to retrieve her or him from camp. Succeeding in a personal adventure is a growth experience, even if it seems difficult at the time. Going home early could be perceived as a failure by campers once they are home again.

If you get a sad letter from your child, please contact the camp director to let us know as well as get an update on how things are going now. If a camper wishes to call a parent, the Camp Director will speak to the parent first. Heartfelt phrases in letters such as, "Remember how much we love you and how much we are looking forward to seeing you and hearing about your camp activities when we pick you up," help a young child through the newness of being away from home and family. Avoid telling the camper all the fun things you are doing at home; make the activities at home seem normal and slightly boring.

For more information on how you can help your child get ready for camp, see the article published by the American Camp Association <http://www.campparents.org/homesickness>

Another great article from a parent about their child's experiences missing home and then missing camp:

<http://www.acacamps.org/blog/parents-place/camp-full-circle>

## CAMP INFORMATION

**HOUSING** is in tents, with 5 campers of the same gender and approximately same age under the supervision of a counselor. Requests for tent mates may be indicated on the online CAMPER INFORMATION FORM. Showers and flush toilets and nurse-staffed infirmary are adjacent to the pool just below the housing area. Toilets and sinks are located in the tent area for nighttime use. Chores are part of living in a functioning camp community. Campers and counselors are responsible for the daily cleaning of living, activity and dining areas.

**MEALS** The French cuisine-influenced menus are a part of the French culture of the camp. Campers will learn not only the French vocabulary for what they are eating, but also where in France the dishes come from. The camp provides three wholesome meals each day, plus an afternoon snack. (And, of course, French cooking class!) Vegetarian dishes are available at every meal. ***Food allergies and restrictions should be noted on the camper forms online;*** severe allergies should be discussed with the Camp Director before the camper arrives. It is our policy to monitor food items and quantities campers are consuming in order to assure adequate nutrition, and campers are encouraged to try unfamiliar foods. If your child has a strict diet (for health or religious reasons) requiring foods that normally would not be provided at camp, please call the Camp Director to discuss your child's needs.

**VALUABLES** Canoe Island is a comparatively isolated, awe-inspiring natural setting. Removed from modern, everyday influences (TV, video, internet, junk food, and associated advertising), campers experience growth and creativity from within. iPods, computers, tablets, and cell phones can limit a camper's ability to focus on meeting new people, participating in camp activities and hearing the natural sounds of the forest and ocean. Because we have inquisitive raccoons on Canoe Island, we do not allow food in tents. For these reasons and to protect campers' personal items, we will keep all valuables, cell phones, tablets, passports, return tickets, money and food brought to the island locked in the Camp Office for the duration of the program. Any items not needed for the trip to Canoe Island should be left at home. Campers traveling unaccompanied may bring a cell phone to notify parents upon arrival at Sea-Tac Airport and the island, but it will be stored until they leave for home.

**MONEY** \$20-\$50 should be sufficient for any off-island trips, purchasing batteries for cameras and flashlights, or purchasing a camp item such as stamps. We have small camp souvenirs such as posters, cookbooks, and apparel, which are available for a donation to our scholarship fund. Money will be returned for some off island outings. Campers using our counselor-chaperoned shuttle service should bring money for meals to and from the airport.

Please send extra camera/flashlight batteries with your child, or provide them with money to purchase them at camp.

**CONTACT WITH YOUR CAMPER** Mail is the most important thing you can send your camper. Send it often and not later than three business days before the end of the session. It is always looked for, and eagerly read during rest hour. Campers who receive none may feel forgotten. You are welcome to phone or email the camp office to inquire about your child, and incoming email for your children are passed on as regular mail. Please do not send attachments or photos in email. Campers are required to write home, in French, as a class assignment and we provide the envelopes and stamps. Giving them addressed, stamped envelopes can encourage them to write to you more often. Campers may only use the telephone in urgent situations and with permission of the Camp Director. Fax and outgoing email are not available to campers unless necessitated by urgent family situations.

**MAIL** Camper's Name  
Session #  
Canoe Island French Camp  
PO Box 370  
Orcas, WA 98280

**EMAIL** to [camper@canoeisland.org](mailto:camper@canoeisland.org) with the camper's name in the subject line.

**FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM** Find out what is going on daily by checking the Canoe Island French Camp Facebook page. We do not specifically post a photo of each child every day. We post the most interesting photos so don't be disappointed if your child is not in the photos each day. We additionally post photos to our [Shutterfly photo archives](#).

**CARE PACKAGES** Popular care package items include small games and puzzles to share with tentmates and books and magazines. **They should not include candy, gum or junk food** because these can create garbage, raccoon problems, poor nutrition, a junk food "black market," and gum is too often disposed of on the ground or makes a sticky mess in the dishwasher. Camper packages are opened with a Director, and anything not allowed in camp will be put away until they leave for home. Please let grandparents and your camper's friends know of this rule as well.

**VISITING CAMP** Open House prior to Session 1 is the best time to visit camp. Visits during the summer are logistically difficult and can sometimes disrupt your camper's experience. Staff live on the island year around, and you are welcome to contact them during non-camp time for a tour of the island.

**FORMS** Please make sure that you log in to your camp registration profile and complete all the forms for your children. These forms give us valuable information about your children, their interests, French level, health, and travel. All of our forms are online as a part of the registration process. Your child's information must be complete by June 1 or if you register after June 1, immediately upon registering.



# WHAT TO BRING AND WHAT NOT TO BRING

- ❖ **LESS IS MORE.** A camp sweatshirt and t-shirt are provided. Most campers do not need or wear everything they bring; consider sending less, especially if traveling by airplane. Laundry will be done once a week.
- ❖ **LAYERING** is the key to a summer camp wardrobe in the San Juan Islands. It tends to be cool in the morning and evening, warm during the day. Combinations of shorts, long pants, t-shirts, a sweatshirt or fleece pullover, hat, and rain gear are ideal.
- ❖ **RAIN** Although the San Juan Islands get only 16"-26" of rain a year, be prepared for it. A waterproof, windproof jacket is a worthwhile investment.
- ❖ **OLD CLOTHES ARE BEST** Camp is the place to wear them out, not start next year's wardrobe.
- ❖ **LUGGAGE** should be address-tagged, compact, and optimal for unaccompanied campers to handle in transit (backpack or rolling duffel). A wooden clothes box is provided under each bed. For campers traveling by air, **personal items, towel, swimsuit and one change of clothes should be in carry-on luggage.** Please check airline's weight and size restrictions prior to packing gear.
- ❖ **LABEL** every item of clothing or equipment. We will attempt to return labeled items at the end of the summer if requested and if postage is pre-paid.

## PLEASE LEAVE AT HOME:

cell phones (except for travel purposes)  
 cd/mp3 players/iPods  
 electronic tablets (we have a library)  
 video games and computers  
 matches, lighters, or lanterns  
 candles or incense  
 knives (including pocket knives)

hatchets  
 firearms and fireworks  
 pets  
 candy and gum  
 snack food of any kind (plenty of food and snacks will be provided at the camp.)

*Campers are asked to turn in any of these items to the Camp Director on arrival, and they will be returned at session's end. Campers who tell you, "It's ok, everyone has it" are mistaken. Thank you for respecting our policies. Similar items, including homemade snacks sent in care packages, will be kept until the camper leaves Canoe Island.*

## PLEASE BRING TO CAMP

### CAMP GEAR:

- \_\_\_\_\_ sleeping bag or sheets and blanket (cot and mattress provided)
- \_\_\_\_\_ small pillow
- \_\_\_\_\_ flashlight with extra batteries and bulb (LED headlamp preferred)
- \_\_\_\_\_ small day pack or backpack
- \_\_\_\_\_ water bottle with lid that seals (at least 1 qt.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ spiral or bound notebook and pencils/pens for French language activities/journal
- \_\_\_\_\_ stationery, stamps, and addresses. Please show your child how to address and stamp an envelope correctly or send pre-addressed envelopes.

### CLOTHING:

- \_\_\_\_\_ five reusable cloth masks (please label the masks!)
- \_\_\_\_\_ rain/wind jacket
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 pairs of long pants
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 pairs of shorts
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 long-sleeved sweater, sweatshirt or polar fleece (campers receive a Canoe Island sweatshirt at camp)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 wool/fleece hat
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 hat with brim
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 long-sleeved shirts
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3 t-shirts or short sleeved shirts

(campers receive a Canoe Island t-shirt at camp)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 7 pair socks
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7 pair underwear
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 pair pajamas or night shirt
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 pair tennis shoes or other closed toe shoes (for tennis, archery, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 pair flip flops to wear to shower or around camp
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 swimsuit
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 "fancy" outfit - dress or skirt/blouse, slacks/shirt (coat and tie optional) for end-of-session banquet

PERSONAL ITEMS:

- \_\_\_\_\_ toothbrush and toothpaste
- \_\_\_\_\_ towel and wash cloth
- \_\_\_\_\_ sunscreen, 30 spf
- \_\_\_\_\_ lip balm with sunscreen
- \_\_\_\_\_ sunglasses
- \_\_\_\_\_ comb or brush
- \_\_\_\_\_ insect repellent
- \_\_\_\_\_ personal hygiene items

OPTIONAL

- \_\_\_\_\_ combination lock for bathroom cubby
- \_\_\_\_\_ camera
- \_\_\_\_\_ personal art supplies for journaling during tent time
- \_\_\_\_\_ musical instruments (camp has guitars, ukuleles, a piano)
- \_\_\_\_\_ watch

ALL CLOTHES AND EQUIPMENT SHOULD BE MARKED WITH THE CAMPER'S NAME.  
*CANOE ISLAND FRENCH CAMP IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR LOST ITEMS.*

# MEDICAL INFORMATION

Canoe Island French Camp is accredited by the American Camp Association and follows its rules and protocols. The ACA requires that we collect medical information about each camper; we gather this information in an **online form that must be on file before your child may attend French Camp**. A registered nurse attends each session. The nurse will contact you with any concerns. It is the policy of Canoe Island French Camp to contact parents whenever a camper illness or injury requires consultation with a physician.

**MEDICATIONS** must be listed on the health form, both over the counter, vitamins, and those prescribed by licensed medical personnel. **All medications and even vitamins must be unexpired, in their original container** and turned over to the Camp Nurse on arrival. The nurse cannot give campers medications that are not prescribed, not listed on the health form, not in their original containers, or are expired. **The nurse must have written permission from parents to give non-prescribed meds (i.e. supplements or vitamins) from home and these must be in their original containers.**

**MEDICAL EMERGENCIES:** A registered nurse and/or the camp directors who are certified in First Aid/CPR will be on Canoe Island at all times when campers are present. All out-of-camp trips will be accompanied by the medical staff or a staff member certified in first aid/CPR. Emergency medical services are available via 911 throughout the San Juan Islands. Emergency services are 1.5 miles by boat from Canoe Island, and the hospital in Friday Harbor is just 4 miles away. The county sheriff's boat has night vision capabilities and emergency flight evacuations are available.

**ILLNESSES BEFORE AND DURING CAMP:** If your child has been ill in the two weeks before camp, please contact us to determine our policies on various illnesses. Our campers and your child will not have fun if they need to spend time in the infirmary. Please do not send your child to camp sick; a camper must be symptom free for 48 hours before they come to camp. They are welcome to come a little later in the session. If there is room in a later session and you feel that would be a better option, we would be glad to transfer their registration.

Please let us know if your child has recently had lice. Lice are easily transferable and take much time to treat on a daily basis. This is not something a camper can deal with on their own or by hiding the issue. Please help us to keep all of our campers healthy and happy. We will be glad to discuss with you whether we can allow the child to come to camp.

# TRAVEL INFORMATION

Make sure you complete the travel information by June 1 in your online registration account. This information is essential to ensuring that we are prepared to meet your child and welcome him or her to Canoe Island. We will notify all parents of registered campers when the travel form is available, which will be after the summer ferry schedule is published usually by April.

Canoe Island French Camp provides transportation to and from ferry-served islands to Canoe Island for all sessions. We prefer to pick up campers on Orcas Island but for those already on San Juan, Lopez or Shaw islands, special arrangements can be made.

## **ARRIVAL BY FERRY (These are the usual ferry times but may be subject to change each year.)**

Campers should catch the ferry leaving Anacortes at 10:20 am (arriving at 11:25 am on Orcas Island) or at 12:35 pm (arriving at 1:45 pm on Orcas Island). Those arriving on the early ferry will be served lunch. Those arriving after 1 pm should have eaten lunch prior to arrival. Those arriving on the later ferry will not miss afternoon activities. As you exit the ferry, look for staff members wearing Canoe Island shirts. Be alert for vehicle traffic around the ferry landing. Parents should leave their car in Anacortes and walk on the ferry to avoid a long wait in line. Plan to arrive at the ferry terminal at least 45 minutes before ferry departure to park, purchase a parking permit, walk from the parking lot and purchase ferry tickets. Those who plan to drive on the ferry should make a [reservation](#) and be in line 45 minutes before departure. **If you plan to drive on, you need to let us know, as cars are unloaded after walk-on passengers, and we will need to know to wait for you to park and get to the ferry landing with your child and luggage.**

## **WATER TAXIS TO CANOE ISLAND:**

### **Out of Anacortes:**

Island Express, [www.islandexpresscharters.com](http://www.islandexpresscharters.com), 1-877-473-9777, [info@islandexpresscharters.com](mailto:info@islandexpresscharters.com)  
Paraclete Charter Service, [www.paracletecharters.com](http://www.paracletecharters.com), 360-293-5920

**If you are already on Orcas Island,** plan to bring your child to the ferry landing at the arrival time of one of the ferries we will be meeting. Please indicate which ferry you will coordinate with on the travel form.

## **ARRIVAL BY KENMORE AIR**

If you wish your camper to travel from Seattle by commuter plane, please contact Kenmore Air (800-543-9595; [www.kenmoreair.com](http://www.kenmoreair.com)), which flies from Lake Union to Fisherman's Bay, Lopez Island. Non-stop flight time is about one hour. These schedules may change between the date you book your flight and the actual travel date, so be sure to confirm the summer schedule. To book an unaccompanied flight for your child give Kenmore Air representative the Travel Director's name, Margaret Schafer, and phone number (360.468.3589).

**ARRIVAL BY VICTORIA CLIPPER** The Victoria Clipper sails from Seattle at 7:45 am arriving in Friday Harbor at 11:15 am where we can meet your camper with our camp boat. Departure from Friday Harbor is at 4:30 pm with arrival back in Seattle at 7:15 pm [http://www.clippervacations.com/san\\_juan\\_islands/ferryschedule](http://www.clippervacations.com/san_juan_islands/ferryschedule)

**ARRIVAL BY PERSONAL BOAT** You are also welcome to drop off your child by your own boat; please contact us for the best time to arrive.

### **CAMPERS FLYING TO SEA-TAC AIRPORT**

A Canoe Island staff person will be available to meet unaccompanied campers at Sea-Tac Airport and accompany them on the BellAir Airporter Shuttle to the Anacortes Ferry terminal and on to Orcas Island by ferry and Canoe Island by camp boat. Cost for this round trip service is \$150 per child. This fee includes round trip shuttle service, ferry fee, and chaperoning from SeaTac Airport to the camp. Please book flights that arrive in Seattle no later than noon so that the group can catch the 1 pm shuttle to Anacortes. Departure flights should be after 3:30 pm and before 6 pm on the last day of camp. As we won't know which staff member will be doing which weekend run, please give the airline the camp director's name and phone number: Margaret Schafer, 360-468-2329. She will send you correct chaperone information before your session. Parents of children traveling unaccompanied will be notified by phone when they are with Canoe Island French Camp staff.

If unaccompanied campers, who are flying to camp or home, need to leave or arrive on other than the scheduled first and last days, we ask that you use Kenmore Air to get them to and from either Seattle or Sea-Tac Airport as our counselors will be busy with camp activities.

### **DEPARTURE**

Canoe Island staff will return campers and luggage to Orcas in time to catch the 12:05 am ferry to Anacortes, arriving at 1:10 pm. If you're coming to Orcas Island to meet your camper for the return trip, catch the 10:20 am ferry. The campers should arrive at the Orcas ferry landing about 11:30 just after your ferry arrives. Please coordinate with our morning departure schedule, since staff have other responsibilities in the afternoon. You may request that your child go on the ferry unaccompanied to be met by you at Anacortes, but no camp staff will accompany them on this trip.



# CANOE ISLAND FRENCH CAMP RULES AND POLICIES

- 1) If a rule is not stated, common sense and good judgment, courtesy, respect and safety should apply. As good citizens, we obey all state and federal laws.
- 2) All living creatures, including people, are to be treated with courtesy and respect. This precludes the use of obscenities, jokes or slurs relating to another's race, religion, sex, or physical or mental limitations.
- 3) Your care in using living and non-living resources helps to preserve our unique environments. Watch, examine, and observe without disturbing. Handling potentially dangerous organisms is prohibited.
- 4) Canoe Island staff should be contacted immediately if someone is sick or hurt.
- 5) Matches, lighters, fireworks, firearms, and explosives of all types are not allowed. Sharp tools are to be used in a manner that will not injure others.
- 6) Smoking or the use of alcohol or drugs is not allowed. The use of any illegal substance will result in parental notification and dismissal from the program.
- 7) Quiet hours are observed between 10 p.m. and 7:30 a.m. except under special circumstances (astronomy observation and early morning wildlife watch). Campers should remain in their tents until at least 6:30 am.
- 8) Separate sleeping areas for male and female students will be strictly maintained. We encourage inclusivity of all. Displays of physical affection will not be allowed including holding hands, hugging, etc.
- 9) Students should not visit others' sleeping areas. This is to avoid problems relating to personal possessions and sleep schedules.
- 10) All personal and camp property should be used only with permission and treated with care. Contact the directors about bringing personal sports equipment to camp.
- 11) Swimming and boating is done only in assigned areas and is supervised by certified staff.
- 12) Unsafe activities must be avoided at all times (i.e.: running, sliding, or jumping on steep, rough, slick, or poorly lit areas). The athletic field and pool provide plenty of high energy activities.
- 13) When riding in a vehicle, students will stay seated, wear seat belts at all times, keep their hands and head inside the vehicle, and never ride in the back of a pick up truck. No camper will exit a vehicle until complete directions have been given by a staff member as to where to assemble and what the boundaries are. Drivers of vehicles will be over 21 and trained in driving vans.
- 14) Violation of these policies, particularly those that relate to an individual's physical or mental health and well-being, are grounds for immediate dismissal from our programs. In the event of a dismissal parents or guardians are responsible for making transportation arrangements to pick up their child.

# CANOE ISLAND FRENCH CAMP BEHAVIOR POLICY

## GOALS

- To offer the opportunity for each camper to succeed.
- To insure the safety and well being of all campers
- To allow campers to build a cooperative framework in the social and academic aspects of the program

## DISCIPLINE ACTIONS

"Disruptive behavior " is any action by a program participant that disrupts or decreases the learning situation, environment, or social interaction of the group. The following steps will be taken by appropriate Canoe Island staff in response to disruptive behavior:

Step 1: The counselor talks to the camper to determine if he/she understands the rules and is capable of adhering to them, with the camper receiving a time out if it is deemed appropriate.

Step 2: If the action continues, the camper meets with the Counselor and Program Coordinator. A verbal behavior contract may be agreed upon.

Step 3: If the action continues, the camper meets with the Program Coordinator and Camp Directors and a contract is written and signed by the student and directors. The parents are notified about the situation and the need to pick up the child from the camp if the behavior continues.

Step 4: If the action continues, the parents are called to remove the camper from the program at the parents' expense.

Disruptive behavior can be defined by, but not limited to, the following:

- a) possession of alcohol, drugs or tobacco products (*All medications, including vitamins, should be listed on the health form and must be turned over to the camp nurse*)
- b) possession of firearms or weapons of any kind
- c) behavior that consistently demonstrates disrespect for fellow campers or staff, disregard of camp rules, and/or behavior which threatens the physical/emotional safety or health of oneself or of other camp participants (this includes sexual activity, repeated sneaking out at night, and inappropriate language)
- d) Violent acts or threats of violence against campers or staff
- e) Theft or vandalism.

Dismissal of a camper would be a very unusual event, but one for which the ground rules must be clearly laid and understood.

While it is the policy of Canoe Island French Camp to document and discuss disruptive behavioral issues with parents or guardians before a camper's dismissal, the dismissal will be at the sole discretion of the Camp Director. There will be no tuition refund in the event of a dismissal.

# UNPACKING SUMMER: HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD OVERCOME “CAMP SICKNESS”!

After a few weeks on Canoe Island your child will be returning to their former life at home and with friends; a very different life from the one they left on the island. You, as parents, can help them re-adjust to home life, just as you prepared them to adjust to camp life:

- Don't push them to jump into the next activity or group of friends too quickly; allow them time and space to “grieve” the loss of close camp comrades.
- Allow them to stay connected to the friends they made in camp.
- Ask open-ended questions to elicit the stories and memories that will ease the adjustment to home and school; revel in their newfound sense of independence, confidence, and pride in their accomplishments.
- Begin talking about, and planning for, the next camp season!

## **Unpacking Summer: Camp 's Lease Hath All Too Short a Date**

Abbreviated from *Unpacking Summer* by Stephen Wallace, MSED

In ACA Camp's *Camping Magazine*, January/February 2012.

To read the entire story, go to <http://www.acacamps.org/campmag/1201/unpacking-summer>

After the last marshmallow has roasted, the last sunset has sunk, and the last tear has dried, the aftermath of a summer at camp often reveals itself in, well, less than expected ways. Sure, there's the “afterglow” of positive memories: friends, achievements, and awards. But there may be something else — a pervasive sense of loss that may surprise even the most empathic campers and mystify their unsuspecting parents, who don't always understand the degree of difficulty in transitioning back to life at home.

## **Preparing Parents and Campers for After the Summer**

As is the case with separation from the comforting, nurturing routines of home — not to mention the support and affection of family members — exiting the camp community can elicit many of the same feelings of sadness and loss. Paradoxically, these emotions may be most intense among older kids, suddenly cognitively capable of abstract thinking — delving deeper into their emotional world — and more focused on peer relationships than their younger campmates. And these strong feelings may emerge regardless of the length of the campers' stay.

## **What the Kids Say**

Jeremy, 15: “When camp ends, all of the friendships that were made at camp remain, especially thanks to modern communication, but it is very hard for campers to make a transition between always being with their friends and living at home again.”

Jenna, 15, finds it important to give it time and take it slow: “Don't pretend that camp never happened. If you immediately jump right back into your routine at home as if you've never left, it becomes a bit tiring. I find it important to catch up on sleep and tell stories about camp to your family. If you do things like that instead of jumping straight into preparing for school, it helps you feel as if the summer didn't rush past you quite as fast.”

Delilah says: “After being at camp for 7 years I can truly say that the friends I've made at camp are like my family. The bond between my friends and me is something that can never be broken. If you're having a bad day, a camp friend is always there to cheer you up and make you smile. Your camp friends are not the type

of people who judge you and make you feel like you don't belong, which is a nice break from certain people who you might encounter while you are at home. Also, not only are you friends with people of your own age, but you become friends with younger and older kids. That feeling of always having someone by your side is a feeling that all kids should get to experience, and I don't know a better place to do that than at camp."

### **What Parents Can Do (and Not Do)**

As you might guess, there are many elements that play into parent-child interaction, including the personalities of each (such as outgoing vs. shy, aggressive vs. passive) and past communication practices (such as open vs. secretive, formal vs. informal). These factors necessarily affect the tone, pace, and productiveness of dialogue. And while there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to successfully talking with kids about missing camp, these young people have some pretty good advice to offer their parents.

"Something to remember for parents is to allow your child to reconnect with friends, both from home and camp," says Jenna. "I know that it's hard for a parent to go without seeing their child for a long time, but when a kid gets home from camp all that they are thinking of is how much they already miss their friends. If you get to see your schoolmates, it's a nice reminder that you have just as many good friends at home, too. I know one thing that my parents ask of me every year when I get home is to please step away from my cell phone for a little while. However, texting my friends that I've just left is a nice reminder that I'm not saying goodbye forever and that I'll still be able to keep in touch with them."

And Delilah offers: "My parents can also be a great help when I am campsick. They reassure me that I will be back there next summer and that I shouldn't cry because it's over, but smile because it happened."

### **What the Parents Say**

Parents obviously experience their child's sense of post-camp loss differently. Some understand, and some don't. But regardless, their reactions and support can make a big difference in the shelf-life of campsickness.

Laurie, mother to Lily, 16, says: "I believe that kids today experience so much stress during the year that it is almost unbearable. Camp is a magical bubble of time when they can be anyone they wish to be and just 'hang out' with their friends and decompress. At camp, Lily can have messy hair and be wearing a dirty t-shirt and her friends will still love her, laugh at her jokes, and accept her for who she is inside. Camp friendships, as a result of living so closely together for so long, are the ones Lily considers to be real and lasting. When she comes home, one of the most helpful things I do is take long walks with her and encourage her to tell me all the camp stories. By sharing them, Lily can bridge that gap just a bit and bring her stories to life once again. I also make sure her older siblings are with us the week she returns, since extra activity helps distract her from the emptiness she feels after being so actively involved with so many friends for such a long period of time."

And Silvia, the mom of two teenage boys weighs in: "One of the best things about camp is that it gives our children an opportunity to have a life that we as parents know very little about. Camp really allows our children to live in an environment that is all their own, with activities and friends that parents know nothing about. This 'private life' is great while it lasts, but when our children come home with camp sickness, it makes it even harder to try to help, as we don't really know exactly what and who they may be missing. Asking too many questions is, of course, the wrong thing to do. Although I am not a huge fan of social media, we allowed our 8th grade son to go on Facebook, and this helped him keep in touch with those people he is missing."

We hope this information provides you with the answers to some of your questions and worries, but we know we haven't been able to cover everything that you will wonder about. Please don't hesitate to call (360.468.2329) or email us ([campdirector@canoeisland.org](mailto:campdirector@canoeisland.org)) for more information.