

## **The Importance of Being There In Choosing a Sleep Away Camp, Seeing is Believing**

*By Laura M. Miller*

You're thinking of sending your child to sleep away camp next summer. You've heard some of popular camp names floating around and know which camps have the best reputations. So, wouldn't it be all right just to send your child to a camp, sight unseen, based on word of mouth? Maybe. *But are you willing to take that chance?*

The ideal time to start your sleep away camp research is about a year and a half prior to when you plan to send your child. And you're better off starting this process earlier, versus later. First off, you need time to do your research and narrow down your choices. An excellent place to start is a camp referral service. While these services are free to families, they do earn a commission from camps upon enrollments they have recommended. So if a referral service steers you away from a particular camp you like, there may be more than one reason.

Once you have narrowed down your choices to three or four camps, it's time to make your summer camp visit appointments. Although you've studied the camp materials and watched the DVD's, remember that these are *marketing materials*. Any camp can stage an MTV music video to garner excitement. There are only seven or eight weeks in which to do your "hands on" research...to actually see the camps in action. Weekdays are preferable for camp visits to gain a more accurate picture of how the camp typically functions. If you can, bring your prospective camper along, so that he or she can be involved in the decision making process.

"The camp looked great and the price was right," said Janice Roth, a mom from Long Island. "It wasn't until I visited the camp, that I realized it was divided in half by an active road. This was a safety issue and not something we were comfortable with," said Roth. And that is not something a camp would reveal on a brochure.

But more than just the physical layout, visiting a camp will give you an accurate feel as to how things operate. Are the grounds well maintained? Is proper safety equipment being utilized? What do the bunks and the cafeteria look like? Is the staff attentive? *Do the campers look happy?* If your child has a health issue, you might also want to see how far the closest major medical facility is. Maps can be deceiving, as facilities are often very spread out in rural country areas.

Finally, you can get information on a particular camp by checking out the web. CampRatingz.com, a free camp ratings & reviews website, offers specific

opinions from campers and their families. But don't rely 100% on other people's opinions. In the end -- since you are the one sending your child to camp -- you need to do your due diligence by visiting the program. Only you know your families values...*and only you know your child.*

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