

Deep Thinking on Name Tapes

Love them, hate them...but you definitely need them!

By Laura M. Miller

Name tapes. Whether your kids are attending day camp or sleep away camp, these little strips of cloth or nylon ensure that you won't have to buy your child a brand new wardrobe, each and every week. Bathing suits have a mysterious way of disappearing...towels and underwear, too. Although us practical moms try to "think disposable" when it comes to camp clothing, it is frustrating, nonetheless, to start off the season with twelve bathing suits and end the season with three!

You might say, I have been fascinated with name tapes for quite some time. I became aware of these little suckers my first summer at sleep away camp. It seems a pair of my underwear had fallen out onto a sports court on its way back from the camp laundry. Thanks to that wonderful little name tape, it wasn't long before *everyone* at camp knew it was *my* underwear that had been loitering for days on tennis court #3!

Cut to age 16. I had just been hired by an upscale camp outfitter in town. While I had dreams of working the sales floor, I was relegated to the basement, where -- along with three other girls -- I worked sweatshop style over sewing machines affixing an endless parade of name tapes onto camp orders: White thread for the light color clothes, black thread for the darks. So by the time my kids were ready for camp, you might say I had already done some thinking on the subject.

Sew In Tapes

My kids' first summer, I hired my seamstress to sew the name tapes into all their clothing. These labels, no doubt, stay on forever. But my kids, (who are "label sensitive,") couldn't stand the itchiness of these tags -- and this method was definitely pricey. However many camp require sew-in name tapes, so be sure to check with your camp. Several camp outfitters -- both local and online -- will sew in name tapes for free on the items you've purchased.

Laundry Stamper

The next summer I tried a laundry stamper. It is great for last minute labeling, but the ink does fade over many washings, and does not show up on dark colored garments. However, I still keep one around for a quick fix. It is also great for socks. My favorite brand is called the Name Dropper and is available at www.namedropperstamper.com.

Iron-On Name Tapes

The following year I decided to try iron-on name tapes. I was appalled when the first set I ordered turned out to be thin nylon tapes. I promptly reordered the fabric variety. But when it came time for ironing-on, I noticed something interesting. The fabric ones adhered ok, but were definitely detectible (and able to be yanked off) by those label-sensitive kids of mine. The nylon ones, however, adhered fully & completely, and never

seem to fall off...*never!!!* What's more they are smooth and don't cause unnecessary itching. *I am sold on them!* However you need to be careful which company you purchase from. There are many "homegrown" label companies on the web that provide an inferior computer-generated product, printed out on break-apart sheets. I have had poor experiences with these labels and would stick with larger camp outfitters in your area, or purchase online from reputable companies, such as www.Cloz.com or www.Bunkline.com. If you are unsure from whom to order labeling products, ask your camp who they recommend.

Clothing Tattoos

Clothing tattoos are the newest entry to the name label market & I am intrigued by them. They are permanent iron-on transfers that come in fun and funky colors and shapes, for the coolest camp duds around! They adhere completely to clothing and are dryer-safe. This is the direction most clothing manufacturers are going in, (think Hanes® new "labelless" underwear.) The main downside to clothing tattoos is price. They will run you about \$18.50 for a set of 50 tattoos, which is considerably more than the traditional labels, and which is why I have yet to try them. They are available from www.stuckonyou.biz.

All in all, it is good to have a variety of labeling products on hand: Name tapes, laundry stamps and laundry pens for last minute labeling...and those awesome silver Sharpie™ pens for writing on dark surfaces. I have also become a big fan of the permanent identity stickers many companies sell, which are ideal for sticking on expensive sports & electronic equipment.

But remember – often enough -- what goes to camp, *stays* at camp. And the more expensive the item or article of clothing, the greater the likelihood that you will never, ever see it again. Labeled or not, the bottom line is, don't send anything to camp that you absolutely can't live without, come September.

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