

how to choose a summer camp

Follow these suggestions and your youngster will come back healthier, happier, and wiser from the stimulating experience of group living in the out-of-doors.

IT'S NOT TOO EARLY in the year to discuss whether Junior or Betsy should go to Summer camp and, if so, which camp is the right one for him or her.

If your child feels secure at home and has had brief happy experiences away from home visiting relatives or friends; if your child *wants* to go to camp, it's close to certain that a good camp would not only be fun but important educationally.

There are about 13,000 camps in the U.S.—a lot to choose from. In making your selection, there are three main considerations: 1) Is the camp safe, clean, and well-run? 2) Is the camp program suitable for your child? 3) What about costs?

You will want affirmative answers to such questions as: Will my child be physically safe? Are kitchen and food handling clean? Is the food wholesome and appetizing? Is the director well-motivated, skilled, and experienced? Are the counselors old enough, plentiful enough, trained enough? Does the program focus interest on the camper, or is it just custodial "business" for the director? Are sleeping quarters adequate?

You should, if possible, consult with parents of other campers and get acquainted with the camp director in order to size up such matters. Directors of good camps welcome questions from parents.

A dependable, more objective means of determining whether a camp "measures up" is to find out if it is a member of the American Camping Association. Every one of its nearly 3,500 member

camps has had to meet accepted standards of camping which have been defined for years.

Here are some examples of specific standards: A camp must have one counselor for every eight campers age eight and older. All camp brochures and publicity material must be accurate. All motor vehicles must be in safe operating condition. Counselors must be at least 19, with the average considerably older. The camp program should "afford an opportunity for the campers to participate in a creative outdoor group experience in a democratic setting, and should provide for the development of each individual." Program activities should be geared to the ages, abilities, and interests of the campers. There must be a medical exam for staff and campers before camp starts, and a checkup upon arrival by a physician or registered nurse.

You can find out if the camp belongs to ACA by looking for the membership seal on the camp brochure or stationery, or you can check directly with the American Camping Association, Bradford Woods, Martinsville, Ind. The ACA will send you a listing of all accredited camps for 50 cents.

THE SECOND major consideration in selecting a camp is to study programs and find one that's suitable for your child in terms of his age, interests, temperament, skills, fortes, and foibles. The better you know your child, the easier it will be to find the *right* camp.

Decide if you want your child in a competitive camp where teams, points, awards, and striving to be "best" is the philosophy—or in a camp that believes in achievement for its own sake.

While many camps stress athletics, there is a

trend toward the kind of outdoor activity that wouldn't be possible in the city: canoeing, trips into the wilderness, cooking out, exploring nature, noncompetitive swimming, campcraft skills that spell joy and comfort in the out-of-doors. Granted, there are benefits in either the athletic or the more "outdoorsy" programs and camps frequently combine the two. It's a matter of emphasis.

If your child has specific interests, consider the special camps whose programs stress such activities as music, dancing and drama, sailing, wilderness trips, or ranch living. Older teen-agers may prefer one of these camps.

Camp fees range from as much as \$1,000 for an eight-week period down to Boy Scout, Girl Scout, and Camp Fire Girl camps that average around \$20 a week. YMCA, YWCA, and other youth organization camps cost from around \$20 to \$60 a week. Camps sponsored by churches, civic organizations, schools, and municipalities range from pay-what-you-can to \$40 or more a week. Day camps range from almost free to \$50 a week.

In planning your budget, find out what "extras" you'll be paying for. Although many camps are all-inclusive, others set additional charges for such things as riding, laundry, and special trips. Some camps require only basic clothing; others, special equipment your child may not have.

All told, the task of choosing a camp for your child is not so bewildering, provided you know what to look for and how to find it. Your serious consideration is vital to achieving the result—at Summer's end—of a returning camper who is more healthy, more responsible, and more skilled after the constructive fun of group living outdoors.



A good Summer camp is well-kept.



There are no hazards for children.



All time is used constructively.



And counselors are worthy leaders.