

A Resource for Out-of-School Time Learning

The [American Camp Association® \(ACA\)](http://www.AmericanCampAssociation.org) is a national nonprofit association working to preserve, promote, and enhance the camp experience for children and adults. ACA endorses camp as an essential element in a child's total development. It complements the academic skills that are learned in school with experientially based life skills. With up to 300 health, safety, and programming standards, ACA is the only national association that accredits camps. ACA-Accredited® camp programs ensure that children are provided with a diversity of educational and developmentally challenging learning opportunities.

Did You Know?

Camps are out-of-school time learning opportunities

- Children with symptoms of attention deficit disorder (ADD) are better able to concentrate after contact with nature (Taylor, Kua, & Sullivan, 2001).
- Children with views of and contact with nature score higher on tests of concentration and self-discipline. The greener, the better the scores (Wells 2000, Taylor, Kua, & Sullivan, 2002).
- When children play in natural environments, their play is more diverse with imaginative and creative play that fosters language and collaborative skills (Moore & Wong, 1997, Taylor, Wiley, Kua, & Sullivan, 1998, Fjortoft & Sageie, 2000).
- Exposure to natural environments improves children's cognitive development by improving their awareness, reasoning and observational skills (Pyle, 2002).
- Nature helps children develop powers of observation and creativity and instills a sense of peace and being at one with the world (Crain, 2001).
- Economically disadvantaged children scored higher on self-esteem at the end of a camp experience (Readdick & Schaller, 2005).
- Children that attended camp increased their interpersonal skills (i.e., cooperation, trust, and communication) more than noncampers (Reefe, 2006).
- Camp provides children with disabilities with a reprieve from disability isolation that results in gains in self-reliance, independence, and an appreciation of their physical capabilities (Goodwin & Staples, 2005).

ACA Partners With Parents

At ACA's family-dedicated Web site, www.CampParents.org, parents can use the [Find-A-Camp database](http://www.CampParents.org) to search for camps according to a number of variables, including academics. The database also allows families to search by location, special needs, special activities, length of session, and age. Multiple variables can be searched all at one time. To learn more about the camp experience, visit www.CampParents.org, ACA's comprehensive camp resource for families.

Camps and Schools Partnering

During the school year many camps partner with nearby school districts to bring youth to camp and teach environmental education and leadership skills. Ask a camp near you if they run school partnering programs.

Other Parent Resources From ACA

- Parents can receive timely information on the camp experience with ACA's e-Newsletter, [CAMP: A Resource for Families](#).
- [Parent-specific videos](#) are available about strategies for finding the right camp, programs designed for children with special needs, and more.
- Camp programs are among the very best ways for children to learn a lasting appreciation for nature and a lifelong interest in caring for the earth. For a list of ideas for promoting green thinking, including a family nature pledge, green book lists, and family-fun activities, parents can visit www.CampParents.org/nature/.

The Latest ACA-Conducted Research About the Positive Outcomes of the Camp Experience

- Parents perceived a significant positive change in their children who attended camp in the following youth development areas: leadership, positive values and decision making, positive identity, making friends, spirituality, environmental awareness, social comfort, independence, peer relationships, and adventure/exploration (Henderson et al., 2007, Henderson & Bialeschki, 2008).
- Parents (70 percent) reported their children gained self-confidence and self-esteem by going to camp (Henderson et al., 2007).
- Children reported significant growth in positive identity, social skills, physical-thinking skills, and positive values as a result of the camp experience, and these gains were still realized after six months (Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007).
- Campers reported that camps provided them with optimal experiences in supportive relationships with adults and peers, skill-building, and feeling of emotional and physical safety (ACA, 2006a).
- Most camp directors indicated that camp activities and programs were primarily conducted in the outdoors, and over three-fourths said campers spent more than seven hours outdoors in the fresh air each day (ACA).
- Camps that intentionally focused on improving the quality of the camp experience as a developmental opportunity showed consistent patterns of improvements particularly when combined with camper-centered assessment and planning by youth (ACA, 2006b).

Supporting Camp and Education Through Public Policy

- [ACA Public Policy Position Statement on School Calendars](#) (PDF)
- [ACA Position Paper on Year-Round Education](#) (PDF)
- [How Did You Spend Your Summer Vacation? What Public Policies Do \(and Don't Do\)](#)

[to Support Summer Learning Opportunities for All Youth](#) (PDF)

Educational Resources

[ACA Bookstore](#)

Find great learning tools for educators, out-of-school-time professionals, and other child and youth professionals.

[Creating Positive Youth Outcomes and Online Course, \\$29.95](#)

This resource will help you design a simple, effective program evaluation process and determine the youth outcomes that you want to target and improve. An online course complements the book and is available to you and your staff for \$44. You can register at <http://www.acacamps.org/einstitute/>.

[Fundamental Counseling Skills, Getting Kids to Listen, \\$49.95](#)

Fundamental Counseling Skills: Getting Kids to Listen features a DVD chock full of practical, powerful tools for staff working with children, articulated in a clear, straightforward training program. The program introduces start, stop, continue, and moves on to a host of other essential counseling skills, including—how to avoid power struggles; how to make better use of nonverbal communication; and other timely techniques.

[Designing Quality Youth Programs and Online Course, \\$29.95](#)

Designing Quality Youth Programs contains information learned from professionals who wanted to make their programs a better place for their young people. Built on eight steps, including asking for input from the youth and your staff, assessing and brainstorming strategies, choosing an action plan and implementing it, and then sharing and evaluating what has been accomplished. Also included is a CD-ROM with program-ready adaptable worksheets. A companion, online course is available for \$39 member and \$44 nonmember for one more of your camp staff. This course is offered at a great value. Register at <http://www.acacamps.org/einstitute/>.

ACA's e-Institute Courses

[Camp Is for the Camper Online Training Program](#)

The Camp Is for the Camper Online Training, Second Edition gives staff a jumpstart in considering their roles and responsibilities before arriving at camp. The program's four interactive modules address counselor responsibilities as role models, stress reduction while working at camp, and demographics of today's campers and behavior management techniques. The program content draws from the popular booklet, *Camp Is for the Camper*. While the setting is camp, much of the information is appropriate for helping any young staff who work with youth to shift their focus to the children.

[ACA Healthy Camp e-Courses](#)

These courses target prevention strategies that camps can use to reduce the likelihood of participant and staff injuries and illness. Courses are available on topics such as minimizing the

spread of communicable diseases, reducing slips and falls through the use of proper footwear, and safe knife-handling techniques. While taken from day and resident camp settings, much of the information is applicable to many youth settings.

Creating Positive Youth Outcomes

This resource will help you design a simple, effective program evaluation process and determine the youth outcomes that you want to target and improve for your camp or other youth development settings such as afterschool. Exercises, guiding questions, and specific examples will help you think about, identify, and design your program to meet and achieve youth outcomes important for positive youth development.

Designing Quality Youth Programs

If you believe your program offers a quality experience for your participants but also think doing even better is ideal, this new online course, Designing Quality Youth Programs, is for you. This course will take you through an eight-step process focused on a rewarding journey of organizational improvement that recognizes each setting is different, every program is unique, and each improvement requires a targeted set of strategies.

For more information about these courses, visit ACA's e-Institute training site at www.ACAcamps.org/einstitute/.

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