

Camp provides enriching experiences for youth

Relationship building, self-expression, visual learning among key lessons from my time at camp

BY ISABELLA OHLMEYER

Fifteen years ago, I attended camp for the first time with my fifth-grade class during the school year. I remember feeling scared to leave my parents for a week at Camp Loma Mar, but I was also excited for an adventure.

When I think about camp, I envision an over-night camp in the red-woods, sharing a bunk bed with my “bunk buddy” and singing songs about banana slugs.

The five-day camp I attended with my fellow fifth-grade classmates provided those opportunities and more.

We learned how to work together in groups while playing morning games.

I remember playing Red Rover, joining hands with my teammates next to me. As a team, we communicated to each other effectively about game strategy, such as who to send over from the opposing team.

After we called someone from the other team, they attempted to break our long chain of hand-holding kids in which we all squeezed our hands tighter and developed strength so the opponent wouldn't break our chain and we could win. The game also showed strong teamwork.



Isabella Ohlmeyer

During the morning and night hikes, I learned how to appreciate nature and the outdoors, and I bonded with my classmates in a more fun and meaningful level — more so than sitting in a classroom.

I would encourage all students to attend a camp of some kind if they have the chance because:

- It gives you a chance to connect with your peers and the world around you.
- Camp embraces self-expression in each participant.
- It is an effective visual type of educational experience that takes information from books and puts it into reality.

A great thing about camp is that there are all sorts to choose from, with themes such as nature, sports, music, theater and religion.

Josh Cohen, an Amador Valley High alumnus, said attending a Jewish summer camp as a kid impacted him for the better.

“Camp changed my life and made me who I am today and what I want to do in life,” he said.

Cohen attended an overnight Jewish camp every summer for seven years during elementary and middle school.

“The song leaders, who lead everyone in music and prayer with singing and guitar, were so inspiring to me that I wanted to learn how to play guitar — and now I do that for a living,” Cohen added. “Camp teaches you



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Children can connect with nature while at camp, such as zooming in on a rock in the wilderness.

life and social skills and is a place to have fun and be yourself.”

Rita Zwiefel, also an Amador Valley graduate, attended theater camps growing up, which also led her to a job opportunity.

“By attending camp, it started my love

of theater and the arts, and I gained a lot of interpersonal skills and experiences that I wouldn't have gotten otherwise,” Zwiefel said. “It also got me my first job with the city of Pleasanton, working with summer drama camps. So it came full circle for me.” ■

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Find the right fit: 4 important camp qualities

Use this checklist for a summer of fun and adventure

As this time of year approaches, kids start staring at the clock, counting down the minutes until the last day of school. But as a parent, you're likely not wishing this time away so quickly, especially if you haven't finalized any day care or day camp plans.

The sheer number of summer day camp options can leave any parent feeling overwhelmed. And there's more to consider than just sing-alongs and friendship bracelets. The best camps provide your kids with lifelong memories and the skills they need to be successful. With an endless stream of

possibilities, how do you navigate and find the best fit for your child?

Erin Cox, senior manager for Life Time Fitness' Kids Programming, shares four things you need to consider before signing your child up for a summer camp:

A history and well-trained staff

It's important to send your kids to a camp run by an organization you trust. There is something to be said about a camp that's been in operation for several years, and a well-trained staff definitely has something to do with it.

The staff should be background-checked and certified to take care of children on a daily basis. Before you sign up, ask about safety standards and what the camp's protocols are for camper-staff interactions.

A mix of activities

Whether it's a camp with a theme or a general kids' day camp, kids do well when presented with a variety of options when it comes to activities.

From arts and crafts to field trips, sports, swimming and games, find a camp with activities your child will love. Your child will thrive at a camp that offers full days of play, thrilling field trips and healthy activities.

Healthy meals and snacks

Active kids need to be properly fueled during the day, so make sure the camp you choose provides adequate and healthy nutrition and time for breaks. Sugar-filled, processed foods are often the norm, and it's always OK to question the menu.

And don't forget to ask about how the camp handles food allergies. Make sure whichever camp you choose makes nutrition and hydration a priority.

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Just because your kids have the summer

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5 steps to keep kids active

Educating youngsters on physical activity can positively impact their overall health

Nearly one in six of all U.S. children and adolescents are obese, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And with some struggling schools forgoing traditional physical education classes, health experts view youth inactivity as a growing concern.

The regular physical activity encouraged in PE classes, summer camps and other programs not only helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscle, it has also been shown to improve students' academic performance.

"Research shows that school is one of the first places where kids establish health habits," said Jen Ohlson, co-founder of Interactive Health Technologies, a company that works to customize physical activity curricula through the use of heart-rate monitoring.

"As a solution, many health advocates are turning to physical education to positively impact adolescents' overall health," Ohlson said. "With the right tools and resources available in school that can extend to home, teachers and parents alike can reach students on an individual level, helping them achieve their own fitness goals."

Ohlson offers her top five tips for program leaders, teachers, parents and caregivers looking to help their kids get more active:

1. Set measurable short-term goals.

Motivation is all about goal-setting. Teaching your kids or students to evaluate their habits and make changes that will improve their well-being helps them learn the importance of living a healthy lifestyle.

Setting goals can be a fun project that teachers, parents and students can work on collaboratively; just be sure the goals are measurable, timely and realistically achievable.

2. Use technology to help them understand.

"Research shows kids in the U.S. are

spending more than 7.5 hours a day using technology. Alarming as it may sound, we see leveraging technology as an opportunity to help kids get and stay active," Ohlson said.

Ohlson said her company has worked with adidas to develop its first wrist-based heart-rate monitoring device built specifically for physical activity classes.

"We're using wearable technology to motivate students to work out to their own individual potential," she added. "Harnessing the power of heart rate zone training, these young athletes can reach their goals by running around, jumping, dancing, really any activity that raises their heart rate, no longer needing to race against their classmates or shoot a certain number of baskets."

3. Make sure they know the "why" and "how."

For students to excel athletically, they need to understand the "how," "why" and "feel" behind the skill in their activity.

If a child gets involved in a sport simply because their parents pushed them to, they likely won't be motivated to improve or continue playing. It's important to help your kids find activities that boost their self-esteem.

4. Be a model for active behaviors.

Show your kids how important staying active is by setting a good example. Younger children tend to follow the lead of their parents, so make sure you're looking after your own health. Make the physical health of your entire family a priority.

5. Get involved in group activities.

Kids are more likely to be motivated when they receive support from a group of peers. Whether it's a sports or dance team, running club or an active play date, encourage your kids to get out and be active



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Teaching teens to incorporate technology into their exercise routines can help encourage them to remain physically active.

with their friends.

While rising obesity rates and dwindling physical activity programs on and off school campuses continue to be a concern,

the right approach and resources can help teachers and parents take matters into their own hands. ■

—BPT

CAMP QUALITIES

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off doesn't mean your schedule becomes more flexible. Look for camps that offer the option to drop them off early so you can still make it to work on time.

Similarly, many camps offer later pick-up times, often key for working parents.

Some camps offer early drop-off if your kids are signed up for a camp that starts in the morning.

There's no need to worry about finding the right kids' camp when you know what to look for. Use this as a checklist and your child will be on their way to a summer full of fun and adventures. ■

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