



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Hello and welcome to the YMCA/APYC Camp Kekoka Family!

We are so excited to have you join our summer camp and give your camper an experience they will not forget. We know sending your camper away for their first sleepaway or overnight camp experience will probably cause some worry and we would like to give you some tips and steps to ensure you, and your camper are ready for this new adventure!

### **1. Mentally prepare your camper for overnight camp**

Before the big day arrives, discuss the summer camp program with your child. Go over the website together, look at the photos, and try to get familiar with what the routing will consist of.

Some overnight campers have never spent a night away from their parents. This means first-time campers might feel uncomfortable, awkward or just plain scared. Prepare them mentally by sending them away for sleepovers with trusted friends and relatives. The most important part of this is to not pick them up and take them home if they call you in the middle of the night. This would not be a fun adventure if you were to allow this during the summer.

### **2. Do all the practical jobs**

The week before camp starts, have your child get a haircut, and do not forget to check for pesky lice. Nobody likes to spend their first day getting treated for lice. If possible, try to take them to see the Doctor and Dentist before their session as well. If you do not and something happens during camp, you may have to pay for emergency medical treatment, which could end up being very expensive if you do not have in-network insurance,

Lastly, make sure you have an honest and open line of communication with the Camp Directors. Whether your child is taking medication, sleepwalks or occasionally wets the bed; disclose all details before camp begins. There is a space on your registration form to disclose just that. Our counselors will read through all notes before your camper arrives to ensure a smooth transition.

### **3. Let your camper take charge**

In many ways, the overnight experience is about your child pushing boundaries, and becoming more independent. So, let them take charge of the preparations- with your assistance of course. Letting your camper take charge in these few ways, below, will also allow them to visualize what their camp experience will be like.

Shop together for supplies. Have them pick out practical items they should need, and let them take a few fun things as well! We have themes every week and we always encourage our campers to bring theme specific clothes/items.

After you have gotten everything from the packing list, pack everything together. We suggest you leave a checklist with all of the items packed to make sure when they pack up on Friday morning, they do not accidentally leave anything behind. Their counselor will help them with this task.



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#### **4. Have a pep talk**

As a first-time camper staying at an overnight camp, your camper will no doubt feel at least a little bit nervous. This is totally natural and several other newbies at the summer camp will be feeling the same way.

Give them a pep talk before camp begins. Let them know the first few days might be tough, but by pushing past their comfort zone they will grow emotionally and have the adventure of a lifetime.

Try to address any concerns and fears they may have. Keep positive, yet be realistic; otherwise, at the first sight of an issue, they will be calling you to pick them up. We would also encourage you to participate in our Open House, whether you are in-person or virtually. These are opportunities for you and your camper to hear from our Camp Staff team and ask any lingering questions! You can also always call our camp office to ask more specific and private questions.

#### **5. Make exciting goals**

Brainstorm with your first-time camper about what positive and realistic goals they have. Try to list 5 specific goals about what they want to do during summer camp. For instance, go down the zip-line, make a friend or learn a new skill, craft. Your camper will hear this phrase consistently through their week, Stay Awesome, Stay Found. These 4 simple words are our way of reminding our campers to step outside their comfort zone and find something new.

Do not forget to write a letter! We utilize an online program called Bunk1 where you can see photos of your camper and send them virtual letters! Check our Bunk1 in our parent resource page.

#### **6. Give them a taste of home**

Overnight camp is an incredible adventure filled with fun from start to finish, but it does not mean homesickness will not come into the equation now and again. When you are packing together, make sure to add a couple of photos from home.

Additionally, pack them with some stationary. We know a week is not a long time to receive your campers letter in time, so we do not suggest sending them stamps. We take campers' letters each day and scan and email them to you so you can reply by the next day through Bunk1.

We also suggest your camper brings with them a personal journal, so they can have something where they can jot down their feelings at the end of the day. We believe this is a cathartic opportunity for nervous campers, or even high energy campers.

#### **7. Write fun letters**

Whether your camper replies to your letter or not, campers love to receive mail from home. However, when you are writing letters to your camper, be cautious as to what you write.

We know you are more aware of how your camper will react to letters from home, but here are a couple of letter writing tips we have noticed help with homesick campers:



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Do not make them feel guilt; "It is so lonely here without you"  
Avoid adding bad news; "Your goldfish died"  
Avoid amazing news which could make them think home is more awesome than camp; "We got a new pool"

#### **8. Do not spoil their experience**

Do not make promises that will spoil their overall camp experience.

For example, do not promise to pick them up early if they are not having a good time. Even if they struggle with homesickness for a while, the results will be a new found confidence if they stick it out. However, if you give them a 'get out of jail free' card, they will not give camp a chance, not only this summer, but in the future as well.

Research tells us joining a summer camp program can build up resilience in children and are in the perfect location to help children learn how to make good decisions. Our camp also prides itself on instilling our four core values of Caring, Honesty, Respect and Responsibility. During the week your camper can receive, and even better, award our character value beads to fellow campers and even counselors.

#### **9. Overnight camp is not just for kids!**

Yes, this is about parents now! You deserve some 'me time'. Take this perfect opportunity for freedom while you camper(s) are gone. Whether you take a vacation, meet some friends or go out for dinner, enjoy your time to recharge before the parental routine starts up again.

#### **10. Short and sweet goodbyes**

Drop-off day for summer camp is exciting, yet daunting. The seemingly fast process may leave you and your camper feeling anxious.

However, whatever you do, do not engage in a long emotional, and tearful goodbye. It will not do any good for either party. If you do drag it out, your camper might feel sad and even guilty. Keep it together, and give them a farewell that is full of excitement and hope!

We do not allow our parents to go to the campers cabin for this reason. We know parents love helping set up their campers bunk, but rest assured the faster your camper gets involved with their fellow campers and activities, the better it will be overall.

We hope this helps you and your camper feel excited about their new experience with us! If you have any other questions, please reach out to our camp office staff:

Administrative Coordinator, Leslie Walsh at [lwalsh@ymcavp.org](mailto:lwalsh@ymcavp.org)  
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