

Summer Camp – More Than Fun

By Radha Selvester, CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services

“School prepares you for college, camp prepares you for life,” said one camp counselor, quoted on the American Camp Association web site. And how true this is! Education is more than learning reading, writing, and facts. There are many more subtle things children need to learn to become successful on multiple levels. Summer camps are a great way for children to acquire the soft skills necessary for a great life.

Since school is mandatory and camp is not, summer camps work hard to make their programming kid-friendly. Good summer camps may appear to children as fun places to go, but they also mix in lots of opportunities for learning. If they are working on a skit, they are reading. If they are singing a song, they are learning about music. When they play sports, they learn team work. Arts & crafts improve fine motor skills. All of this is truly educational without the stress of grading and testing.

Good summer camps give kids opportunities to engage in positive youth development. This means the children have opportunities to direct or choose activities and strengthen their self-esteem. This happens when children have opportunities to become team captains, patrol leaders, or cabin monitors. It also happens when older campers have opportunities to serve as CIT – counselors in training. Camps are usually divided into groups – by age, gender, or interests – giving children the opportunity to feel a sense of belonging – to the red group, tadpole cabin, yellow pride, or treehouse campsite. In a well-run camp, each member of the group contributes and receives lots of positive feedback for their participation. They learn to do their chores as a team and take pride in their work. Some camps even honor their campers with “Molly Mop & Billy Broom” delivered to the campsite where the campers are the best at keeping their bunks clean and tidy.

Camps also offer the opportunity to do something kids don’t usually get to do at home. There are fencing camps, drama camps, horseback riding camps, boating camps, and more. Even basic day camps try to include swimming, archery, bowling, and skating as field trips. The best place to find out about local camps is the annual March Summer Camp expo – advertised in the [North Florida School Days](#). At the end of this issue you will also find many local camps listed.

For some, their children attend summer camps because parents have to go to work and there is no adult available to care for kids at home. But even for stay-at-home parents, sending children to camp for some portion of the summer can be a wonderful experience. I was fortunate as a youth to experience the following activities during my summers: photography, basket weaving, crafts, tie-dye, horseback riding, canoeing, macramé and knot tying, campfire cooking, sailing, painting, rock-climbing, tennis, hiking, and more. My parents would have never done these things with me and I am so grateful for the experiences which helped me develop a great appreciation of environmental issues and a love of textile arts.

Going to camp gives kids opportunities to recreate themselves, try new foods, make new friends, and try new activities. Good camps encourage resourcefulness, independence, and self-

reliance. Their time away from parents gives them an opportunity to mature and your time away from them may give you an opportunity to – as the mother of two toddlers at the time put it – “finish a thought.”

If some time at camp isn't all your children need to get along well at home, please contact CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services to inquire about free Family Action counseling for youth age 6-17. CDS Interface Youth Shelter also offers a residential program in Gainesville for 10-17 year olds. CDS Interface Shelters in Palatka and Lake City will be holding a pilot program this summer: one week Girls Empowerment Camps in July. If space permits, Alachua County girls may be able to attend. Please contact (352) 244-0628 for more information. www.cdsfl.org