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Learning benefits of summer camp

Further your child's education at kids' camp

Camp staff just about everywhere and adults raised with the camping experience will tell you summer camp isn't only about recreation. More than anything, they say camp teaches individuals about life and how to live it well. It's a unique place to learn.

Find your
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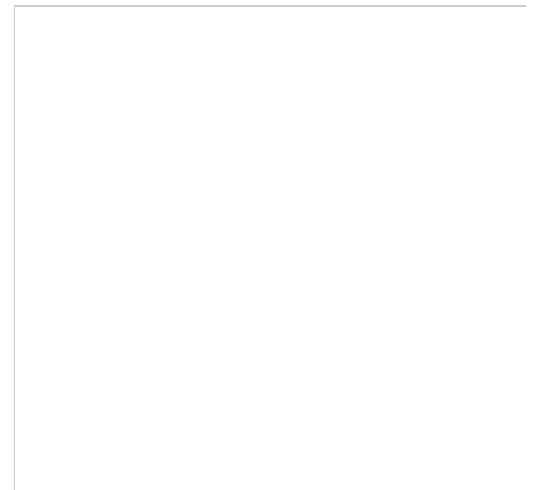
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Perspectives

- Camp director's viewpoint
- Educator's viewpoint
- Researcher's viewpoint

Camp director's viewpoint

Summer camp is a place of active learning (</education-camps.php>) that occurs on many levels, explains academic and camp owner Stephen Fine. His 2005 PhD thesis examined



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residential summer camp (</residential-camps.php>) as a unique learning environment.

"Camps are a special place to learn. Kids who find it difficult to learn in another setting will often succeed at camp," Fine says.

"Camp directors will tell you that kids with attention deficit disorders (</adhd-schools.php>) do very well in a camp setting. This is anecdotal, but the sentiments are quite common."

From his research, Fine found that learning at camp occurs in three areas—personal, social and physical—with strong carryover into school (</school/>)studies.

Personal

"At camp, children learn they have the capability to do things on their own," Fine says. Kids at residential camp are responsible for their own space and know that others depend on them to carry out certain duties. "This type of experience starts to change a child's whole self-concept and their sense of who they are and what they can do."

“Whereas schools applaud good marks, camp acknowledges and rewards a broader range of accomplishments

Whereas schools applaud good marks, camp acknowledges and rewards a broader range of accomplishments, Fine says. "It creates an environment where every child can feel valued for their contribution. Camp is very fulfilling on a personal level."

learning)

Cutting edge academic programs, such as Focus Learning, suggest that, yes,

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Kids need nature: expert (</kids-need-nature.php>)

Personal growth also comes through being separated from parents (</blog/tips-for-overcoming-homesickness-at-camp-19660/>) and the security of home, Fine adds. "It's important for kids to be away from their parents and family. It allows them to understand that they can stand on their own two feet (</leadership-camps.php>)."

Social

"Children meet people at camp they may not come into contact with in their everyday lives. It breaks down barriers that kids often put up between each other. The school cliques don't separate at camp," Fine says.

Campers come together from different parts of the city, the province, the country or even the world to be part of a supportive community. "At camp you work as a team. It builds social capital. Camp teaches you how to be a good citizen (</camp/youth-empowerment-social-justice-camps>). Camp teaches you how to be successful in life."

"Social bonds between campers are often deep and lasting. Long friendships are made at camp. Supportive networks are created that continue throughout life for some," Fine says. "Very long and lasting lessons about how to be a contributing member of a community are made at camp. You can interview people 20 years after they have gone to camp and they will tell you about their experience at camp with great clarity."

Physical

Kids quickly become aware of their physical prowess and their ability to challenge themselves in various ways, Fine says.

"Children become strong very quickly. They are moving all day at camp. They are active from the moment they get out of bed."

Whatever physical activity campers are participating in –swimming ([/swimming-camps.php](#)), horseback riding ([/horse-camps.php](#)), rock climbing ([/rock-climbing-camps.php](#)) or hiking –developing strength and setting and accomplishing physical challenges builds a great deal of confidence, Fine says. "This self-confidence transfers to other areas of a child's life."

Fine, who is also chair of education and research for the Ontario Camping Association and owner of Hollows Camp in Ontario ([/ontario-camps.php](#)), strongly believes campers can transfer what they've learned at camp to many other settings now and later. As he sees it, camp offers boundless chances to learn ([/camp/academic-benefits](#)). "Camps can create many curriculum-related learning opportunities, whether it's earth science ([/science-camps.php](#)), music ([/music-camps.php](#)), theatre ([/drama-acting-camps.php](#)), physics, art ([/arts-camps.php](#)) or math ([/math-camps.php](#))," Fine says. "The camp classroom is effective because it is situated learning. What they are learning becomes real for kids and they never forget it."

Educator's viewpoint

"Camp has been one of the most significant experiences of my children's lives," says Linda Cameron, associate professor in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Summer camp shaped the lives of her now-adult children and she sees its powerful potential to affect, in a positive way, the lives of many children.

"Camp provides opportunities for children to adapt and grow social and emotionally. They can learn in a safe ([/camp/camps-safety.php](#)) and caring environment how to cope with separation and operate successfully without depending on their parents," Cameron says.

Camp was an important microcosm that helped her children learn to be well grounded in the real world. One camp her kids attended included children with special needs ([/special-needs-camps.php](#)). "They learned to live with children who had disabilities ([/disability-camps.php](#)) and to see everyone as contributing members of the community," Cameron says. "They learned life skills. They learned to negotiate, compromise and co-exist within a group. Kids can be self-centred. At camp they are taught to be group-centred."

“As an educator, Cameron says she has become increasingly concerned about over-protected and 'pushed kids.'

As an educator, Cameron says she has become increasingly concerned about over-protected and "pushed kids." ([/camp/kidsickness.php](#)) As she sees it, children are either overly coddled, with few chances to independently or spontaneously explore their world, or their lives are overly structured and they are rushed from one activity to the next. Children need the chance to interact spontaneously with their peers, so that they can develop socially and creatively and learn to problem-solve, she says.

Cameron is also concerned that urban kids are far too detached from the wonders of nature ([/wilderness-trips-camps.php](#)). "Children need nature for their health and the development of their senses. Kids today are not developing their senses and therefore their perception of sights and sounds and smells." Residential camp is one way to alleviate this "nature deficit ([/blog/nature-deficit-disorder/](#))."

At camp, children can discover for themselves the world around them. "Camp can open children's eyes and give them different experiences beyond their day-to-day lives," she says. "It can help them ask new questions and develop wonderful ideas."

Researcher's viewpoint

Summer camp is the perfect antidote to the "bubble-wrapped kid" says Troy Glover, associate professor in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. Michael Ungar, author of *Too Safe for Their Own Good*, coined the phrase bubble-wrapped kid to describe urban children who are overprotected by their parents, to the detriment of them learning to become independent and responsible individuals.

"Summer camp removes the bubble wrap from children," says Glover, who is involved in the first year of a national five-year Canadian study on the benefits of summer camp. Camp provides a safe and nurturing environment, but at the same time it is structured to allow children to challenge and test themselves. This fosters self-confidence and independence, he says.

‘Glover sees camp as an effective teaching environment because learning is enjoyable there.

Glover sees camp as an effective teaching environment because learning is enjoyable there. "When people look at camp, they see fun. But that is not what camp's about. What's really important, and the value of the experience, is what children learn. Sure camp is fun. But why do we dismiss the value of the experience because it's fun?"

Campers learn not only about themselves, but also about relating and interacting successfully with their peers. They become self-reliant and, at the same time, learn to work as part of a team, whether it is sharing cabin clean-up or supporting one another on a high-ropes course. "Summer camp is a self-contained community where you have to work together with others to achieve anything," Glover notes.

He argues that children learn some of life's most important lessons at camp. "Parents spend a lot of time these days trying to enhance their children's academic credentials ([/camp/academic-benefits](#)). Yet, it is good social skills that allow children to grow up to be successful adults."

"Many parents mistakenly don't value the soft skills enough," Glover says. "If you look at developmental psychology, these sorts of soft skills are what make the difference to children in the long term." As part of the camp study, Glover will involve interview parents of current campers as well as past campers who are now adults. "We'll be looking at the short- and the longer-term impact of camp. Adult camp alumni will be interviewed about how camp influenced where they are now."

From a practical standpoint, Glover says camp should also be seen as a health benefit to a society concerned about childhood obesity ([/weight-loss-camps.php](#)). "The best way to encourage activity in children is to send them outdoors. At summer camp, children are almost always outside and in motion."

Glover also favours summer camps for kids who have trouble fitting in with their peers elsewhere. "Kids who don't necessarily excel in some areas have a chance to find something they can do well at camp. Many camps offer a lot of alternative physical and sporting activities ([/sports-camps.php](#)). Camps are also a place where children are celebrated and find the freedom and confidence to be their true selves," Glover says.

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