

# moms like me

March 2010

**SUMMER  
CAMP**  
Get Them Ready  
To Be Away

**HOP!  
SKIP!  
JUMP!**

6 Ways to Get  
Them Moving

**7  
FUN  
FINDS**

Make  
Kids Beg for  
Bath Time

Easy Ideas  
for Extra-Special  
Kid Time





# Camp Jitters Be Gone!

Leave summer camp anxiety behind by helping kids learn what to expect in advance. **BY RACHEL BUCCI**

**L**azy days by the lake, new friends, camp songs and gooey s'mores are all synonymous with camp. But being away from home, either overnight or for most of the day, can make kids (and their parents) anxious.

Fortunately, camp is designed to ensure success—a high ratio of counselors to kids and plenty of activities to keep children busy and engaged (translation: not thinking about parents or home)—and the vast majority of kids adjust quickly and do great at camp, says Mike Cohen, director of Camp Timberlane for Boys in northern Wisconsin.

“Actually, there are few mistakes parents can make in the process of getting kids ready for camp,” Cohen says. “Once they are there, the counselors

do a great job making kids feel comfortable, so they can start making friends and having fun.”

Nevertheless, a little planning and foresight will nip nervousness in the bud and pave the way for a great camp experience for both you and your child.

### *Soothe*

If you've involved your child in choosing a camp, your job is half done. But even if they are excited, they may still be a bit nervous. Acknowledge that, but focus on the positive.

“Let them know they have a severe case of being normal,” Cohen says. “That it’s going to be great, and it’s OK to be nervous.”

Talking it through and painting a clear picture of what camp will be like has helped Kristin Bacon-Brenes of Portland, Ore., mother of Samuel, 7, and Claire, 11. “We do an initial collection of resources and then talk about what they are interested in,” she says. “The more I can explain about the whole scenario—people’s names, what the routine is going to be—the more smoothly the whole thing goes.”

Take advantage of a camp open house if it’s offered. Go through the camp materials and talk about what will be new or different. Look at the itinerary and activities together, and help your child choose what to sign up for.

### *Share*

If you were a camper, dust off the photos and memories, and tell your kids how great camp was when you were a child. This is also a good time to share with them any nervousness you may have had—and how you thrived.

Caryn Fox of Fairfax, Va., mother to 13-year-old twins Conner and Brendan, went to summer camp every year from age 9 on and is still in touch with many camp friends. She says her kids have grown up hearing about her experiences. “Camp was such a big part of my childhood,” she says. “We’ve always talked about camp, and we sing camp songs all the time!”



### *Practice*

Camp will help your child build independence and resilience, but the more you can practice these things in advance, the better. For overnight campers, encourage and arrange practice sleepovers with friends or relatives. Day campers will benefit from a full-day trip to a local park or neighboring city with a friend’s family, says Peg Smith, executive director of the American Camp Association. “The point is to do something beyond school—a different environment. Be positive and enthusiastic, drop them off and pick them up at a set time so they see that they can do it.”

### *Pack*

When it comes to packing, Bacon-Brenes puts her kids in charge. “We talk about how many days they’re going to be gone and make a checklist based on what the camp has given us,” she says. “They pack and then I check to see that they have what they need. It gives them a sense of control and the skills to get ready. They get excited and proud about it.”

Make it extra-special with a new bag or backpack just for camp. And don’t forget to include camp essentials such as pre-stamped envelopes or postcards, favorite books and comforting reminders of home such as a family photo or stuffed animal. And most camp directors agree, for the best camp experience, leave cell phones and electronics at home. ■

## Parental Prep Time

It’s not uncommon for parents to have their own bout of camp nerves. To smooth the road, prepare yourself both mentally and practically.

Thoroughly read all the materials from the camp and ask questions of the director if you have any. “Make sure all of the forms are filled out ahead of time, not at drop-off, otherwise this creates chaos from the beginning. Kids feel this, and it makes them anxious,” says Niki Hayhurst, youth sports director at the Salem Family YMCA in Salem, Ore.

“If you, as a parent, are struggling with the separation, take that anxiety somewhere else; don’t show it to your child,” says Peg Smith, executive director of the American Camp Association. “It’s OK to have that anxiety, but stay positive. Part of our job as parents is to help our children learn to separate—it is an essential developmental stage for young people to travel through. People think of camp as recreation, but think of it as an expanded learning opportunity for parents and kids to grow and learn at the same time.”