

## Choosing the Best Day Camp for your Child

As a parent, you'll soon find your mailbox stuffed with brochures for day camps and summer programs. They all look exciting, but how can you tell which programs are going the extra mile for your child? Here are five questions you can ask day camp directors as you look for the right match for your camper.

### **1. Is the camp Licensed by the State of Colorado?**

Camp programs working with school-aged children are required to be licensed by the State of Colorado Department of Human Services. Childcare licensing mandates that a camp meets specific health and safety standards and works to keep parents well informed. If a camp is not licensed by the State of Colorado, ask why not.

### **2. Is the camp Accredited by the American Camp Association?**

The American Camp Association is the only independent accrediting organization reviewing camps in the country. Accreditation is a voluntary process encompassing over 300 standards that helps camps provide:

- Healthy, developmentally appropriate activities and learning experiences
- Discovery through experiential education
- Caring, competent role models
- Service to the community and the environment
- Opportunities for leadership and personal growth

ACA accreditation reassures families that camps have made the commitment to providing a nurturing environment for their children. To find an ACA Accredited camp in the Front Range, visit [www.acarockymountain.org](http://www.acarockymountain.org) or [campparents.org](http://campparents.org).

### **3. What are the staffing ratios?**

The ratio of staff to campers can tell you how much individual attention your child will receive at camp. Ask the camp director if their ratios include just counseling staff or if they also include support staff who don't work directly with campers during the day. You can also ask what the normal group size is, and how many staff members supervise that group. Finally, find out if these ratios improve during more specialized adventure programming including water activities, rock climbing and biking.

Be aware that some programs have campers assigned to large groups and then "break up" into smaller groups. Inquire about exactly how the groups are split up, and the percentage of time they participate in smaller groups versus the larger group.

### **4. How are camp counselors trained?**

Most quality camps have a 3-5 day training program to give staff the skills they will need to help create a successful experience for your child. Staff members should be trained in more than the technical skills of running a program, they should learn the

camp's philosophy and practice listening to children and managing a group appropriately. Ask the camp director how this is accomplished in staff training.

### **5. How are specialized adventure counselors trained?**

Specialized adventure counselors take the lead in supervising safety, equipment, and instruction for the more technical activities. It is important that these staff have advanced training in their specialty beyond personal hobby experience.

With so many options for summer day camps in Boulder County, you are sure to find the right match for your camper. Brochures, the Internet and personal references are a good place to start your search. Be sure to call camp directors and ask them these five questions. As an informed parent, you will be prepared to select a camp that meets your standards for staff, programs, safety, and facilities and strives to promote the welfare of your camper.

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