

Summer Success: Preparing your child for the best summer ever!

Sending your child to day camp, day care, or residential camp is often the best option when school is out and parents have to work. With no homework to worry about and fewer extracurricular activities, summer should be a breeze for kids, but there can sometimes be factors that may create a difficult experience for your at any summer program. Here are four quick tips that will help your child have a positive experience in a summer program:

1. Summer treats or healthy eats?

Barbeques, family vacations, and picnics are plentiful each summer. Although special foods appear on the picnic table, it is important to make sure your child has the right nutritional balance and hydration for energy needed during the next day or week's activities. Having only ice cream for dinner at the end of a long hot day sounds cool and refreshing, but does it contain the nutrient content your child will need for their next day at camp or the local recreation center? Be sure to provide solid dinners and send your child off with a stomach full on breakfast, even if they stayed up late and do not want to get up for breakfast before their summer program.

2. Have them get their "z's"

Long daylight hours make it hard to get little ones to sleep when exciting summer activities are available. Help your child keep a regular sleep schedule to build up the energy needed to participate cheerfully with their peers and summer staff day in and day out. If you arrive home late from a vacation or family outing, attempt to let your child sleep in if possible and get the sleep that will be needed for the next day's fun.

3. Set up expectations in partnership with the program

Activities and expectations can vary immensely throughout the summer programs that are offered in the Boulder area. Be sure to let your child know what they are getting into each new week if it is not the same routine as the last one.

If your child is attending a program with a friend, let them know that they will also be expected to make new friends. Sometimes new friends are viewed as a threat rather than opportunity among pre-established childhood friends. Help your child to realize that even when they make new friends, older childhood friendship bonds will last far beyond the summer--even if it seems as if the "best friend" they came to camp with now has a new "best friend." Remind your child of their friends who may be attending other programs or are out of town for the summer.

4. Pack the right gear/clothing.

Follow suggested gear lists and make sure to label everything. If the list says to send a rain poncho, be sure to send it. If your child will be hiking, send sturdy shoes that will keep dirt, pine needles, and bugs out.

If you have questions about, or cannot afford an item, discuss it with the program administrator. Many summer programs have spare items left behind from children of summer's past and will be happy to assist you temporarily to help ensure the child is safely set up for the day. It helps directors and administrators to know in advance which children may need additional resources.

Summer should be filled with fun memories and special times spent with family and friends, but the heat and intense conditions of long days outdoors can often create grumpy, over stimulated, and dehydrated children by the day's end. By following these four simple tips, you can help ensure that your child is prepared mentally and physically so that when pick up time comes around, you will be able to enjoy each other's company as the sun sets and the evening cools down.

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