



## ASK YOUR CAMP THESE QUESTIONS

### MYTHS ABOUT THE THE AMERICAN CAMP ASSOCIATION

Following intensive and ongoing research, this foundation places little value in American Camp Association (ACA) membership or accreditation. The ACA is primarily a camp lobby group that calls itself an educational body. The ACA continues to deliver highly biased and misleading information from insiders. Children and families deserve unbiased information about the camp arena as well as substantive education and protections that are not motivated by political or business interests. The ACA has also refused to address the 95,000 reported sex crimes perpetrated by the Boy Scouts of America, many of such cases occurring at camps.

### MYTHS ABOUT OVERSIGHT AND REFERRALS

Every camp should be licensed, inspected and managed by professionals with child development experience. Sadly, most if many camps are not. While referrals are one piece of the decision process, they should never outweigh your own due diligence. Very few people know that U.S. camps are largely unregulated or under-regulated, despite what camps might say. For instance, California day camps are not licensed. They are not required to produce background checks, emergency action plans, medical professionals, certifications in high-risk activities and injury or abuse reporting. Overnight camps also receive very lean oversight. These facts are shocking, but they are facts. Your state regulations will likely afford many exemptions and opaque language.

### YOUR CHILD HAS A VOICE

Parents and caregivers are often eager to send children to camps. But children should have their own say in the matter 1.) as to whether they want to attend camps and 2.) what camp they want to attend. Never dismiss children who are struggling with their camp experiences. They may have very reasonable explanations for doing so. Some of those explanations might even stem from very serious issues. It is imperative to keep lines of communication open and honest at all times. Ultimately, rely on your family, not your camp operators, to determine the best course of action for your child's wellbeing.

**DOES THE CAMP OPERATE WITH A VALID LICENSE FROM THE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH (TO OPERATE AS A CAMP) OR CHILD CARE LICENSING AGENCY (TO OPERATE AS A CHILD CARE FACILITY)?**

Many camps are not required to possess licenses/permits. Those that are often receive insufficient oversight, inspections and scrutiny. Many camps, especially faith-based camps, are exempted from regulations. Ask your county or state officials if your camp is licensed and what the license does to protect your children.

**WAS THE CAMP INSPECTED AT AN ANNOUNCED VISIT BEFORE ITS SEASON BEGAN AND AGAIN AS AN UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION DURING OPERATING SEASON?**

Most camps are inspected to meet building or food codes. They are not inspected for critical health and safety measures, including proper certifications to run high-risk activities, background checks, emergency action plans, proper child care services and medical application.

**ARE THE INSPECTION RESULTS PUBLICLY AVAILABLE?**

They rarely are, largely because inspections are either not required or the inspection results only relate to building or food codes. Consult your county website or your state's regulation agency such as the Department of Public Health or child care regulation agency.

**WHAT IS THE CAMP'S INSURANCE POLICY?**

Despite the fact that many camps serve hundreds of children, their insurance coverage can be as nominal as a million dollars. Should a child suffer a serious injury or incident of abuse, the policy very well may be insufficient, requiring a costly, time-consuming lawsuit. Ask your camp about its coverage and if it's low, ask why they value children's lives in such a way.

**HAS THE CAMP EVER VIOLATED THE LAW?**

Consider doing your own background check as you would if you were hiring a nanny. After all, these are your precious children. Never trust without verifying.

**HAVE YOU EXECUTED A THOROUGH INTERNET SEARCH – SCROLLING THROUGH MULTIPLE SEARCH RESULT PAGES – TO SEE IF THE CAMP IS RESPONSIBLE FOR INJURIES, DEATHS, SEXUAL ASSAULT OR OTHER ABUSES?**

Again, your own due diligence is vital the safety and wellbeing of your children. We agree that children should have recreational and social outlets where they can grow and learn. But, we must not continue to treat camps in a hands-off manner when many very serious preventable incidents happen at camps every year.

**DOES THE CAMP COMPLY WITH MANDATED REPORTER REQUIREMENTS?**

Mandated Reporters are required by law to report cases of suspected abuse with "reasonable cause" to do so. Abuse can include physical, verbal, sexual or neglectful acts. Go here to find out more about Mandated Reporter requirements in your state: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/state/>

**DOES THE CAMP CONDUCT ANNUAL BACKGROUND CHECKS?**

Some states if not counties require background checks for child care operations. Check to see if your state does. However, states do not necessarily require camps to report their background check findings to any agency. ALL camp staff should be required to undergo background checks each year, not just seasonal staff. We know of plenty of instances in which camp operators covered up for bad actors and their horrendous acts. Camps also largely self-report, so they have little impetus to disclose such bad actors or acts. Ask your camp about its policy.

**DOES THE CAMP ACCEPT STAFFERS WITH CRIMINAL HISTORIES?**

Despite background check results, camps can and do still hire convicted criminals. Ask if any staffer, including owners, have been convicted of misdemeanors or felonies and what those crimes entailed. Again, do your own due diligence by running online searches/reports or requesting public records.

## WHAT IS THE CAMP'S SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY?

Many if not most camps publish photos of their campers either publicly or to all of the families that patronize the camp. Err on the side of caution when it comes to allowing photos of your children to enter the public or semi-public sphere. Also, learn the counselors' names and check on their social media activity if public. While it might sound a bit invasive to do so, here are just some of the boundless examples you might find. These counselors and the minor were drinking or drunk or executing/sharing such elicited acts **during camp season**.







### **DOES THE CAMP DIRECTOR-OPERATOR HAVE EXTENSIVE RELATED EXPERIENCE?**

Camp operators do not necessarily have trained understanding in child development or age-appropriate behavioral management. They run recreational businesses for kids and they learn as they go. Having camp experience is good. But do not strictly rely on the age of a camp to make your decision.

### **DOES THE CAMP HAVE A VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM, ESPECIALLY IF IT HAS A POOL?**

Video surveillance is an excellent security measure if managed appropriately. At the very least, ask your camp operator about their security measures. You can also consult the authorities to see if any security breaches have occurred on the property.

### **DOES THE CAMP OFFER AN ACCEPTABLE REFUND POLICY?**

Camps can be quite expensive. They can also implement policies that make it very difficult to reimburse tuition monies, even for worthy reasons. Read the fine print on your contracts. Ask the camp about its tuition policies. And be wary of very stringent reimbursement practices. However, be reasonable about your own expectations.

### **DOES THE CAMP HAVE AN EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN (EAP)?**

This is critical. Incidents happen. And more than you think, especially at camps or in environments that include high-risk activities. An Emergency Action Plan is a preparedness tool that connects risk assessment with appropriate responses. Fires. Earthquakes. Active shooters. Disease outbreaks. Injuries. Deaths. Abuses. Camps must be prepared for such things. Request a copy of the EAP.

### **WHAT KIND OF TRAINING DO COUNSELORS RECEIVE?**

Make no mistake, a camp is a child care operation. And just as we expect traditional child care facilities to afford proper training and credentialing, we should demand the same of camps, especially because they afford even more dynamics and risks. Demand to know about counselor training and monitoring. Also, favor a camp that does “in-service training,” which constitutes ongoing training to keep counselors sharp.

### **ARE CAMP STAFF CERTIFIED IN CPR AND OTHER ACTIVITIES BEFORE BEING HIRED?**

Camps should certify the majority of their staff in CPR and First Aid. If camps run high-risk activities such as riflery, aquatics, climbing walls, zip-lines, equestrian, archery, etc., they can provide you with certification copies that prove staffers are qualified to manage such activities. That said, you should do your best to verify those certifications. And, you should learn more about the certification processes themselves.

### **HOW MUCH INSURANCE COVERAGE DOES THE CAMP CARRY?**

Camps are ordinarily woefully under-insured. Camps with 1,000 campers during a season can sport a policy as nominal as \$1 million. Although these insufficient insurance policies cost camps very little money, they cut into profits. Protecting profit margins all too often outweighs protecting kids. An injury or abuse case can result in damages far beyond insurance coverage, which would necessitate long and costly litigation. It’s up to you to assess the value a camp places on your child’s head compared to the value that the camp affords.

### **DOES THE CAMP MAKE ALL OF THE ABOVE INFORMATION PUBLICLY AVAILABLE?**

Remember, without people, there are no camps. And those people, meaning you, pay considerable sums of hard-earned money to entrust your children to people that you truly do not know well. The least a camp can do to show its commitment to you and your children is to make all of its standards and practices publicly available. Anything less is unacceptable.

### **DOES THE CAMP ALLOW PARENT/GUARDIAN ACCESS TO REVIEW ACTIVITIES DURING OPERATION?**

An open house is a temporary interaction with a camp. And while it serves as a worthy introduction, it does not necessarily afford a 360-degree view of what your child will experience. After all, camps are most certainly going to be on their best behavior as they sell their programming to you. While you should not expect to be able to visit any camp on a regular basis nor should you want to, being afforded the opportunity to see how a camp performs beyond a basic intro is far from unreasonable. It’s a red flag if a camp, especially a day camp, prohibits you from visiting once or twice during a season.

### **WHAT ARE THE CAMPER-TO-COUNSELOR RATIOS?**

Smaller cohorts ordinarily equate to quality attention and better programming effectiveness. A 1:10 counselor to camper ratio is acceptable, but anything beyond that number is cause for concern. The younger the children, the smaller the ratio. Overnight (resident) camps should sport lower counselor-to-camper ratios.

### **WHAT ARE THE CAMP’S DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES?**

Camper ages ordinarily range from 5-15 but can expand to 3-17. Taking into consideration a breadth of camper backgrounds and life experiences, as well as a wide age gap, operators must know how to apply age and incident-appropriate disciplinary actions. Operators must also be clear about such actions for counselors or staffers who breach acceptable behavior or break rules. Camps must activate an atmosphere of respect, not bullying, honesty not deception and collaboration not hyper-competition. Ask for the camp’s disciplinary procedures. Also, chat with your child about your expectations.

**DOES THE CAMP ENCOURAGE, ACCEPT & SUPPORT CULTURAL DIVERSITY, GENDER DIVERSITY, PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY CHALLENGED CHILDREN, ALL OF WHICH REFLECT SOCIETY AS A WHOLE?**

Just like children, camps come in many shapes and sizes. What is it that you want for your child to experience and what is it that your child wants to experience? Make a list of those priorities and see how your camp choice meets those needs. We suggest you consider a camp that embraces diversity to help your child better understand the world in which (s)he lives. Camps should also clearly explain how they accommodate campers with special needs and how they are qualified to do so.

**DO FOOD SERVICE PROVIDERS HAVE PROPER CERTIFICATIONS AND FOOD HANDLING CARDS?**

Most but not all counties inspect camps with food operations. Ask your camp for proof that it passed proper inspections. Also ask the camp how it manages food preparation, storage and distribution. It is a parent-guardian's responsibility to advise a camp about food sensitivities or allergies. But, it is a camp's responsibility to have protocols in place that protect sensitive campers from potential harm.

**DOES THE CAMP EMPLOY A HEALTH PRACTITIONER?**

Kids get sick and injured at camps, more than most people realize. Proximate exposure to others and higher risk environments contribute to these outcomes. It is a red flag if a recreational camp does not employ a qualified health practitioner, especially if a camp says it does not have enough money to do so. This person should be a nurse, doctor, or at the very least, health administrator with enough experience/credentials in care environments to skillfully treat incidents, administer medicine and communicate effectively with other health professionals. Your state might require camps, especially overnight/resident camps, to employ health professionals. Do not send your child to camp without knowing about health protocols. Staffers and counselors should be trained and experienced in CPR and fundamental first aid while also practicing health drills throughout the camp season.

**DOES THE CAMP HEALTH POLICY ADDRESS VACCINATIONS, MEDICATIONS, APPLICATIONS?**

Talk to your doctor about immunizations/vaccinations your child should acquire before attending camp. Campers 12 and older should be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Campers that are not vaccinated must follow proper state and county requirements. Make sure you know the camp's COVID-19 policy. Camps should keep confidential health records for each camper. You should ensure that a qualified camp health administrator fully understands your child's health needs. Finally, the camp should clearly mark and organize medications in a secure facility while charting application for parental records.

**WHAT TRAINING, CERTIFICATIONS AND EQUIPMENT DOES THE CAMP POSSESS IF IT OFFERS HIGH-RISK ACTIVITIES (RIFLERY, AQUATICS, HORSEBACK RIDING, CLIMBING, ZIP LINES, ETC.)?**

Campers die each year from falls, drownings, other preventable incidents. Many of these tragedies occur due to a lack of preparedness or attentiveness. Bows and arrows, guns, tomahawks and other high-risk equipment must be managed by trained staff and stored in secure facilities when not in use. Counselors who manage these activities should be fully qualified to do so, i.e. USA Archery Level 1 Instructor, Level 1 or 2 Challenge Course and Climbing Wall Practitioner Certifications for zip lines and climbing walls, a Range Officer Training Course for gun ranges, etc. Demand that your camp proves its safety measures.

**DOES THE CAMP POOL MEET ALL CURRENT CODE REQUIREMENTS?**

County codes require pools to meet certain standards, such as the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act that prevents drain entrapments. Camps must also observe occupancy requirements. Pools should also be maintained by persons knowledgeable in pH balance, electrical, structural and other mechanicals. You should be able to check camp inspection records to review violations, if any.

**DOES THE CAMP EMPLOY A PROPERLY CERTIFIED, EXPERIENCED AQUATICS DIRECTOR?**

This director should possess, at minimum, two years as a certified lifeguard for pools or waterfronts plus certification in CPR, First Aid and AED and prior experience managing an aquatics operation. You can check Red

Cross certifications here: <https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/digital-certificate>. But be advised that, although hard to believe, certifying agencies like the American Red Cross do not necessarily verify that training and testing were correctly administered. The Aquatics Director should institute weekly “in-service” training drills to keep lifeguards sharp.

### **DOES THE CAMP CERTIFY LIFEGUARDS AT LEGITIMATE ORGANIZATIONS?**

#### **BEWARE OF CAMPS THAT CERTIFY ON-SITE AFTER COUNSELORS ARE HIRED.**

Again, certifying agencies do not necessarily use their own personnel to verify training and testing records. Lifeguard training is challenging, as it should be. Failure to gain certification is hardly uncommon. It is somewhat suspect if camps attempt to certify counselors as lifeguards after they hire them.

### **ARE LIFEGUARDS 18+ WITH MORE THAN ONE FULL SEASON OF EXPERIENCE?**

Simply put, they should be. However, they do not have to be. Current lifeguard requirements allow children as young as 15 to be pool lifeguards and 16 to be waterfront lifeguards. Camp lifeguards should possess experience. If they are first time guards, they should be closely managed by a mentor or the aquatics director.

### **HAVE ALL LIFEGUARDS BEEN RE-TESTED EVERY YEAR BEFORE CAMP COMMENCES?**

Although lifeguard certification ordinarily lasts for two years, camps should re-test guards – before camp commences – to assess if not refresh skills.

### **DOES THE CAMP OFFERS SWIM LESSONS?**

If your camp offers swim lessons, counselors should be certified as Water Safety Instructors. You want instructors to be well-versed in properly, professionally teaching children how to be water-safe

### **DOES THE CAMP FOLLOW PROPER CAMPER-TO-LIFEGUARD RATIOS?**

Most aquatics agencies recommend one lifeguard for every 25 bathers. This foundation believes that is insufficient. We recommend that camps err on the side of extra caution with ratios of 1:15 or better and an aquatics director at the aquatics site as frequently as possible. Drownings happen at camps every year, largely due to insufficient supervision.

### **WHAT IS THE CAMP’S SWIM SKILLS TEST PROGRAM/POLICY?**

You should advise the camp about your child’s swim competency level. If your child does not swim well or at all, strongly consider withholding your child from aquatics activities. Otherwise, your child should wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device and also remain within arm’s length of a lifeguard. Camps should test children who can swim to ascertain their skill level before assigning them access to water. In order to gain such access, the child should be able to nonstop swim a full pool length unassisted, jump into water over one’s head, return to the surface and exit the pool, then tread water for about one minute. Camps should carefully document all testing.

### **ARE U.S. COAST GUARD-APPROVED PORTABLE FLOTATION DEVICES AVAILABLE FOR OPEN WATER?**

If camps do not provide US Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (life vests) for your non-swimming or learning-to-swim child, your child should not be in the water. You can provide your own life vest but at your own risk. There are well-documented drowning cases of camps that failed to provide these life vests. All watercraft activities must require life vests. Ask your camp about its supply and distribution of these vital devices.

### **DOES THE CAMP KEEP ACTIVITIES LOGS?**

Camp counselors should log attendance at pools, climbing, hiking and other high-risk activities, not only to keep track of their cohorts, but also to assess any concerns or wage observations for further management review.

**WHAT ARE THE FIREARMS POLICIES?**

Full Disclosure: This foundation does not support firearms at children's camps, largely because states and counties afford inadequate oversight. Camps with firearms must employ properly credentialed staffers to manage their arms ranges. When not in use, firearms must be stored in locked facilities unavailable to anyone except upper management. Take a long, hard look at allowing non teen children to handle guns. The above social media photo shows a camp counselor drinking beer while holding a rifle from an unlocked firearms case. That same counselor appears in another photo drinking more beer while holding a pistol near his head. Any counselor illustrating such behavior should be immediately fired and potentially reported to authorities for reckless endangerment.

**IF THE CAMP OFFERS ARCHERY, DOES THE ARCHERY RANGE COMPLY WILL ALL LEGAL STANDARDS?**

Similar rules apply to archery where gear should be securely locked away when not in use and properly certified instructors manage the activity. Archery ranges should be set up according to safety standards.