Summer Fun

Day and residential summer camp programs for children with special needs
Summer Planning for Children with Special Needs

Summer vacation often poses a challenge for parents of children with special needs. You can find programs that will provide an engaging and enriching environment for your child, but it's important to start thinking early about what kinds of activities your child would benefit from and what your options are.

Determining your child’s needs

When choosing a summer program, it's important to consider your child’s age, interests, and personality. You'll also want to think about how summer activities can help support your child's year-round learning. Here are some questions that can help you determine what kind of summer program would be good for your child:

• What would your child enjoy? Many children have a particular passion, such as music or animals. If your child has a special interest like this, look for summer programs that would encourage her passion, such as a zoo program or a music camp.

• What skills is he working on? A child who needs help learning to read could benefit from a program that provides specialized reading tutoring. If he’s been focusing on socialization skills, a noncompetitive camp setting with lots of interaction with other children could be a good opportunity to continue learning how to interact with others. If he needs to acquire skills that will help him get a job in the future, maybe an internship would be a good idea. Think about the goals he has been working toward during the school year and how he could continue making progress over the summer. Your child’s Individualized Education program (IEP) can serve as a guide.

• Does your child have difficulty with new or unfamiliar situations? If so, a camp or other program may be challenging. Talk with other parents in your child’s class or your neighborhood to see if your children could attend a program together.

Exploring the options

As you begin to explore the activities and programs in your community, remember that your child’s options aren’t necessarily limited because of her disability. You don’t have to focus your search on programs for children with special needs. The law says most providers have to accept your child. And with the right resources, some extra planning, and good communication with care providers, you can create a positive situation almost anywhere.

The first place you should go to find out about summer programs in your community is your child’s school staff. Your child’s teachers can probably recommend programs and activities that have been accommodating and successful for children with special needs. You may also want to talk to other parents for ideas.

Here are some options that may be available in your community:

• Local park and community-center recreation programs. These are often half-day or all-day programs, sometimes in special areas like sports, art, or music. In many parts of the country, programs like these cost less than other options, but some have residency requirements. These programs tend to have limited hours (often 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.), but some offer extended-day coverage for an extra fee.

• Day camps. Many religious organizations, Boys and Girls Clubs, Y’s, and schools offer day camps. Like recreation programs, they tend to have limited hours, but some offer extended-day coverage.

• Activity programs and workshops. Some organizations like museums and nature societies offer short-term workshops in a variety of areas. Organizations might include language-school programs, theater-sponsored workshops, music-school programs, museum programs, or public library summer-reading programs.

• Expanded after-school programs. Before- and after-school programs that operate during the school year at Y’s, schools, or other community agencies sometimes expand to offer full-day care during the summer, even for children who aren’t enrolled during the school year.

• Overnight camps. Overnight camps may offer stays by the week, month, or all summer. Some camps are oriented toward specific activities, such as sports, nature, or the arts. Some also provide opportunities for overnight adventure trips, like whitewater rafting or backpacking.
Again, keep in mind that it’s against the law for a provider to tell you that your child cannot be admitted to a program because of his disability. Also remember that many options and ideas are available for making a situation work. For example, if your child needs one-on-one assistance at a camp but the camp cannot provide this, your insurance company or state department that oversees the welfare of children with disabilities may be able to pay for an extra teacher, aide, or counselor.

**Taking a closer look**

Once you have found a handful of programs you think might work, it’s time to do some in-depth research. Here are some questions you might ask as you learn more about each program.

- **What is the program philosophy?** Well-run camps have clearly stated goals. Look for programs that will be a good match with your child’s personality and increase her sense of confidence and self-esteem. Consider whether your child will do better in a competitive environment or one that is cooperative.

- **How much training and experience do staff members have?** Will they welcome your child or be intimidated by her? Teenagers earning a summer salary can be wonderfully enthusiastic; in some cases, though, well-trained adults might provide a better experience for your child. Are staff members able to make needed accommodations? Are they willing to work closely with your child’s aide? Can they effectively manage your child’s behavior in a way that makes you feel comfortable?

- **What is the ratio of staff members to kids?** A program with one adult for every two children will be quite different from a program with one adult for every ten. If your child will be attending camp, you should consider the staffing guidelines of the American Camp Association (ACA), which take into consideration the age and special needs of participants. For example, the ACA recommends a ratio of 1:1 for campers with severe mental disabilities. Check the ACA Web site at www.acacamps.org for more information.

- **What kind of medical facilities or professionals are on site?** Find out if a nurse is available and how medications are dispensed. If your child needs medication or may need other medical care, you will want to be sure that the program has good personnel and procedures in place. For example, if your child takes insulin, be sure that there is a designated, safe storage area for the medication. Also make sure that the camp staff is trained to respond to medical emergencies, such as seizures.

- **Are the facilities accessible?** Remember that solutions are available to many accessibility issues, but those solutions will only be successful if the program staff is willing to work with you.

- **How will you communicate with staff members and with your child?** If your child will be attending a day program, find out if you will have opportunities to speak with counselors at drop-off and pick-up time. Will staff members be readily available by phone or e-mail? If your child will be attending an overnight camp, find out how often you will be able to speak with him.

- **What are the sleeping, bathing, and eating arrangements?** If you are considering overnight camp, you will want to be sure that your child will be comfortable and will get the help she needs to be able to fully participate in the program. If your child requires a special diet, make sure the camp can provide it.

- **What do other parents think of the program?** No matter what kind of program you are considering, ask for references, and try to talk to at least three parents to get a good idea of what you and your child can expect.

**Paying for your child’s summer program**

Some programs, especially those designed specifically for children with special needs, can be expensive. But it’s a mistake to avoid looking at these programs just because of the cost. You may have more options than you think.

You may be able to get some or all of the cost for your child’s summer program paid for by your school district. If you can prove that your child will be working on the skills outlined in his IEP at the summer program, the school district may pay for it. Be sure to talk with school or district administrators early in the process if you will be asking for the school district to cover some or all of the cost of your child’s summer program.
Making it work

Choosing a summer program or activity is only the first step toward creating a fun and enriching summer for your child. You'll also need to develop a plan to communicate with the staff at the program or camp and take other steps to ensure your child's experience is a positive one. Here are some tips that can help:

• Get to know the camp or program staff. Visit the camp site and make arrangements to meet as many program staff members as you can. A good relationship with staff members is the best way to ensure your child has a great experience.

• Ask who should be your main point of contact. You'll want to have lots of day-to-day communication with counselors or staff members, but it's also a good idea to develop a relationship with one administrator or program director. This is the person you'll call whenever you have any concerns or questions. Make sure your contact person knows how to reach you at work and at home and encourage her to call you with any information, negative or positive.

• Educate staff about your child. It's important that any staff members who will be interacting with your child understand his condition or disability. If you have brochures about the condition, distribute those. You can also print fact sheets off the Internet or get them from your health care provider. In addition to understanding your child's specific condition, it's important that the staff learn something about your child personally. For example, if your child does best when she is interacting with calm, very patient teachers or counselors, let people at the program know this so that they can match her up with the right staff members.

• Look for ways to support the program. Small gestures, like bringing in popsicles on a hot day or volunteering to run a booth at the summer carnival, will let staff and other families know how much you appreciate their hard work. You may also be able to lend your support through fund-raising activities in your community.

• Thank everyone who worked to make your child's summer a success. Thank counselors, staff, and other children for everything they did to help your child. If a staff member was especially helpful, consider writing a letter of thanks and sending a copy to the program director or governing board.

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Resources

American Camp Association (ACA) www.acacamps.org. The ACA is the national accrediting organization for camps and provides a wealth of information and resources for campers with and without special needs.

Internet Special Education Resources (ISER) www.iser.com. The ISER is a nationwide directory of professionals, organizations, and schools that serve the learning disabilities and special education communities. It helps parents and caregivers find local special education professionals to help with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder assessment, therapy, advocacy, critical teen issues, and other special needs.

Kids Camps.com www.kidscamps.com. This online directory of camps all over the U.S. includes listings of camps for children with special needs.

Written in collaboration with the Parent Training and Information Center at the Federation for Children with Special Needs (www.fcsn.org), a non-profit organization committed to listening to and learning from families and encouraging full participation in community life by all people, especially those with disabilities. © 2006 Ceridian Corporation. All rights reserved.
ASTHMA

The Consortium on Children's Asthma Camps
www.asthmacamps.org

Dragonfly
www.dragonflyforest.org/programs/summer-program

AUTISM

Aspire
www.massgeneral.org/children/aspire/default.aspx

Camp Akeela
www.campakeela.com

Camp Chazak
www.eisnercranelake.urjcamps.org/chazak

Camp Northwood
www.nwood.com/template/home.asp?form_camp_id=6471

Camp Sequoia
www.camp-sequoia.com

Camp Spectacular
www.cloverpatchcamp.org/camp-spectacular

The Summer Camp at Summit Academy
www.summitacademies.com

The Summit Camp
www.summitcamp.com

BEHAVIORAL, EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL CHALLENGES

Camp Chazak
www.eisnercranelake.urjcamps.org/chazak

Camp Maple Leaf
www.mapleleafclinic.com

Camp Starfish
www.campstarfish.org

Camp Sunrise
www.bostonaba.com/campsunrise.html

Camp Wing
www.crossroads4kids.org

Confidence Connection
www.confidenceconnection.org

Daybreak Day Camp
www.cambridgecamping.org/camps_programs

Pine Tree Camp
www.pinetreesociety.org/camp.asp

Ramapo for Children
www.ramapoforchildren.org/about-ramapo

Social Smart Kids Camp
www.socialsmartkids.com

The Summit Camp
www.summitcamp.com

Wediko New Hampshire Summer Program
www.wediko.org

BLIND/VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Carroll Center Summer Programs
www.wediko.org

Computing for College-Carroll Center for the Blind
www.carroll.org

National Camps for the blind
www.blindcamps.org

Perkins Outreach Elementary Summer Program
www.perkins.org

Perkins Outreach Summer Program: A Sampling of the World of Work
www.perkins.org

Perkins Outreach Summer Program: Dealing with the Present While Preparing for the Future
www.perkins.org

Perkins School for the Blind
www.perkins.org

Real World of Work-Carroll Center for the Blind
www.carroll.org/services/youth/on-campus

Space Camp for Interested Visually Impaired Students
www.tsbvi.edu/space

CANCER

American Cancer Society - Camp Rainbow Gold
www.cancer.org/myacs/greatwest/areahighlights/camp-rainbow-gold

Camp Good Days and Special Times
www.campgooddays.org

Camp Rising Sun
www.camprisingsun.com

Camp Ta-Kum-Ta
www.takumta.org/programs/summer-camp-2009

Happiness is Camping
www.happinessiscamping.org/programs
### CHRONICALLY ILL OR DISABLED

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### DEAF/HARD OF HEARING

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<td>Abington Parks and Recreation Department</td>
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Camp Laurel  
www.gsofct.org/pages/CampLaurel.php

Camp Lawrence  
www.mvymca.org

Camp Lawroweld  
www.lawroweld.org

Camp Lewis Perkins  
www.gscwm.org/lewis_perkins.shtml

Camp Lincoln  
www.ymcamcamplincoln.org

Camp Little Notch  
www.friendsofcln.org

Camp Marshall  
www.campmarshall.org

Camp Massapoag  
www.greaterlowellymca.org/id70.html

Camp Massasoit  
www.ymcasouthcoast.org/Locations/Mattapoissett/CampMassasoit/tabid/274/Default.aspx

Camp Maude Eaton  
www.girlscoutseasternmass.org

Camp Mechuwana  
www.mechuwana.org

Camp Merrie-Wood  
www.gsofc.org/pages/CampMerrie-Wood.php

Camp Nokomis  
www.mvymca.org

Camp Onyahsa  
www.onyahsa.org

Camp Otter  
www.mvymca.org

Camp Pattagansett  
www.gsofc.org/pages/CampPattagansett.php

Camp Pennacook  
www.girlscoutseasternmass.org

Camp Pikati  
http://www.westsuburbanymca.org/camps/pikati

Camp Pine Cone  
www.pinetreesociety.org/cpc.asp

Camp Polliwog  
www.westsuburbanymca.org

Camp Putnam  
campputnam.org

Camp Ramapo  
www.ramapoforchildren.org

Camp Rice Moody  
www.girlscoutseasternmass.org

Camp Runels  
www.girlscoutseasternmass.org

Camp S.T.A.R. (Supporting Therapeutic & Accessible Recreation)  
www.northshoreymca.org

Camp Sangamon  
campsangamon.com/index.php

Camp Satucket  
www.oldcolonyymca.org/campsatucket

Camp Star/Angelina Summer Camp  
www.springfieldcityhall.com/Park/237.0.html

Camp Susan Curtis  
www.susancurtisfoundation.org

Camp Thorpe  
www.campthorpe.org

Camp Timber Trails  
www.gsofc.org/participate/camp/timber-trails.php

Camp Timbercrest  
www.gswny.org

Camp Triumph  
www.academynorth.com

Camp Virginia  
www.girlscoutseasternmass.org

Camp Wapanacki  
www.girlscoutsgwm.org/Camp/wapanacki.html

Camp Watchaug  
www.campwatchaug.org/daycamp/traditional.html

Camp Waziyatah  
www.wazi.com

Camp Wee-Kan-Tu  
www.campfarley.com

Camp West Woods  
www.campwestwoods.com

Camp Wind in-the-Pines Girl Scout Camp  
www.girlscoutseasternmass.org
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Summer Camp Hale Reservation
www.halereservation.org

Summer Youth Sailing Program
www.piersparksailing.org

Techgirlz
www.rit.edu/ntid/techgirlz

The Bridge Center Summer Camps
www.thebridgectr.org

The Drama Play Connection
www.dramaplayconnection.com

The Giving Camp
www.thegivingcamp.org

The Guided Tour, Inc.
www.guidedtour.com

The Paul Center for Learning and Recreation
www.thepaulcenter.org

The Summer Camp, Inc.
www.thesummercamp.org

Tiny Tadpoles
www.westsuburbanymca.org

Twin Hills Day Camp
www.girlscoutsgwm.org/general/page/camp-twin-hills

UNH 4H Camps
www.extension.unh.edu

Universal Access Program
www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/massparks/accessibility

Variety Club Camp and Developmental Center
www.varietyphiladelphia.org

West Suburban YMCA
www.ymcainnorton.org

Whispering Pines Day Camp
www.girlscoutsgwm.org/Camp/whisperingpines.html

Windsor Mountain Summer Camp-Deaf Plus
www.windsormountain.org

YWCA
www.ywca.org

HIV/AIDS

Camp Amerikids
www.campamerikids.org

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Camp Akeela
www.campakeela.com

Camp Bar Tovi
www.92y.org/camps/yomi/specialneeds.aspx

Camp Chazak
www.eisnercranelake.urjcamps.org/chazak

Camp Huntington
www.camphuntington.com

Camp Lee Mar
www.leemar.com

Camp Pinecrest
www.bridgewell.org

Camp Tova
www.92y.org/camps/yomi/specialneeds.aspx

Confidence Connection
www.confidenceconnection.org

Confidence is Cool Summer Camp
www.sailtoprevail.org/cc_camp.html

Katy Isaacson Elaine Gordon Lodge
www.ahrcnyc.org/camping/our-camps/katie-isaacson-elaine-gordon-lodge

Neil Klatskin Day Camp
klatskindaycamp.com/index.php/bergen-county-day-camp-programs/special-needs

Sprout, Inc.
www.gosprout.org

The Charles River Center
www.charlesrivercenter.org

Variety Club Camp and Developmental Center
www.varietyphiladelphia.org

Wediko New Hampshire Summer Program
www.wediko.org

LEARNING DISABILITIES

Camp Huntington
www.camphuntington.com

Camp Lee Mar
www.leemar.com

Camp Maple Leaf
www.mapleleafclinic.com

Camp Northwood
www.nwood.com/template/home.asp?form_camp_id=6471

Camp Sequoia
www.camp-sequoia.com
Camp Shriver at Umass
www.csde.umb.edu/shriver.html

Camp Starfish
www.campstarfish.org

Confidence Connection
www.confidenceconnection.org

Eagle Hill Summer Program
www.ehs1.org

Landmark School Summer Program
www.landmarkschool.org

Linden Hill Summer Program
www.lindenhhs.org/summer-program

Ramapo Anchorage Camp
www.ramapoforchildren.org/html/home.htm

Riverview Summer Program
www.riverviewschool.org

SOAR
www.soarnc.org

Summer@Carroll
www.carrollschool.org

The Learning Camp
www.learningcamp.com

The Summit Camp
www.summitcamp.com

Wediko New Hampshire Summer Program
www.wediko.org

LUPUS

Camp Sunshine - Let Kids Be Kids Summer Program
www.lupusny.org

OBESITY

Camp Kingsmont
www.campkingsmont.com

Camp Shane
www.campshane.com

Shane (Trim-Down) Camp
www.campshane.com

PKU, METABOLIC CONDITIONS

PKU Teen Challenge at Children's Hospital
www.newenglandconsortium.org

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

Camp Pembroke
www.camppembroke.org

Camp Ramah in New England - Tikvah Program
www.campramahne.org

Camp Warwick - Camp Sunrise
www.campwarwick.com/CampSunrise.htm

Canonicus Camp
www.canonicus.org

Cathedral Camp
www.cathedralcamp.net

JCC Grossman Camp
www.grossmancamp.org

JCC Maccabi Camp Kingswood-Zohar Program
www.kingswood.org

JCC Springfield Summer Programs
www.springfieldjcc.org/camps/summercamp

Jewish Community Center Camps
www.bostonjcc.org/Camps-and-Vacations.aspx

The JCC Jacob & Rose Grossman Camp
www.grossmancamp.org

Winnekeag
www.campwinnekeag.com

VENTILATOR DEPENDENT

PA Vent Camp
www.paventcamp.com