

April/May 2013 InSite: ONLINE EXTRA

10 Things You Can Do To Prepare Your Child for Camp

Provided by Mr. Ed Covert, executive director at Redwood Glen, Loma Mar, Calif., a Salvation Army camp.

1. Arrange for your child to stay with a grandparent or friend for a night or two. This way, your son or daughter can experience what it is like to sleep somewhere new and different.
2. Make sure your child can manage basic personal hygiene such as brushing teeth, changing clothes and bathing. Bed wetting should not preclude a child from attendance at camp; however, the camp staff needs to be aware of the issue so that appropriate arrangements can be made and to ensure the camper's dignity is protected.
3. During the weeks leading up to camp, take time to share your own camp stories and memories with your child to build excitement and anticipation for camp. If possible, pull out old camp photos or scrapbooks for your kids to look at.
4. Do not schedule a significant family event while your child will be away at camp. No child wants to be abandoned at camp while mom, dad and the rest of the family go on a fun family vacation or have a special celebration.
5. Develop a checklist of items needed for camp (or get one from the camp) and work with your child to get everything together. Call the camp if there are items that you cannot secure for your camper. It is not necessary to buy a lot of new gear; most camps will have extra supplies or resources that will ensure that each camper arrives at his or her cabin with all the essentials to have a successful week at camp.
6. Mark the first day of camp on the family calendar. Together with your child, mark each day off and spend a time talking about what a great experience it will be.
7. Write your child a couple of letters and pack the sealed envelopes in their luggage a day or two before they leave for camp. Tell your son or daughter they can open them while they are away at camp. It's also equally important that you write a letter and send it through the mail. "Mail Call" is always a big event at camp and every child loves to get mail from home.
8. Pack paper, postcards and stamps so that your child can write to you.
9. Encourage your child to have a backyard sleep out by pitching a tent in your backyard. This will give your son or daughter the freedom to navigate through their feelings of anxiety, curiosity, and excitement within the safety and security of their own home. Also, consider going to the library and checking out a kid's book about summer camp and read it together by the light of your flashlight in the tent.
10. When you arrive with your child at camp, make a point of meeting and connecting with the camp staff so your child can see that you are interested in, and trust the people that will be caring for them.