

Five Ways to Help Your Child Prepare for Camp

If you have kids or teenagers in your life, you know firsthand how much their lives were impacted by the complexities and pressures of the last year. Many of us would reflect on those years sans a pandemic and remember how hard and confusing they were. Imagine experiencing those same emotions with a pandemic stacked on top. Sounds pretty hard, right?

For many kids and teens, a bright spot each summer is going to church camp. It's a fun week with friends and often where many personally encounter Jesus for the first time. Unfortunately, many kids and students didn't get this experience last summer, as many camps across the country made the difficult decision to cancel due to the coronavirus. On a long list of disappointing canceled events last year, camp was no exception.

We are looking to this summer with renewed excitement as we prepare to host camp again. Camp is on—it's back!

The reality is that even though camp is ready for the kids, kids may not necessarily be ready for camp. Many families and ministries are looking for guidance to help their kids transition to participate in activities they may not have done in a while. Following a year of social distancing and many kids being at home more than the norm, how do we help prepare kids to get back into the swing of social gatherings? How do we prepare kids of all ages to be away from home for things like overnight church camp?

Here are a few suggestions to help you set your child up for success at camp this summer.

Plan a "Camp Conversation."

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, canceled vacations, and limited interactions, it is likely kids haven't spent an extended period of time away from home or around people other than immediate family. Kids that may have typically run to the departing church van with open arms, leaving mom in the dust of the church parking lot, may have increased anxiety or fear this year about being away from home. They may feel overwhelmed thinking about social interactions after a year of virtual school and limited extracurricular activities. Put some intention behind talking through how your child may feel about being away from home.

Here are a few questions you can ask:

- What are you most looking forward to at camp?
- What makes you nervous about being away from home?
- How can I help you feel prepared to be away from home?
- How do you feel about being around your friends at church for a whole week?
- How do you feel about meeting and interacting with new kids from other churches?

Manage your child's expectations.

In light of many things being different because of COVID-19, camp is no exception. Camp will be fun and memorable and transformational, but it will also look different this summer. Our

Lifeway camps have created a detailed guide to help church leaders and parents know what to expect. You can find the guide by visiting the website of your child's camp and clicking on the "COVID-19 Update" banner. Other camps probably have similar guides. Talk through these changes with your children before they arrive so they aren't surprised and they feel prepared and hopefully excited!

Take baby steps.

If your children have been participating in virtual school for the last year, begin planning time for them to interact face to face with other kids their ages. It could be very overwhelming to go from almost no in-person socializing to traveling and being around large groups of people, especially people they may not know well. A lot of churches have been hosting services and ministry activities virtually, but if you have the opportunity to begin attending church in person, this is a great way to begin getting your child reacclimated to being around others.

Work in partnership with your child's ministry leaders.

It is likely that the student pastor or kids minister taking your child to camp has a lot more information than you do. If you have any questions, ask them! If they don't have the answer, they should know who to ask at the organization hosting your group. It's important that you also inform the group leader of specific things that your child may be overly anxious or fearful about going into the week. This gives the adults present with your child at camp the opportunity to be proactive in alleviating those concerns and identifying anything at camp that could be triggering. Your ministry leaders should also have packing lists to help make sure your child takes everything he/she will need. Maybe send a little extra hand sanitizer this year?! For younger kids, it is often helpful to have their outfits picked out for each day or even labeled by day of the week.

Pray with them. Pray for them.

As you have these conversations about camp, use these moments to pray with your children. If you're talking about their anxiety or fears, don't miss the opportunity to ask the Lord to alleviate those feelings and to provide a sense of peace. Teach them that the Lord can handle anything we bring Him because He is bigger than even the greatest of our fears. When they are at camp, continue to pray for them. Consider creating a visible reminder like lighting a special candle or wearing a special bracelet to help you remember to lift them up in prayer while they are gone. Calendar reminders are also a great way to schedule a moment each day to pray for your child while away at camp.

Casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

1 Peter 5:7 (CSB)



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