

Summer camp has to have one crucial element: fun

by Jane Clifford

OK, parents. As you consider summer camp options for your child this year, Tom Madeyski wants you to keep a couple of things in mind. Madeyski, executive director of the YMCA of San Diego County resident camps, urges you to listen to what your child wants from summer camp. Discussing interests, needs and feelings is crucial to summer camp being a successful experience.

Which leads Madeyski to his second point: Don't make camp a job for your child. If she wants to do math and reading all summer, fine. If it's his choice to sign up for 10 weeks of soccer, with the hope of a future college scholarship, great.

SUMMER CAMP - Summer camp has to have one main ingredient: fun. Here, camp kids get drenched by a water wave. CNS Photo by Kevin German.
Madeyski recalls the words of a teen who was walking along the beach with a camp counselor as they were taking part last summer in surf camp. "He told the counselor, 'This is my vacation from all of my life. I have school, sports, clubs that I'm in. I'm so programmed. But when I come to Camp Surf, it's my vacation from it all.' For children to look at us as an island in a very hectic life is something."

And it illustrates recent research and books on the subject of play.

"I think there will always be a place for the special-interest camps for skill development and academic achievement, and they can make that summer time more enriching," Madeyski said. "If parents are discounting a camp or program because it's funsy stuff, well, we're finding out more and more there's a benefit to that, too."

He has seen it firsthand - during 27 years in camping, the past 17 leading the Y's resident camps, and as father of two daughters who have grown up around camp and love the outdoors. "There's great concern that childhood is moving indoors, in front of a computer screen, in front of television," he says. "A tremendous amount of social growth comes from children playing with children."

That was brought home, he says, at the national camp conference this year when David Elkind, author of the groundbreaking book "The Hurried Child" (Perseus, \$16.50), spoke about his latest book, "The Power of Play" (Da Capo Lifelong Books, \$24).

"Everyone's feeling that it's an increasingly competitive world," Madeyski says, "and at younger and younger ages, kids are saying, 'I need AP courses or fieldwork in my field of interest,' but there's still a need for and benefit from play."

Madeyski suggests parents consider camps that offer children some instruction in something and some time just to sit and contemplate their navels. Both are important, he says, "because they are only children once."

LEARN MORE

Parents who want to find more information on summer camp can research just about any topic by visiting these Web sites.

- American Camp Association - www.acacamps.org - is a nonprofit organization (formerly known as the American Camping Association) of camp professionals that has been around for nearly 100 years.

ACA accredits more than 2,400 camps that voluntarily meet up to 300 standards for health, safety and program quality. The "Parents" area of the site includes "Find a Camp," where you can search through those accredited camps to find the one that's right for your child. You also can access "The Ultimate Camp Planner" for information on everything from what ACA accreditation means to tips on packing for camp, dealing with homesickness and interviewing camp directors about their programs. In addition, there's general parent-child information.

- Western Association of Independent Camps - www.waic.org - represents 50 private children's camps in Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. You can search by state, name, resident or day camp. Each of these camps also is an accredited member of ACA.

- Christian Camp and Conference Association - www.ccca-us.org - offers resources to find Christian camps, conference centers, spiritual retreats and jobs at those facilities.

- KidsCamps - www.kidscamps.com - is a database, in Spanish and English, of more than 10,000 summer camp programs. The site, created in 1995, also links to several other camp-related sites, including www.campjobs.com, a directory of summer camp jobs, and www.campersmall.com for online camp products.

To celebrate its 12th anniversary, the company is offering 12 tuition prizes - six for \$500 each and six for \$250 each - toward 2007 camp fees. To enter, visit the site and click on the "Summer 2007 Camp Tuition Giveaway" link.

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