

Why Summer Camp is More Important Than Ever This Year

After a year of remote learning and limited social contact, summer camp will help prepare children for a ‘return to normalcy’.

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When is the last time your child made a new friend? Tried a new activity? Spoke to an adult they hadn't met before? We have all avoided people we don't know since mid-March of 2020, and we cover our faces with masks so that a simple smile or greeting to a stranger is rare and may even go unnoticed. Many children are going to school remotely and have avoided any interactions outside of their household for the better part of a year. Those who have attended school in-person and those who have continued to attend after-school activities are spending time with coaches and teachers that they know and trust in smaller-than-usual class sizes.

Fortunately, Megan Ranney, M.D., M.P.H, an emergency-medicine physician at Brown University, [told Business Insider](#) that we'll start seeing a light at the end of the tunnel in the spring. This is great news for everyone and especially our children. But how can we ensure our children will be comfortable in social situations they've been missing for a year? Camps will play an integral role in preparing our children to re-enter a society they may not be comfortable with.

5 Reasons Why Camp is Important After a Year of Remote Learning

Camp provides opportunities for kids to interact with new peers.

Opportunities to interact with new people have been non-existent. Camp will be most children's first opportunity to be around new and different people for the first time in 16 months. Many children who would have started nursery, pre-K, or day care in the past year may have been held out for various reasons, including a parent's comfort level, a lack of need for child care, health reasons, or a decrease in a family's budget. Children will be expected to have “normal interactions” with each other when they are back together, and many will not have had the skills or practice to do so.

At camp, each child is placed in a group with a number of children who they may have never met. Staff is trained to play ice breaker games and have conversations that create comfort right from the start. It is important that the child feels welcome and is not overwhelmed. These strategies are typically repeated each time a group attends a new activity with staff they haven't met yet. The children who start camp at the beginning of season observe how the camp staff acts to welcome them and the other new campers. Those campers then model the same behaviors when new campers join the group later in the summer. Campers will carry these skills with them into the new school year or other new social situations.

Camp provides opportunities for children to interact with new adults.

Young children observe and interpret the actions of the adults around them, and we all act and react differently. Children notice when things change or are uncomfortable. They pay close attention to what decisions are made by the adults in their lives—and without appropriate communication, kids devise their own reasons for why these decisions have been made. All of these thoughts and ideas about what is happening in the world can be confusing and make it difficult to return to a “normal” environment that includes unfamiliar places and faces. Children are presented with new adults throughout early childhood and adolescence on a regular basis.



At camp, your child will be greeted with open body language (and an unmasked smile when that is possible again!) by multiple adults throughout the day. At each new activity, an adult speaks to the children using age-appropriate language and the clearly expressed goal of wanting everyone to participate and have fun. Children see new adults as positive role models at camp, which helps them learn to be comfortable with meeting new adults outside of camp when appropriate.

Camp provides kids with teachable moments and the environment to explore them.

Spontaneous or “teachable moments” don’t often arise in quarantine. Besides being surrounded with the same familiar people for 16 months, children have also stuck with familiar activities and entertainment to keep themselves occupied. They are participating in activities that provide a comfortable feeling in a time of uncertainty. They are purposely not put on the spot or made to feel any more uncomfortable than they already are.

When “teachable moments” do arise, adults and activity leaders have more difficulty recognizing them or may not have the skills to facilitate them within the protocols and goals of their activity. At camp, staff are encouraged to change or enhance activities and curriculum based on the curiosity and interests of the campers. The best camp group leaders and counselors make early personal connections with campers and build on those throughout the summer through interactions and creative projects they participate in together.

Camp provides children with unstructured creative play time with familiar and unfamiliar peers.

Within the camp setting children will run around, play, and socialize freely with their cohorts. Many activities at camp are structured and pre-planned. However, each day children will also have free time in playgrounds and creative play areas without any direction at all. At [Shibley Day Camp](#), for example, campers of all ages have free time on the fields and courts, on a variety of playgrounds, and in play areas and multiple sandboxes throughout camp.

