

# Camp Etiquette

By Christine Chen

## Dear Ms. Chen,

My son will be going to a sleepover summer camp for the first time this summer. He is ten and is extremely excited about the thought of being on his own for two whole weeks. I am happy that he is so excited, but want to make sure that he remembers his manners while away from his family. Do you have some suggestions or some camp etiquette do's and don'ts that I can start working on now? It's always nice to get a good report on your child's behavior.

—Grace

## Dear Grace,

It's hard to believe summer camp is just around the corner. Summer camps create so many wonderful memories for children, especially when they have the opportunity to attend a sleepover camp.

I am assuming that your son will be attending a camp in the great outdoors, as these seem to be the most popular sleepover camps for children. If this is the case, it is important for your son to be reminded of some courtesies he should show to others and the respect he should show toward the environment.

The magic words—Please, Thank you, You're welcome, Excuse me—are so important and will certainly be appreciated by the camp counselors and fellow campers. Hint: Your son will probably stand out on this point alone, as these words are certainly not used as often as they should be used.

**Respect the designated quiet time.** You can imagine at the end of the day, the adults are wiped out as well as many children. However, there are always a few who just can't seem to quiet down. Remind your son that he should try to cooperate during these quiet times so that everyone can get the rest they need.

**Respect other campers.** It is important for children to remember that kids will be coming from different locations and from different backgrounds. Teach your son how to introduce himself to others. He would simply say, "Hi, my name is Jake." He should smile and shake hands. This is a wonderful opportunity for your son to make new friends that may last for many years to come.

**Respect the camp counselors and staff.** Counselors are with the children 24/7. They are usually young and full of energy and love children. However, their job can be tiring and sometimes unrewarding. Remind your son to show them the utmost respect, as the counselors are in charge and are his authority for the



next two weeks. The activity leaders, cooks, maintenance staff, and others who help run the camp never grow tired of appreciative campers. It never hurts to remind kids to look for opportunities to help, even when not asked.

**Be a good sport.** Many camps have wonderful activities that can be competitive at times. It's so important for children to learn teamwork and cooperation. Children should never give negative comments and be poor sports during games or other activities.

**Keep a neat and tidy room.** Whether your son is camping in a tent or a cabin, he should remember that he is sharing space. His bed should be made each day; his clothes should be kept neatly folded in his suitcase or duffel bag; dirty clothes should be placed in a laundry bag.

**Leave the bathrooms neat and tidy.** There may be a limited supply of water, so it may be that shorter showers are needed.

**Respect the environment.** Your son should be reminded of the following: throw trash in trash cans, never pick plants or collect wood from trees that are alive, and respect the wildlife.

Now there are some things you can do to help your son enjoy this experience as well. Here are just a few tips for parents to remember:

- Send care packages. This doesn't mean huge boxes that will require a U-Haul when camp is over. A small package with snacks, small games, or some funny gadgets is so much fun for kids to receive, especially if they are feeling a bit homesick. If your son has a few boys in the same cabin or tent, you may even want to include something he can share with each one.
- Write a few letters or send e-mails regularly. Many camps don't allow cell phones or calls from parents, so a few notes from home are always appreciated. However, from my own personal experience, don't count on too many letters in return—they are just having too much fun!
- Don't fuss too much during drop-off, pick-up, or on visiting day. Your son will appreciate your efforts of maintaining self-control as you see him wave good-bye or upon seeing him for the first time in two weeks. Of course, I'm not saying a hug and kiss are not appropriate, but uncontrollable sobbing and embraces that leave him gasping for air might cause some embarrassment.

Going away to camp is really no different than any other day in regards to good manners. It's all about respect. And, if your son remembers these tips, you can be sure when you arrive to pick him up, you will get a good report! ☺