**Prepare Your Child . . . and Yourself for Camp!**

For parents, the most heart-racing, adrenalin pumping moments happen when you let go and watch your child try something on his or her own. The moment the training wheels come off, the first trip down the driveway on the skateboard, the time our children ride the school bus – these are more than just memories, these are critical moments that define growth and change. For many families, the first time they send their child to camp is one of the biggest let go, hold your breath, and watch them soar moments in childhood.

In today’s world of high-tech kids and families who have a constant connection to each other, it’s essential to take the time to emotionally prepare for camp. It is, of course, important to prepare the first-time camper, but families need to make sure that Mom, Dad, younger siblings at home – virtually everyone – is ready to adjust to camp life. The American Camp Association® (ACA) provides the following tips to help ease first-time families into the camp experience:

* **Parents** – As parents, it is important to focus on the positive aspects of camp. Remember that separation is natural, necessary, and inevitable – what better place to have that first experience than in a caring and nurturing environment designed specifically for children? Parents can also focus on the amazing benefits of camp – an experiential education like no other teaching valuable 21st century survival skills like leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication.
* **Siblings** - [Bob Ditter, family therapist](http://www.campparents.org/aca/expertadvice) and one of the nation's leading experts on camp, cautions it is likely that the child left at home will experience separation anxiety and truly miss his or her sibling. To help them prepare, be sure to talk about the upcoming separation. Before the eldest child leaves for camp take a picture of your children together that the sibling can keep in their room or carry around. Remind your children about the communication they can have with each other through letters and postcards.
* **Other family members** – Be sure that everyone is aware of the upcoming experience. Let family members know how to contact camper if they are interested through letters and care packages — make sure they are aware of any communication policies the camp may have, i.e. no phone calls or restrictions on what can be sent in a care package. In addition, an increasing number of camps are using Web sites to display photos or video during the camp session. According to ACA’s 2011 Emerging Issues Survey, 75 percent of responding camps indicate that they post photos or videos to a Web site for families to view. Forty-five percent indicate that they post information, photos, and videos to social media outlets like Facebook. Families should be sure to ask camp directors about these options.

Camp is an equal opportunity life-changer. By sending a child to camp, families are truly giving a gift that lasts a lifetime. By taking steps to mentally prepare for camp, families not only keep from getting “kid-sick” for their camper, but they can stay positive about the camp experience – which goes a long way toward helping first-time campers adjust to life at camp. And just like taking off the training wheels, the moment families see their camper radiating confidence and joy they will feel that burst of pride and gratitude that they allowed their child this experience.

For more information about preparing for the summer camp experience, or to [*Find A Camp*](http://find.acacamps.org/finding_a_camp.php), parents can visit [www.ACAcamps.org](http://www.ACAcamps.org). This online resource for families includes [expert advice](http://www.campparents.org/expertadvice.php), information on health and safety, and ACA’s searchable database of over 2,400 ACA-Accredited® camps.

Contact Public Relations at 765.346.3391 or pr@ACAcamps.org to interview an [ACA spokesperson](http://www.acacamps.org/media_center/about_aca/facts.php#bios) for more information about the essential camp experience. For customizable [public service announcements](http://www.acacamps.org/media_center/vnr/) or [article reprints](http://www.acacamps.org/media_center/press/reprint.php), visit our [Media Center](http://www.acacamps.org/media_center/) at [www.ACAcamps.org/press-room/](http://www.acacamps.org/press-room).