

## Summer Camp – A Child/Parent Experience

by Hanna Fogel, MA, MBA

“How do I let Andrew go to camp this summer and not worry all the time?” asks Linda. Shelley confesses she has been beside herself and doesn’t know how to control it since talk about camp started. As a parent and a family therapist, I have given great thought as to what evokes those emotions. I explored the concept of camp, its history, its current challenges and parents’ common reaction to sending a child to camp for the first time or to a new camp. At the end, I came up with some suggestions for parents (and kids) to help them cope. Hopefully, you will find them helpful as other parents have.

According to the *basic definition*, “summer camp is any combined recreational and educational facility designed to acquaint urban children with outdoor life.” The *earliest camps* were started in the United States with the first YMCA camp in New York set up in 1885. *What is camp for a child?* Camp is a growing experience. It is a learning experience, an opportunity to explore a world bigger than their immediate family, neighborhood or school. They acquire a stronger sense of self through developing autonomy; they make new friends, and develop social skills not necessarily acquired at home, including functioning in a team and leadership environment.

*Trends in camps today* are responding to the world’s changing realities. Our world is more inter-generational, more multicultural, more risk-taking, and demanding greater customization utilizing ever-growing technological solutions to every day challenges. Constant changes and uncertainties affect our sense of security and our children’s. Over the years I have had parents share *two major areas of concern* they encounter once their child’s first summer experience is introduced: Their children’s safety, and their children’s emotional peace.

A basic rule I always recommend parents follow is: *Communicate with your child*. Share any concerns you or they may have. Parents can expect camps to demonstrate their commitment to providing safe and nurturing environment for children.

The emotional coping with the separation is shared by parents and children alike. My advice to parents is, be *truthful about your anxiety* to *instill trust* and confidence in your child. Our children are a reflection of ourselves. It is therefore the sense of trust that we project onto them that will reflect back. Interviews with parents and children have revealed that separation anxiety, commonly known as children’s emotional reaction to saying good-bye, is more of a ‘parent stress issue’ than a child’s. The easier parents let go of their children, the smoother the child’s adjustment will be, and the more rewarding the experience. Be inclusive, yet allow separation. And, use your parental instincts – most of the times those would work best.

**References:** *Encyclopedia Britanica, Washington Families Magazine, The Summer Camp Handbook* by Christopher Thurber, Live Parent/Child Interviews

**Author:**

Hanna Fogel, MA, MBA

Individual, Couples & Family Therapist

Brookline, MA

Tel.617.901.7300

Email:hafogel@yahoo.com Web: <http://home.comcast.net/~hannafogel>