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# THE TOP 14 QUESTIONS TO ASK CAMPS

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IN YOUR SEARCH FOR THE BEST CAMP**



True North Sports Camp - Tim Fraser

# THE TOP 14 QUESTIONS TO ASK CAMPS

BY CATHERINE ROSS

No question is foolish or too direct when you are dealing with the well-being and safety of your child. Where distance and time permit, some camp directors are even willing to visit potential campers in their own homes.

Here are the top 14 questions to ask camp directors.

**1** Is your camp accredited by a recognized camping association? If not, why not?

## 2 What are your qualifications and experience?

Even experienced camp professionals have a hard time agreeing on the necessary qualifications for a good camp director. Camp directors have backgrounds in many disciplines: law, medicine, nursing, recreation, education and business, to name a few. Most directors exhibit common qualities: a respect for children and young people, an appreciation of the outdoors, experience in organization, management and leading, and an ability to perform under pressure. They attend conferences on camping or in related fields to further their professional development.

Camp directors set the tone. Everything that happens on the camp property is their responsibility. Their prime concern is the safety, health and happiness of the campers. Before delegating this responsibility, they must hire mature, experienced, skilled and competent individuals and then train them fully in all aspects of safety and risk management. Throughout the season, they support, supervise and evaluate staff to ensure the well-being of every individual on the camp property.



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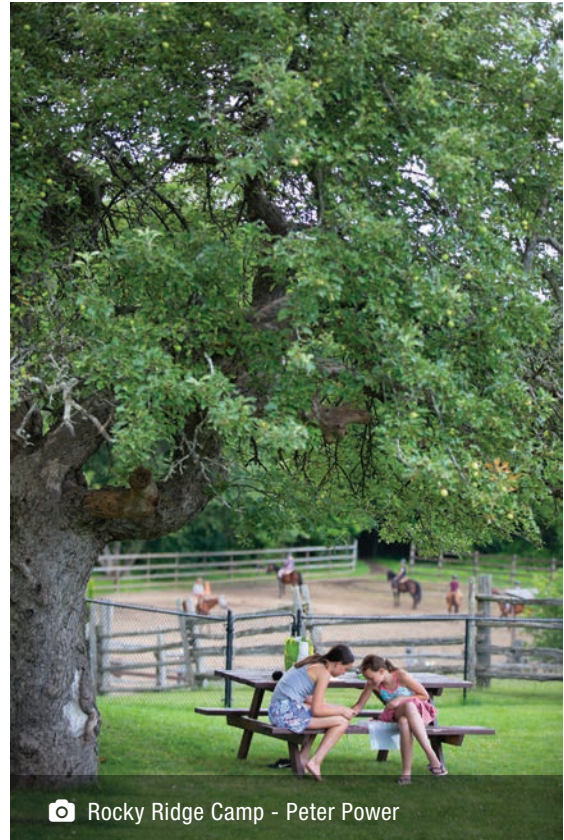
### **3** What is your camp's mission statement? What can my child expect to gain from an experience at your camp?

Each camp is unique. Some focus on individual skill improvement and competition; others concentrate on team sports and co-operation, and some combine both. Some are highly structured while others offer more choices. Some are religiously affiliated and include daily religious programming while most are secular or non-religious. It is important to match your child's needs with the culture of the camp.

### **4** What written policies are practised at camp to ensure camper safety?

In pre-camp training, staff learn the written safety guidelines for every activity and program and practise the emergency procedures for fire, waterfront emergency, severe weather or a missing camper. The counsellors are then responsible for teaching and implementing the safety procedures with their campers.

**[Read more about camp safety here.](#)**



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## **5 Who is responsible for my child at all times?**

The person with the most immediate responsibility will be your child's counsellor. You will want to know the age, experience and qualifications of the counsellors. The minimum age for resident camp counsellors is usually 17. Directors devote considerable time to building the best possible team, beginning with former employees returning to a previously held position or taking on the challenge of a new role with additional responsibility.

After reading many applications and résumés and shortlisting the candidates, they interview applicants individually or in groups, but if this is not possible, a phone or Internet interview is considered. If geography is an issue, the director may ask a trusted, former employee to meet a new applicant. Following successful interviews, reference and police checks are done.

Directors hire the most qualified, mature, experienced and skilled staff available, then further train them for their specific jobs. Waterfront counsellors/instructors will have lifeguarding, first aid and lifesaving certification. Boat drivers require a Pleasure Craft Operator Card. Activity instructors will have training and/or certification in their specialty area. Staff training often occurs in the off-season at camping conferences and continues in pre-camp preparations. By asking about the rate of return of former staff, a parent can gauge the staff's stability and commitment.

**[Learn five steps to finding the best camp for your child.](#)**



The staff-to-camper ratio dictates the level of supervision. In determining an appropriate ratio, the age of the campers is key. Suggested suitable ratios are:

- Ages five and under - one staff to six campers
- Ages six and seven - one staff to eight campers
- Ages eight to 16 - one staff for 10 campers.

## **6 Who looks after my child if they get injured or sick?**

Health care is available on the campsite 24 hours a day. The Health Centre is staffed by a doctor, a registered nurse, a registered practical nurse and/or certified first aiders. The needs of the campers and staff and the distance to and support available at the local health clinic or hospital, determine the qualifications of the health-care staff. Arrangements for emergency care are made in advance of the season with the nearest hospital.

The camp's health centre is adequately equipped to handle the anticipated first aid and health needs of the campers. It provides suitable space to isolate sick or injured campers and a quiet place for resting or overnight accommodation. There is a locked cupboard for medication and a refrigerator for ice packs or medicines like insulin that must be kept cold.

## **7 When will my child not be supervised by an adult?**

Children often get into trouble when they are bored. If there are large chunks of time when campers will be unsupervised (and, therefore, not being engaged), problems can arise. Specific times to ask about: in the evening when campers have gone to bed, travelling between programs, and rest hour.

## **8** What will you do if my child misbehaves?

Discipline is a deeply personal choice and parents really need to be comfortable with the methods that the camp uses. Short time-outs and a discussion with a counsellor are good first steps for camp discipline. A camp that has a head counsellor or section head who specializes in dealing with child behaviour is a camp that will take good care of your son or daughter.

## **9** How are the day's activities scheduled?

Often, an overnight camp's promotional material includes the schedule for a typical day, while day camps are likely to have a set daily schedule. In some overnight camps, cabin groups choose their activities with their counsellor and spend the day together rotating through their choices. In others, groups are together for meals, evening programs, and bedtime, but throughout the day, individuals choose their own activities. Some activities, such as swimming, may be compulsory.

Ideally, your child will exercise some programming choices suitable to their age and experience. Sometimes sharing activity choices is part of the registration process. Most schedules permit a little free time, though camps vary in this.

## **10** What do you do on the first day to make my child feel like they have an important place at camp?

Those first moments are crucial to a child's enjoyment of camp. A great counsellor will begin immediately to play games with the



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children; this will help them learn the names of the kids in the cabin and begin making them all feel comfortable. An excellent counsellor will know which campers requested to be in a group together and will work to ensure that they mix well with the other children.

## **11** How does your camp deal with bullying?

Bullying is a common concern for parents. A camp director should be able to answer this question in a way that demonstrates that they have already considered the problem and have solutions in place. A camp that takes this issue seriously will have a solid teaching component on prevention, recognizing the signs and how to deal with the outcomes of bullying.

**[Read more about bullying and cyberbullying.](#)**

## **12** Does the camp provide transportation?

If it does, it is advisable to use this service. En route, your child will get to know some of the campers and staff. The trip will be carefully programmed and supervised to welcome and include new campers. If your child is prone to motion sickness, administer the medication before starting the journey and advise the supervising staff.

## **13** Can you provide the contact numbers of a few camp parents?

Current or former campers and parents are a camp's best advertising. After seeking their permission, directors are pleased to provide this information to give prospective parents another perspective on the camp operation. Your child will have his own questions. They are likely to be simple questions that cover the basic needs: *Where, when and what do I eat? Where do I sleep? Where do I go to the bathroom? Will there be other new campers? What will my counsellor be like?*

## **14** Why does your camp not allow my child to keep his or her cellphone?

Most camps do not allow campers to have their cellphones with them at all times. A good camp director will be able to explain the policy to your satisfaction. Camp experiences are most successful when their campers are occupied with the camp activities and



not concerned with their latest text message or calling their friends from home. Most camps have a policy that will allow parents to call and speak to a staff member to see how their child is doing. A camper who is missing home will often have greater difficulty adjusting to camp if they speak to their parents.

**[Read more tips in the \*Our Kids Preparing for Camp\* e-book.](#)**

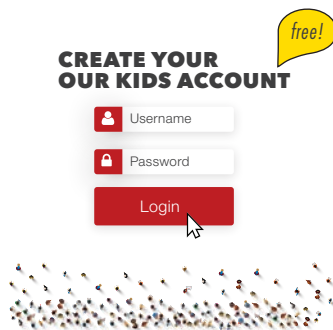


📷 Bond Academy Day Camp - Tim Fraser



📷 Crescent Camps & Summer Programs - Tim Fraser

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