



Counselors and Campers: Together at Home and at Camp?

For any parent, it is difficult to let a child go away for camp for a week. There are many concerns we are faced with and many questions that responsible, loving parents must answer. The Camp Directors of CHAMP Camp are parents themselves, so we know what it's like to worry. Those anxieties are intensified even more when a camper has medical necessities that require sophisticated round the clock care. Therefore, many parents feel relieved if a caregiver that they know and trust comes along to camp with their child. We understand why that is comforting and reassuring to the family and the camper. Some campers, particularly first-timers, like to have a "buddy" from home to help ease the fears of the unknown and unfamiliar.

As you parents know, CHAMP Camp is a camp where children come without family members. There are, however, several other camps in the U.S. that are "family camps," if that is your preference. Actually, many campers who come to CHAMP Camp have also participated in one of the family camps in previous years. Our mission is different in that we allow campers to experience adventure, social activities, and routine care without family, so that kids can build self-esteem and independence, which are important qualities to acquire in the whole business of growing up. We empower children to communicate their needs to others, take appropriate responsibility for themselves, and learn to rely and trust on others. Our counseling staff is absolutely outstanding... we would challenge you to find another camp where the ratio of counselors is 2.5 for every one camper... and where the counseling staff is comprised almost exclusively of credentialed and licensed medical professionals who work with pediatric patients with trachs and vents on a regular basis.

Nevertheless... here's the lowdown. We do not encourage nor discourage counselors from home, but we've learned from experience that honest observations might be helpful.

1. We want counselors from home to feel as though they are part of the "team" caring for kids. This is accomplished by the counselor being an active participant in orientation and training the day before the campers arrive. Some counselors travel with their kiddos... and although this makes sense, when they arrive a day later than the others, they do not feel as though they part of the group effort. When the counselors miss orientation, we do the best "catch up" we can, but it's just not the same.
2. Our staff rotates their responsibilities... we share the load, so to speak. No one counselor can expect to provide care and encouragement for any one camper every day, all day. But some counselors from home feel they must take care of their camper exclusively. By the end of the week, they are totally exhausted, and the camper really hasn't learned to enjoy others. Similarly, when we offer to give the home counselor a "break," they may welcome it... but they don't necessarily feel that they should jump in and give anyone else a hand if it's not "their" camper.

3. Campers like the familiar, the safe, the secure. We all do. But oftentimes it is hard to break away from that and make new friends at camp if a camper stays with his/her counselor all the time. At CHAMP Camp, we encourage kids to expand their horizons, try something new, succeed at a new endeavor, safely reach a new goal, and on and on. That's not as easy to do if the apron strings are loosened a bit.
4. Many kids, particularly those who are the older campers, really desire a time away from home when they feel freedom from mom, dad, or someone who knows mom or dad, watching their every move. We should applaud this. It's normal.
5. Some counselors who come "with" kids have had successful experiences by not actually being in their cabin providing the care, but just being at camp, and being a resource or pal at certain times each day. Some counselors actually feel the experience is better for them and the campers if they keep their distance and get to know others.
6. Lastly, some of our best counselors have come with a kiddo from home... but they are strong individuals who really give their campers opportunity to reach their fullest potential. So they step away a bit. And they are professionals who love the camp experience for themselves, too... and they thrive on getting to know and care for other campers are working closely with other counseling colleagues.

We want to make the best possible decision for you as parents and ultimately for your camper. It is extremely hard, if not impossible, to feel complete and total faith in a camp staff that you don't know, and that we understand. We are happy to talk with you at any time regarding your concerns, and we would be delighted for you to talk with other parents who have experienced CHAMP Camp, with counselor support from home and those without a caregiver from home. Either way, more than 90% of campers return each year... and that's a fact that we're very humble and proud to share!