



Sex Wise Parenting Tips from Dr. Janet Rosenzweig

Choosing a Safe Summer Program for your Children

The school year is about to end -- now what's up for the kids? Summer camps are fun and educational, but parents need to make sure the program is run in a way that keeps your child safe.

These tips can help ensure a child's physical and emotional comfort and safety.

- If the children will be picked up by a bus or van, will there be someone other than the driver to provide supervision? Excited kids can get unruly and distract a driver; an older child assigned to lead songs and keep order may be enough if a staff member is not available. If parents drop off the children, does the child pass from the parents' supervision directly to a staff member? Is there a safe path to travel when the child leaves the car?
- Camp administrators should check the background and references for all people who have access to children. This includes maintenance and food services staff as well as the counselors, teachers or volunteers working directly with the kids. It is common for summer camps to employ students; these young folks should participate in pre-service training to learn the rules, values and standards of the camp, and be assigned a supervisor.
- If the camp day includes swimming, has the staff been prepared to deal with children who get embarrassed changing clothes in front of others? If there is a focus on sports, are all children encouraged to participate? Is competition kept to a healthy level? Parents may also want to know if there is a policy about discipline that is consistent with their values.
- Parents should find out if children are supervised as they move about, for example if a child needs to use a rest room (including reasonable time limits). Tight supervision is a must for field trips; whether walking to a neighborhood park or traveling to a local tourist destination, counselors should assign buddies and perform constant head counts.
- Parents should always be able to observe the camp day. The camp should require parents to sign in, and parents should be respectful and not interfere with camp activities.
- The camp should maintain a list of people allowed to pick up the child. Parents need to provide the list when the summer session begins, and honor the process by not calling with last minute changes that the camp can't verify.

A parent could find answers to these questions by interviewing the camp director, visiting the camp or talking to parents who have sent their children in prior years.

Throughout the summer, parents should make it a point to ask their child questions on these topics and be sure that the child feels safe and comfortable. Summer should be a time of relaxed fun for children and parents will be able to relax themselves when they know they have chosen a safe summer program for their children.

Dr. Janet Rosenzweig is the author of The Sex-Wise Parent and The Parent's Guide to Talking About Sex: A Complete Guide to Raising (Sexually) Safe, Smart, and Healthy Children and the Vice President, Research and Programs for Prevent Child Abuse America and For more information, read her blog, follow @JanetRosenzweig on Twitter or contact DrRosenzweig@sexwiseparent.com to schedule a program for your school or community group.