



Summer Planning... For your child with Special Needs

If you have additional questions about summer planning for your child with Special Needs, Contact your KidsAbility Therapeutic Recreationist:

Waterloo: Meg at (519) 886-8886 x302
mshirley@kidsability.ca

Cambridge: Sheryl at (519) 621-7580 x260
sdedman@kidsability.ca

Summer Camp Planning

Summer Planning... For your child with Special Needs



This booklet contains...

- *Tips for finding the right camp for your child*
- *Information about supports for your child*
- *Frequently asked questions*

Therapeutic
Recreation
Services





Organizing for Success

Camp is a place for children to try new things, learn new skills, develop friendships, and have a lot of FUN.

Organizing a successful camp experience for your child with special needs requires a little extra planning and preparation, but camp can be a fun and rich learning environment, so it's worth the effort. This booklet will provide information on finding a camp that is a good fit for your child, and the supports that are available to help make it a successful week.

Tip #1: Start planning early!



Start exploring your options in February, so you have lots of time to talk to the camps about their programs and your child's individual needs. Options for one-to-one support for your child or financial assistance may be limited, so it is best to make arrangements for this as early as possible.



Tip #2: Choose a camp that is a good fit for your child

Theme: Does your child have a specific hobby or interest? Camps range from very general (games, crafts, swimming, etc.) to quite specific (dance, art, nature, computers...)

Routine: Is there unstructured time at camp that would be a challenge for your child? Is there a predictable routine? Can the camp provide you with daily schedules to help your child prepare for the day?

Questions to ask when Choosing A Camp

- I'm looking for a... Residential Camp Day Camp Full Day Half Day
- I'm looking for a... Specialized Camp Integrated Camp
- I'm looking for a ... General Camp Speciality Camp



What are your program's ratios?		Can I arrange a time to see the camp site?
How many children do you allow in each session?		What supports does your program offer?
What is the average age of your staff?		Do you offer funding?
Is your site accessible?		What qualities do you look for in your staff?
Do you have an inclusion policy?		Where do you recruit your staff from?
Do you have a camper code of conduct?		What do you include in your staff training?
Is your program accredited by any organization?		What training do your support staff receive?
Are all your staff CPR and First Aid trained?		Do you have guidelines for private workers?
Are leaders-in-training counted in your ratio?		Do I receive a discount with a private worker?
How much time do you spend outdoors?		Are there families I can talk to about your camp?
What do you do if the weather is bad?		Do you provide transportation?
How do you handle camper information?		How do you support your staff?

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I find camps in my area?

A Summer Camp and Recreation Program Guide is published each spring, listing camps and recreation programs in Waterloo Region. Pick up a guide at KidsAbility, your local community centre, or City Hall. This guide tells you which camps offer individual support, are wheelchair accessible, offer subsidy, etc.

How do I find individual support?

The following camps are members of Kids In Camp, a network of camps providing options for one to one support: City of Cambridge, City of Kitchener, City of Waterloo, Cambridge YMCA, Cambridge YWCA, Camp Kummoniwannago, Camp McGovern, Engineering Science Quest, and Hidden Acres

Can I use my SSAH dollars to pay for camp?

Yes. SSAH dollars can be used to pay for the camp registration, as well as to pay a worker to attend camp with your child. Some camps offer a discount to campers who attend with a worker.

What other funding is available?

Many camps provide subsidy to families in financial need on a first come first serve basis. Contact the camp directly.

I still have questions– who can help?

A KidsAbility Therapeutic Recreationist can provide additional resources and recommendations.

Waterloo: Meg at (519) 886-8886 x302
mshirley@kidsability.ca

Cambridge: Sheryl at (519) 621-7580 x260
sdedman@kidsability.ca

Environment: Do they do best in small groups? Do they need time and space to run around with other kids? Do they have sensory needs that make being in environments like gyms or arenas difficult? Is mobility and accessibility a concern?

Tip # 3: Assess the camp's attitude towards inclusion



Does the camp mention inclusion or supports for children with special needs in its literature? Look at the registration form- what questions do they ask about special needs? How much space do they provide for information? (more is better!) Are their questions positively phrased? If you call the camp, are they open and interested in discussing your child's individual needs? Does the camp have an inclusion policy?



Tip # 4: Consider support needs and options

Would your child benefit from additional support at camp? Some camps offer one-to-one staff (sometimes called inclusion facilitators or IF's) to provide additional support for children with special needs. Some camps will make arrangements for a volunteer to be paired with a child with special needs. Some camps may be willing make arrangements for your child's group to have an extra LIT (leader in training) to provide extra support. Consider your child's needs, and what level of support they would be best to have.

Tip #5: Provide the right information

Camps need information about your child's skills and challenges to put strategies into place to ensure a successful and stress free week for both your child and the camp. **The right camp for your child will welcome everything about them, and work with you to create a successful experience.**

Provide information about

- what your child may find challenging (transitions, fine motor activities, unstructured time, sitting still, etc.) and strategies that would help them to manage these times better



- your child's favourite things to help counsellors quickly establish a positive relationship with your child.



- Safety concerns you may have (does your child wander or run from overstimulating environments? Do they have balance or mobility challenges? Do they fatigue easily? Do they need reminders to eat or drink or use the washroom?)



Tip # 6: Get the week off to a good start

If your child is nervous about camp, see if you can visit the camp at an earlier date so they can see the environment, and ideally meet their counsellor. Some children adjust more quickly to a new environment if they arrive early when things are still quiet. Other campers may have a hard time waiting or managing unstructured time if they arrive before formal programming begins. When dropping off your child, don't rush. Stick around long enough to support your child through the initial transition.



Tip # 7: Communicate



When picking up your child, check in with their counsellor if possible to make sure you're aware of any challenges during the day. If there have been challenges, try to manage the situation as constructively as possible. See if you can work with the counsellor to identify the trigger, and discuss options to avoid it in the future. Often, pick up is a very busy time, so these conversations may not be possible. See if you can call the camp in the evening, or arrive early the next day. If your child has communication challenges, consider using a communication book. This can be an effective way for you to provide day to day information, and receive updates from the staff who are spending the day with your child.

