

Grow your kids at camp!

By Heidi Hoff

Although the snow is still on the ground, it's time to start registering for March Break and Summer Camp! If you think this is the year for "away camp," you'll be pleased to know how much camp will help your child.

If you attended camp as a child, you may have fond memories of canoeing, campfires, and S'Mores. What you may not have realized until you became an adult, however, was how much the experience helped you to grow up and feel a sense of independence apart from your family; in other words, how much you learned about yourself and the world around you.

Over the years camps have become a bit more modern and the food a little tastier, but one thing about them remains the same—the change for the better that it fosters in young children that noticeable when the young campers return home. So what sparks these changes? Apart from the fun and games, what exactly does camp provide in the way of learning for children? Doctor Frances Aboud, Professor of Psychology at McGill University tells us:

1. PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS:

Children benefit by learning how to live independently of their parents, coordinate, and cooperate with peers, develop attachments to other adults, plan and carry out activities on their own, develop physical strength and skills, and have a domain of self-esteem separate from the ones developed during the year. It's good to put your eggs (self-esteem tokens) in more than one basket.

2. LEARNING BLOCKS: Children who have been to camp are probably more adventurous and have confidence about physical skills. They might be more eager to learn things that they have done at camp, which other children may not have done, only because they have some confidence in their ability to do these things. But it rests on confidence in oneself to take on new challenges because you've survived these before.

3. SENSE OF SELF: Young campers gain a heightened self-confidence and an array of social and physical skills that they would never develop at home. Learning how to canoe, camp out, play tennis, and do life saving are life-long leisure skills that are important for physical, mental, and



social health and well-being. Parents who can't teach these skills to their children, and parents who can, should both consider the camp experience.

Though not all children are camp material, it's up to the parents to decide if their son or daughter simply won't be able to survive the separation from family. Try a few "test runs" before sending your child to overnight camp. By having your child sleep over at a friend's or relative's you can get a glimpse of how they might fare without you. Talk to your child about what it will be like, visit the camp if you can, and if you don't think your child is ready, don't force the issue. Enrol your child in one of the many day camps available. Try to match the camp to your child's interests and chances are good that your child will come home brimming with stories, skills, and smiles! □

For some great camp options, visit our Camp Directory, both in the magazine and online at www.whatsupkids.com

