

# Picking summer camp takes investigation

Whether their children want to learn to dance or hunt for tadpoles, parents could have a tough time picking the best summer camp programs this season.

About 400 organizations are expected to run children's camps in Ontario this summer. Many will operate as day camps, offering everything from specialized arts, crafts or music programs to horseback riding and wilderness treks.

Residence camps also run a wide range of activities, while providing children with the chance to spend some time away from home, sleeping in cabins or tents.

The array of options available can confuse parents seeking the best programs for their youngsters. It's important to investigate camps carefully to be sure

they will provide proper care, interesting activities and good overall value, say representatives of the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations (MCCR).

According to the ministry's consumer advisors, in depth interviews with camp directors should give parents most of the information they need to make a choice. Industry members agree it's vital to ask lots of questions.

"Find out about staff qualifications, how many children attend, age groups, when the kids go to bed and ask what kind of medical supervision is provided," says Skip Connett, spokesman for the Ontario Camping Association (OCA). "If the director doesn't want to answer your questions, go elsewhere."

The number of counsellors on staff is particularly important, especially for

safety reasons, says Jim Bonk of the YM-CA. Most daytime programs operate well with one counsellor for every 10 youngsters, although really young children should have more supervision, says Bonk.

Parents should also be sure they know what their children expect from summer camp. Does Billy really want to spend three weeks at art camp or will he be bored after three days?

"What often happens is that parents will send little Suzie off to a particular camp just because a friend is going," Connett says. "Certainly, if the friend has attended before, you'll have some idea if it's a good camp or not. But, unfortunately, just because the program is right for the friend, doesn't mean it's right for Suzie."

If in doubt about the kind of program that will appeal to

your child, a general activity camp may offer the best solution.

Specialty camps offering intensive programs in such areas as sports, arts, music or dance became popular a few years ago. But, according to Connett, the traditional, "all-activity" camps are still in the majority.

Location is another important consideration when choosing a program. Make sure day camps are fairly close to the child's home to avoid lengthy bus trips.

Regardless of the type of camp involved, find out if transportation is provided by the operator. Are the costs for busing included in the overall fee? Costs for certain special activities or excursions may be extra.

To avoid unpleasant surprises, be sure you've added up all the fees and costs before registering.

Deposits are usually required, but they

may be fully or partially refundable within a specific time period and under cer-

tain conditions. Check details about refunds before signing up.

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