

Finding a Summer Program for Your Child

There may be cold weather and snow on the ground, but it's not too early to begin thinking about a summer program for your child.

Why a summer program? For starters, safety is an ever present concern. Also, these days, it is likely both parents work and find it difficult, if not impossible to be at home during the summer months. The result is families rush to fill their children's summer days with everything from traditional summer camps to sports, to math and science, to dance and theater.

But parents should look at and choose summer programs thoughtfully and find something that "fits" your child. Explore all types of care options - family childcare, park and rec departments, community based organizations, school districts and day or overnight camps. Visit programs. Do they look safe? Do the staff enjoy talking and playing with the children? Count the staff/adult child ratio. Are there enough adults to supervise all of the different activities?

Questions parents might think about are:

How long the program has operated. What percentage of children return each year? Is the program certified or accredited by a professional association? Check references from parents who have used the program.

How is the program organized? How will children spend their time? Do the program's hours meet your needs? Will your child get physical exercise, opportunities for cultural enrichment, and practice reading, math, or other skills? Will the child have an opportunity to choose some of his/her activities? How does the program accommodate children with special needs or medical needs, allergies?

Does the program offer scholarships or financial aide? How do you apply? What are the deadlines?

Remember to ask about additional fees for things like transportation, field trips, food.

How will your child's nutritional needs be met? Does the program provide healthy food or snacks? Do you need to provide lunch?

Do staff have first aid or CPR training?

Are discipline policies compatible with your own philosophy?

Remember to ask your child what types of programs he or she would like. Involve kids in the

decision making. Look for programs that focus on their interests. Some children may want a relaxed atmosphere, others need a lot of activity. Children over 12 years old may benefit by being in a leadership or counselor trainee program.

The best summer experiences are fun, provide a balance of activities and experiences and provide children with a connection to their peers. High quality summer programs keep kids engaged in learning, teach them new skills, and allow them to develop previously unseen talents. They allow children to form relationships with caring adults, help them stay fit and active, and foster creativity and innovation.

UNH Cooperative Extension offers Barry Conservation Camp in Berlin, NH for youth with an interest in environmental education and Natural Resources.

Barry Conservation Camp is located in the White Mountain National Forest at the Berlin Fish Hatchery. Run in cooperation with the N.H. Department of Fish and Game, the camp provides a close-knit community for its 35 campers and eight staff. Nearby York Pond offers swimming and canoeing for the camp. Five cabins house up to seven campers with a counselor in each. Central toilet and shower facilities, as well as a dining hall and kitchen, accommodate the camp.

This is a great camp for youth who love the outdoors, prefer participating in a small camp, and enjoy hands-on learning in environmental and conservation programs. Barry Conservation Camp staff pride themselves in creating a special place where kids can discover their strengths, work together in teams and leave camp with a greater awareness of themselves and the world around them.

Check the UNH Cooperative Extension website

<http://extension.unh.edu/4H/Camps/docs/BarryCon.htm> for more information and programs at Barry Conservation Camp.

The on-line registration will be accepting registrations for 2009 mid-February.

Looking for financial aide? Contact the UNHCE Merrimack County 4-H program at 225-5505 or 796-2151.

