

GOING TO OVERNIGHT CAMP? MAKING THE DECISION

Overnight camp can be a magical experience for many children and teens. It can give them a wonderful sense of belonging with peers, lighthearted fun, bonds with inspiring young counselors, pride in the achievement of new challenges, love of nature, and maturity and independence.

However, lots of children and teens with learning disabilities (LD) feel anxious about new experiences and have trouble adjusting to unfamiliar environments. Overnight camp means living full time with a group of peers and managing the absence from home. Deciding if they can manage well enough to enjoy the benefits of camp can be another of the many challenges facing parents of children and teens with LD.

Introducing the topic of camp gradually and without pressure is often helpful.

- Give your young person time to think about the decision.
- Give him or her as much information as you can about the everyday details about what will happen.

- Avoid providing too much information all at once; rather, give it in small bits.

Above all, be open to hearing your child or teen's questions and objections.

- It can be very tempting to try to "sell" the camp experience because you know it could be so wonderful.
- It is critical to balance communicating your enthusiasm with listening.
- Take objections and worries seriously. Try not to disapprove of them or dismiss them.
- Try to put yourself in your child or teen's shoes and imagine what the roadblocks are.
- If your child or teen is being generally negative but cannot say why, try to help him or her to put the worries and objections into words.
- The first step in managing our feelings is to feel that someone else understands and cares about how we feel and still respects us.

However, some people can become overcome with anxiety and have limited openness to new ideas. Some children or teens need some pushing in order to try anything new but once involved they enjoy it. Therefore, it is a delicate balance

between being understanding and applying pressure.

Encouraging signs that overnight camp is a good idea:

- The anxieties and objections become fewer and less intense as you talk about them
- The child or teen shows interest in the camp experience
- Together you are able to brainstorm ways of dealing with anxieties
- Together you are able to identify ways he or she coped with similar problems before
- You are aware of your child or teen's strengths that will help him or her to be successful at camp.

For example:

- ▶ Enjoyment of the outdoors and activities like swimming and canoeing
- ▶ Some skill in getting along with peers and feeling liked, at least with adult support
- ▶ The ability to cooperate reasonably well with adults
- ▶ The ability to tell others what is bothering him or her and seek help
- ▶ The ability to cope with feelings such as anxiety or irritation, using adult support if necessary



Integra, founded in 1967 by parents and professionals, is an accredited Children's Mental Health Centre dedicated to helping children and adolescents who experience social, emotional and behavioural problems related to their learning disabilities. We are a charitable organization administered by a Board of Directors comprised of dedicated volunteers from the community.

Integra has an experienced and multidisciplinary professional staff that is dedicated to creating and implementing a range of programs. Integra serves as a centre for research, practicum placement and continuing education.

Integra is committed to the promotion of a community-wide understanding of the mental health needs of children and adolescents who have learning disabilities, and to improving community-based services for them and their families. A range of clinical services is provided by Integra, as well as related activities in research and evaluation, and in training, consultation, collaboration and advocacy.

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TIPS FOR PARENTS

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