

# Sending Your Child to Camp?

## TIPS FROM OUR DIRECTORS

*As Directors of the TGC Children's Camps, and as Parents, and we understand the deep level of trust that takes place when you leave your child(ren) in our care. First of all, we thank you for considering this. Our children are also at the camp, and we give you our commitment that we look at every child on the grounds as if they were our own and we will do everything in our power to ensure they are safe, well looked after, and enjoying their time at camp. We believe camp can be an incredibly impacting time for a child, and every year we give 100% focus to ensuring there is fresh energy and excitement to the camp experience. We are looking forward to the upcoming camping season – can't wait to see all the faces we've grown to love, and to meet all the new faces stepping out into their first adventure.*

**-Rob & April Howard**

For those new to the camp experience, it is like a multi-day sleepover filled with opportunities to make new friends, try out new skills, and deepen your faith. It is important to us that children not only receive a *well-rounded camp experience*, but that they understand:

- they have been created with a purpose
- that they are loved
- that they can have a relationship with God which will give them strength to walk through life's challenges.

If a child walks away from their experience believing they are worthwhile, and feeling equipped with new skills and good memories, we have done our job.

### **A Little About Us:**

We are a team of ministers with over a decade of experience in ministry, education, and entertainment. April holds a B.Ed (Great Distinction) working full time as a teacher, and Rob runs a DJ Entertainment Company and spends a lot of time dancing with kids! We are parents to 5 beautiful children ranging in age from 5 to 15. We have been serving as ministers with Lighthouse to all Nations Church in Regina for over a decade.

There are a number of ministers who work with us in the camp setting: parents, returning year after year because they just can't escape the excitement of camp. We function as a family, and during the camp invite each and every child to join in with us as we celebrate our heavenly Father.

Part of our staff includes a "camp nurse" – usually a retired or practicing nurse, or an individual with related qualifications – who monitors all medications and health needs of the children. All of our staff receive some basic training on First Aid, and a number of our counselors possess First Aid training certificates. We also work carefully with our dedicated cooks to ensure we are meeting special dietary needs of the children who come to us. Most children give rave reviews about their camp meals – and the cooks like to join in on many of the camp activities.

The camp itself is run by an elected Board, including a number of local pastors, who work year-round to ensure the success of the camp. We are very pleased to note that this team consists of members from different denominations, and spans several generations – which brings a rich balance to our planning.

### **A Quick Look at our Schedule:**

Days begin with a 7:30 wake-up bell. The morning features a lively service, a variety of games, and learning a new skill such as dance, visual arts, sports, outdoor experiences, etc.

After lunch activities include pool time and other water activities, archery, canteen, trampolines, wide games, crafts, and more. Each cabin will take a couple of turns in the week to help with “gratis” (clean-up) and the cabin competitions include keeping neat and tidy!

The evenings feature a second interactive service time and a wide game. Before bed we have “mug up” or snack, and one evening during the week features a camp fire.

Explorer Camp lights are out no later than 9:30, and Adventure Camp is no later than 10:30. Right before bed children settle in their cabins with a “cabin chat” to reflect on the day’s messages and help students to debrief and settle.

### **Where Do the Kids Sleep?**

Every child will be assigned to a cabin with children in a similar age grouping. We have separate dorms for girls and boys. Each cabin will have a counselor and usually a CIT (counselor in training) who work together to provide supervision, care, and accountability for one another. Beds are bunk bed style, and each child is assigned their own bunk and a space for all of their belongings. No one sleeps together in a bed. The beds have mattresses, but campers will need to provide their own bedding. Some children bring sleeping bags, others prefer to bring a full bedding set: there is no right or wrong. Dorms usually get fairly warm at night, but it is important to remember the cabins are not well insulated and if it is a cold evening it will cool down somewhat.

It has been our practice that in the evenings counselors talk with the children about the messages of the day, then they turn out the lights (every cabin has a night light) and read a couple of stories as the children drift off to sleep.

If your child has special toys they would like to bring to camp to sleep with, or just to give them a little extra courage – please go right ahead!

### **Safety**

Trossachs follows the “**Plan to Protect**” program with its children’s and youth camps to ensure accountability for its workers, and the safety and well-being of every child who sets foot on the grounds. This means that our workers all must complete a detailed application including references and a criminal record check. Training takes place for workers and counselors including basics of health care, policies on supervision, emergency planning, incident reporting, etc. It is our policy at all times to know where the children are, and to have them within our sight aside from using the bathroom. A child should never be all alone at any point in the day.

Prior to the camp, counselors go through instruction on safety procedures at the camp for a number of potential circumstances be it a First Aid emergency, to a physical problem such as a fire, to other potentially harmful situations (much like fire drills and lock downs in schools). Within the first two hours of the camp, all campers are also briefed so they know what to do if there are problems.

We advise children do not have money with them while at camp, and all medicine is turned over to the camp nurse and kept locked up. The Director and Nurse have access to the medicine, and all staff and children are made aware of where they can go at night to get assistance if there is a need. (Children would speak with a counselor, and the counselor would find either the Director or the Nurse).

### **Special Needs:**

We believe every single child should have the opportunity to go to camp. Every. Single. Child. This means we are willing to work with a number of special needs so that they can enjoy this experience. HOWEVER, we also know and readily admit we do not have the specialized training some children may require throughout the week. It is important when you register that you are as

straightforward with us as possible about all of your child's needs so we can ensure we have a safe and effective plan for everyone involved. In some cases, such as food allergies, milder autism, diabetes, etc. – we may simply need some briefing on the needs and the care plan. In other cases we may need additional supports from the parents/guardians.

If you have a child with a chronic illness or a more substantial disability, please contact us directly to see how we could incorporate him or her into the program. If your child normally requires an aide, it is likely we would need that provision to be made in some way for the camp – whether it be a parent or a hired caregiver. This would require further security policies to be in place which is why we would need direct communication. Help us learn to help you!

### **Praying for My Child**

We believe and teach that it is possible to have a personal relationship with God. Part of being in a relationship includes communicating, and God communicates with us in many ways. At the camp, we will pray for your child and encourage them to pray as well. We will encourage them to listen for the voice of God (not necessarily audibly but in all the other ways He can speak as well). We will also teach that God answers prayer: including when we pray for healing. God can heal our hearts, our minds, and our bodies. He does not always answer our prayers the way we think He should – but He is fully capable of doing anything He likes.

We will pray for hurts and pains, we will pray for better hearing and for digestive issues and even for allergies. The one thing we will not do is tell a child to stop taking medication or to try to eat something that is potentially harmful to them. We clearly teach children that at the end of the day, we have to partner with and honor our parents. God has put our parents in our lives on purpose, and He wants us to honor them. If a child wants to test something out to see if they are healed, we tell them they must talk with their parents first and ask to try it out, and to accept whatever answer they receive. We also encourage consulting a physician to walk through this safely.

### **Visiting During Camp:**

We encourage parents to take some time when they first bring their child to camp to tour the grounds, meet our staff, and help their child to settle in.

Our days are fully planned and with so much to see and do, little time is left over to worry about missing home. If a child is experiencing homesickness, we will help them make a call home to check in. We will speak with you personally first so you understand the context of the call, will have your child speak, and then will check in with you afterward to ensure we are all on the same page. If a child asks to make a call we usually encourage them to wait a little while and plan to make the call close to a meal time or near the end of the day.

Camp is a big step for many kids in being away from home. Although it can be hard on both sides, we have experienced that its best if families refrain from visiting during the week. This is for the security of all the children on the grounds, and allowing the programming to run smoothly. If you still feel better checking in, please make those arrangements with the camp director.

### **How Do I Know if My Child is Ready?**

The children are usually ready far sooner than the parents! The only big exception to this is with our 6-year-olds (and particularly the boys), although there are a number of children in all age brackets who come to us experiencing their first time away from their families.

Factors to consider include: Is your child confident in using the washroom on their own? Are they okay with new people and will they be able to verbalize their needs and/or concerns? Are they able to follow instructions in a large group setting? How readily do they settle in to sleep at night? Will any special needs be able to adequately be met while they are away?

Over the past couple of years, we have begun to assign a "camp auntie" to each of the younger boys' cabins who spends time with the group during the day. This allows our boys to have connection with a mommy type figure who will approach situations a little differently than the male counselor might. We have found our incidents of homesickness have decreased since we began this practice, and our aunties have a blast playing all day with the boys!

### **When Camp is Done**

Camp is an extremely high-energy time. Children will be kept busy with activities from the morning when they wake up until they go to bed. There are also many elements that are new and/or different: the routine is different, the people are different, and the food is different. None of these things are bad, but do require energy to adapt. Consequently, when camp is over, children are generally quite tired. They may be emotional as the full impact of their time hits, and because they are tired and there was so much to process you may see some grouchiness. This should not be anything that lasts long, but we do find our own children are usually sad to say goodbye to friends and worn-out. We also know that camp is their favorite time of the year and well worth it.

If you have concerns about anything that took place at the camp, please feel free to call us (the Directors) in order to clarify. There are always many perspectives to a situation and we may be able to provide that, or we may not have been aware of a concern that we need to take care of. We are all working to grow better and appreciate feedback.