

Canada Safety Council has summer camp tips for parents

The summer months can be a challenging time for working parents with young children.

While the school year provides supervision and structure, summer break leaves parents in a conundrum ? though they want to be available to supervise and spend time with their children, parents often don't have that luxury during working hours.

Alternatively, many parents are also available during the summer months, but want to provide their child with a nurturing and educational experience, imparting life skills and a chance for their child to socialize with peers during the school downtime.

These are only a few of the many reasons parents opt for summer camps as a way to keep their children entertained, interested and supervised over the summer months. With camp season quickly approaching, the Canada Safety Council would like to remind parents to do their research, above all else. There is no shortage of summer camps being offered across Canada, and each of them is required to meet provincial and federal safety guidelines which span several topics including food, health, building codes and fire codes.

Additionally, some summer camps seek out accreditation with the Canadian Camping Association (CCA,) a non-profit national organization that sets standards to meet and sometimes exceed the legal minimum. Parents should keep an eye out for this accreditation when researching an appropriate summer venue for their child.

Here are a few more safety pointers for parents to ensure they're getting the most value for their money and the best camp experience for their child:

? Ensure that camp counsellors and/or leaders are made aware of any health issues relating to the child. These can include food allergies, nature allergies, injury history and any recent surgeries or illnesses. Although most camps have first-aid supplies on hand and a nurse or other medical caregiver available, the risk of needing them will be reduced dramatically if they can be provided with the information up-front.

? Find out what kind of training and accreditation the camp counsellors receive. Certification in first aid and CPR should be present in most cases, with more specific duties requiring more specific training.

? Ask about the ratio of counsellors to campers, as this will dictate the level of supervision. According to the CCA, summer camps should have a counsellor-to-camper ratio of eight to one or better (not including maintenance, office and support staff.)

? Find out what kind of activities they will be doing. Naturally, some activities are inherently riskier than others ? a gymnastics camp, for instance, will probably naturally result in more injuries than a computer camp. But additionally, choosing a camp that interests the child will help make sure they're engaged in the activities. This will result in far less potential injuries than if a child is disinterested or not paying attention.

? Will the campers be doing any water activities? Will they spend time boating or swimming? If so, ask about life jackets, the supervision policies in the water, and if all instructors are trained in CPR. Are the lifeguards certified with the National Lifeguard Service? Do they have proper emergency water equipment, including a spine board and oxygen? Is the waterfront clearly marked and guarded? If the campers will be doing sports, find out the sports safety rules and ask about the equipment they use.

? Consider whether to send the child to an overnight camp or a day camp. The former can be tricky for some children to navigate, especially if they've never been away from home or get homesick easily. Involve them in the conversation and ask which they would prefer.

? Most camps will provide a list of items the child will need for camp. Make sure to label everything with the child's name or initials.