

Choosing the right camp!



A GUIDE TO CHOOSING SUMMER CAMPS

2021



Welcome!

Dear parent,

Living in Toronto means families have access to an extraordinary variety of summer camps — from sports and science to nature exploration and the arts. Once your child completes Junior Kindergarten, the idea of that first summer camp experience often comes into view. You might find yourself browsing websites, chatting with other parents, and weighing different options, all while wondering how to make the best choice for your child.

It's an important decision, but it doesn't need to feel overwhelming. After nearly a decade of conversations with thousands of families, we've gathered insights that can help simplify the process. This guide is here to support you — not to promote any single camp — by offering practical tips and thoughtful questions to guide your search. Whether you're brand new to camp life or looking to try something different, we hope this resource helps you feel confident, prepared and excited about your child's next summer adventure.

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Different types of camps

One of the perks of living in Toronto is the sheer variety of summer camps available — there truly is something for every child. Whether your little one is curious about everything or passionate about one specific interest, you'll find options that match their personality and developmental stage.

Here are three main types of camps to consider:

1. Multi-Activity or Traditional Camps

These camps offer a well-rounded mix of activities such as games, crafts, outdoor play, excursions, and more. Some come with weekly themes. They're great for children who enjoy variety or are still discovering what they love most.

2. Specialized or Educational Camps

These focus on a particular skill or interest — from cooking and coding to chess, robotics, or financial literacy. They're ideal for kids who want to dive deeper into a hobby or try something new in a focused setting.

3. Sports Camps

These can be multi-sport (a mix of athletic activities) or single-sport (e.g. soccer, basketball, or gymnastics). They're perfect for energetic kids who love movement or want to build skills in a specific sport.

💬 Tip: Talk to your child about what excites them. If they're eager to explore a specific interest, a specialized or sports camp might be a great fit. If they prefer variety or aren't sure yet, a multi-activity camp can offer a fun and balanced experience. Many families choose a mix — enrolling in a few focused camps and rounding out the summer with a traditional one to keep things fresh and engaging.



There are a few key aspects of camps and how to choose what works best for your family. Each family is different and only you as the parent can decide what is most important to you and where you can be a bit more flexible. Which camps is the best choice for them also depends on your child's personality, age and needs. Here, we'll walk you through the different aspects in no particular order and explain how to assess each of them carefully:

1. Camp Location

Obviously, logistically, you need to be able to get your child to the camp(s) you've registered them for. Some parents love it when they can walk or bike to camp with their child, as it's a great way to spend time together in the summer and for extra bonding time. However, sometimes camps right in your neighbourhood are full or non-existent, or your child really wants to go to a camp that's at the other end of the city. We recommend looking it up on Google Maps and assessing if you can really make the commute work. Maybe that week, you work from home to make things easier, or you could register them with a buddy and take turns with the other family for drop-offs and pick-ups. Whatever you do, ensure that it's feasible and won't add unnecessary stress to your already busy life.

Another aspect of the camp location is easy access to green space around it. Most parents want their child to spend time outdoors during the summer days, and ensuring that the camp you choose takes campers outdoors daily can be an important criterion. If in doubt, ask the camp(s) you are interested in how much time they spend outdoors every day and where they go.



2. Your child's interests & personality

Summer is a great time to explore new things and learn new skills. Those skills are not only hard skills like cooking, basketball, coding, etc., but also soft skills such as conflict resolution, social awareness, etc. Each camp offers unique opportunities for your child to learn and grow in a setting different from school.

Children have naturally curious minds and want to learn new things. We recommend following these steps when discussing camp options with your child:

1. Discuss the different types of camps (themed camps, sports camps, educational camps) and see what sparks their interest.
2. Narrow it down to a few camps.
3. Review the website with your child to decide whether this looks and feels the way they imagine it.
4. Try to settle on a combination of different types of camps in case your child ends up getting bored at one camp or if activities get too repetitive. They might welcome a week at another camp.
5. Keep in mind your child's personality. Some kids are social butterflies and want to do a different camp each week to keep things interesting. While other kids prefer to settle on just one or two camps, so they don't have to switch once they've gotten used to a new environment.



3. Friendships

Camp is a great opportunity for your child to make new friends or spend time with friends.

Consider registering your child for camp with a friend from school or even a cousin, neighbour or a friend they don't go to school with. It's a great way to spend time together and create memories they'll treasure for a lifetime. Especially the first summer at camps, it can be comforting for your little one to know that they're will be a familiar face from the start.

Sometimes your child might already have a shared interest, such as soccer, cooking, etc., with a friend, and it's just a matter of finding a week that works for everyone. If there are no obvious shared interests, traditional camps offer themes and activities that can be attractive to many types of kids, and they'll quickly find a week that works for both.

Whenever you register your child with a friend, sibling or cousin, ensure to inform the camp so they can be placed in the same group. Keep an eye out for age ranges, as generally campers are split by age at most camps to ensure age-appropriate activities in each group.

 **Tip:** Start planning early if you want to sign up with friends to ensure your camp of choice still has enough spots to accommodate your child plus their friend(s).



4. Camp Staff

While your child's interests, friends and preferences are important, ultimately camp staff are the ones who make or break the experience at any camp.

Do your research on the camp staff at the camps you're considering to register for. We recommend looking at the following aspects:

1. Are counsellors paid or are they volunteers? While both can offer a great experience, volunteers generally have a higher turnover, and hence, there is less consistency with the people who care for your child. While with paid staff, the likelihood that your child will be cared for by the same staff each week or even the whole summer is higher.

2. Age of the staff: While all camps hire young people to work over the summer, different camps have different age limits. Find out what the youngest age is of the staff who will directly care for your child. You want to ensure that there is always at least one adult around at all times, ideally more. Every parent has a different comfort level, and this may shift according to your child's age, so only you can decide what you're comfortable with. However, the first step is understanding the team structure and age requirements for each role at the camp.
3. Qualifications of staff: While very few camps employ only ECEs over the summer (ECEs are generally employed all year round at daycares), some camps ensure to still employ professionals in the field of child development. Find out if there are any certified teachers or students in Teacher's College onsite at the camps you're considering, as they can significantly contribute to the success of a camp.
4. Training: Find out what type of mandatory training staff go through. For example, are all staff first-aid trained or only one person per camp site? Do all staff have X amount of hours of mandatory training? What does the training entail? Also, you want to ensure that all staff over the age of 18 have a clean recent police or vulnerable sector check.



5. Price & inclusions

The expense of summer camp can feel overwhelming. Of course, whichever camps you choose, they have to work for your family budget. Keep in mind that a higher price tag doesn't always mean better quality programming, as it sometimes can simply mean exclusive access.

When comparing prices, ensure to look out for the following in order to compare apples to apples:

1. Is HST included (camps are HST exempt unless the camp chooses to charge HST to offset their own HST cost), or will that be added at the end before I pay? This is a tricky one as it's often not explicitly mentioned and you have to go all the way to checkout to see how much you will actually end up paying.
2. Are all activities included, or does anything need to be paid extra?
3. Are any meals included, or do campers bring their own? Is there an affordable add-on for lunch packages?

6. Safety protocols

Last but not least, safety is paramount for any activity your child participates in. No matter how much fun it is and how much they love it, if it's not safe, as a parent, you will always feel uncomfortable sending them to that program.

To find out more about safety, we recommend the following steps:

1. Review the camp website and its FAQs. How do they talk about safety? What are the things they explicitly mention they do to keep campers safe?
2. Ask questions: If you don't find enough satisfying information on their website, reach out to the camp and ask what they specifically do to create a safe environment for campers.

Only you can decide based on their answer and the information on the website if your parent mind is put at ease and you feel comfortable sending your child to that camp.

Conclusion:

While there is no simple answer to 'which camp should I send my child to this summer?' we hope that these points help you a bit to know where to get started and what to research before you make those decisions!

A quick recap of the things we recommend you find out about before registering for camps:

- ✓ **Camp Location**
- ✓ **Your child's interests & personality**
- ✓ **Friendships**
- ✓ **Camp Staff**
- ✓ **Price & inclusions**
- ✓ **Safety protocols**



Summer will be here soon and we couldn't be more excited to meet our campers, make new memories and have FUN!

On behalf of Toronto Kidz, thanks for choosing us!

if you have any additional questions or would like to discuss any of these topics in more detail, we are only a phone call, email or text away! We're more than happy to walk you through all the details as we want you to feel prepared and confident once the summer starts!

Call, email or text us at:

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