



**EISNER & CRANE LAKE**

UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM CAMPS

# **First Summer at Overnight Camp**

## **FAQs**

## ***How do I know if I'm ready to send my child away to overnight camp?***

As parents, we want to see our children grow up, and yet we don't. We want our children to be independent, yet we want to be in control. In the back of our minds we have the haunting notion that our children's success at camp may mean that, in some small way, they don't need us any more. If you're ready to face the excitement, uncertainty, and even a bit of sadness that surrounds a child's first overnight camp experience, then you've taken the first step.

The second step involves creating a trusting partnership with camp. We trust that you will prepare your children both emotionally and physically. The physical part is easy. (Soon you will receive information about what to bring to camp and what to leave home.) We'll also suggest time-proven ways you can help your children emotionally prepare for camp. On both counts, it's your job to set your children up for success.

Although we work year-round, our job really begins in earnest the moment your children enter camp. We'll see to it that they eat enough, sleep enough, and dress appropriately for the weather. We'll provide a camp environment in which they feel comfortable expressing their feelings and asking for help. We'll offer them a day packed with activities and place them in a cabin where they'll make life-long friends. Our counselors will hold their hands through all the things they'll experience for the first time. And our nurses, doctor, camp directors, community care team and faculty will make sure they're healthy and happy.

If you're ready to take the first step and acknowledge that you may experience a range of emotions about sending your children to camp, then you're half way there. If you're ready to enter a partnership with camp, wherein you do your part and we do ours, then you've taken the final step. Now you're ready to send your children to camp!

## ***How do I know if my child is ready to go to overnight camp?***

There are as many answers to this question as there are campers at camp. However, consider two main areas of readiness. One, can your child take care of their personal hygiene? Although our counselors cue campers daily, can your child shower, wash their hair with shampoo, comb out their hair, brush their teeth, apply sun screen? Your child must be able to do all these things to stay healthy and clean at camp. Second, can your child self-advocate?

Will they tell a counselor if their stomach hurts, if they can't find their stamps, if they've run out of socks or if a friend hurt their feelings? This is one of the major areas of growth we see in children over the summer. A child's comfort advocating for themselves soars while at camp. However, at minimum, your child must be able to speak up when something is not right.

## ***How do I prepare my child to go away to camp?***

**Consider camp a learning experience.** This is an opportunity for children to experience a world beyond their home community and a chance for both of you to practice "letting-go." "Letting go" allows children to develop autonomy, independence, and a stronger sense of self. It allows them to make new friends, take responsibility for themselves and their bunkmates, learn about teamwork, problem solve, mature a bit, and more. Talk about all these wonderful new opportunities with your children in only the most positive way.

**Pack for camp together.** Decisions about what to pack should be a joint venture. If your children feel like they're an integral part of the decision-making process, it will further prepare them for a summer on their own. So, don't pack any bags while they're at school. Likewise, don't allow them to pack their bags without you. You must make the final decisions about what goes to camp and what doesn't.

Please remember that camp is more rugged than life at home. Limit the buying of new clothes and things to bring to camp. More familiar clothes and possessions will help ease the transition. Assure them that you won't be angry if the new shirt gets stained or if the flashlight breaks.

**Talk about your children's concerns.** They will have a lot on their minds before they leave for camp: *What if I miss you? Will I have fun? Will the other kids like me? Will my counselors be nice? Will I like the food?* Try to be as empathic as possible, imagining all the concerns they may have. As you recognize these concerns, don't dismiss, diminish, or disregard them. Instead, allay their fears with calm and encouraging words. And be careful not to make things worse by compounding their concerns with yours.

**Discuss the possibility of feeling homesick.** When children ask about being homesick, be encouraging, assuring them that it's only natural to miss home. It's a good idea to remove the word "homesick" from your camp conversations. At camp we talk about "moments of sadness," staying away from the notion of being "sick." It's okay to have moments of sadness; it's normal and healthy when you're away from your family. In fact, we all have moments of sadness even when we're at home! These moments are a part of life, for parents and children

alike. We explain to our campers that if they miss their family, they must have a wonderful family. How wonderful that they love their family so much that they miss them! The goal at camp is not to erase or deny these moments of sadness, but rather to work with bunkmates and counselors to make these moments fewer and fewer and to focus on making the “moments of fun” greater and greater each day. After a day or two, the moments of sadness cease to overshadow those precious moments of fun.

Most importantly, don’t make any deals, promising to pick them up if they’re not happy. This will only set them up to fail. Assure them that you have made the best choice and that you know they will have a wonderful camp experience. Make sure they know how long they will be at camp (one session or two), and that you will be there on closing day ready to meet their friends and hear all about camp. Listen, acknowledge, empathize, encourage, and be positive.

**Have realistic expectations.** Like the rest of life, camp will have its high points and low points. Not every moment will be filled with wonder and excitement. Maintain within yourself, and encourage within your children, a reasonable and realistic view of camp. Discuss both the ups and downs they may experience. They may not love every meal, but you know the food will be kid-friendly and tasty. They may not get the lead in the show, but you know they’ll love the drama program and the opportunity to perform. They may not make 10 best friends, but we know they’ll make friendships that will last a lifetime. While at camp, opportunities abound to problem solve, negotiate, increase self-awareness, and heighten one’s sensitivity to the needs of others. These opportunities aren’t always fun, but they stimulate personal growth and help children reach their potential. Resist sending them off to camp feeling pressured to succeed at everything. We want every child to come to camp excited about the new experiences and the endless possibilities that await there.

**Talk about camp as a Jewish Community.** It’s a good idea for children to know about all the Jewish experiences they’ll have at camp. They will celebrate Shabbat camp-style, with outdoor T’filah led by campers and staff, energy-filled song sessions, Israeli dancing, *Havdalah*, and more. Daily *Limud* and *Keshet* (our informal Jewish learning programs) will bring them to new heights of Jewish exploration and new depths of Jewish identity. Their repertoire of Jewish songs will double, and their fluency in prayer will increase.

**Stay in touch.** Campers love receiving mail, so try and send something on a regular basis: comics from the newspaper, sports articles, funny cards, etc., each with a brief note. Rotate through your family, with Mom writing one day and Grandma and Grandpa the next. We have an email system in place for you to use. (You will receive information about this in the spring.) While regular communication is important, don’t go overboard. Remember, your children will be living in a new world at camp, having temporarily left their world at home. It will be easier

for them to adjust to the camp world if they are not inundated with news from the world left behind.

Some letter writing tips: Do... ask lots of questions about their activities and friends. This will help them structure their letters to you. Don't... tell them how much you miss them or how quiet the house is without them. Your children needn't feel anxious about your well-being while they're at camp. Do... comment about the things they mention in their letters to you. This will show how interested you are in what they're doing. Don't... write about great family parties you went to or amazing movies you saw. It's in their best interest not to feel like they're missing too much while at camp.

### ***Will I have the opportunity to meet the camp staff and tour camp before the summer?***

Yes! New Camper Orientation is a day when parents and campers come and tour our facilities, meet some of our staff and counselors and introduce themselves to other new campers and their families. It gives both parents and campers the opportunity to see where our campers eat, sleep, play, swim, and so much more during their time at camp. You will even get to sample our camp cookies and juice!

A first-time summer experience is so very exciting, but we also understand that this is a big step for you and your child. We are prepared to work with you in every way that we can to make this an amazing experience for everybody.

### **Eisner Camp New Camper Orientation**

**Sunday June 9, 2019**

**1:00 – 4:30 p.m.**

**At Eisner Camp for new Eisner Camp families**

*rain or shine!*

### **Crane Lake Camp New Camper Orientation**

**Sunday June 9, 2019**

**1:00 – 4:30 p.m.**

**At Crane Lake Camp for new Crane Lake Camp families**

*rain or shine!*

***What you will find when you [sign into your CampInTouch account](#).***

**PARENT POSTING #1 FOR SUMMER 2019**

**The answers to the following questions and more:**

- What are the aims and objectives of camp?
- What are the camp's goals?
- Does the camp have American Camping Association accreditation?
- Who are the various members of the camp staff?
- What kind of training does the staff receive?
- What role do rabbis, cantors, and Jewish educators have at camp?
- What are the names of the various units at camp?
- What is the daily camp schedule?
- In which activities will my child participate?
- What type of Jewish educational program does the camp offer?
- How does the camp celebrate Shabbat?
- How is Shabbat different from other days of camp?

**PARENT POSTING #2 FOR SUMMER 2019**

**Forms will include:**

- Code of Conduct
- Camper Information (one for campers, one for parents)
- Parent Contact
- Camp Transportation
- Medical Forms
- Anti-Bullying Pledge
- Special Diet Request
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation
- On-line pharmacy registration information

**PARENT POSTING #3 FOR SUMMER 2019**

**Information about:**

Camp policies, rules and regulations  
What to expect on Opening Day  
Visiting Day (for full summer campers only)  
Laundry  
Dispensing of medication  
Camper and parent phone calls  
Packing list  
Contacting camp  
Birthdays at camp  
Bunk placement  
Mail and packages  
Unit trips  
Spending money  
Directions to camp