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The Upside

Virtual camp fairs make it possible for families to explore options from the comfort of home.

In a usual year, the first quarter is typically when schools and communities host summer camp fairs, offering parents and guardians a way to meet day and overnight camp direc-

tors, learn about their summer programs, and take advantage of early registration discounts. For nearly 25 years the Bucks County Camp Expo has been this region's camp fair, providing a valuable community service by connecting families in greater Philadelphia and nearby New Jersey counties with local day camps, plus overnight camps from across the country and around the world.

The world knows this is not a usual year. Like so many organizations that found creative ways to continue their services during the pandemic, in 2021 the Bucks Camp Expo pivoted to a virtual platform, partnering with the Bucks County Herald to present an online summer camp directory at UltimateSummerCampGuide.com.

A new community partnership

“Parents have long trusted the Expo to introduce them to good summer programs, just as they trust the Bucks County Herald

for reliable news and community information. Our partnership enables families to learn about participating camps and summer programs using our new virtual camp fair UI-



COURTESY OF DELAWARE VALLEY UNIVERSITY YOUTH SUMMER PROGRAMS

ultimateSummerCampGuide.com, from the comfort of home,” said Joe Wingert, publisher of the Bucks County Herald. He noted that while some other online camp fairs’ platforms are available for only one or a few days, parents can view our camps and click through to their websites all year long.

Virtual camp fairs like UltimateSummerCampGuide.com allow families to pop some popcorn, snuggle up on the couch, and have fun exploring the broad range of camps and summer programs for ages 3-17. Dr. Christopher Thurber, a child psychologist and co-author of “The Summer Camp Handbook,” advises parents to engage their children in the research and process of choosing a camp. “Children who feel forced to go to camp are much more likely to experience intense homesickness than those who feel a sense of agency,” says Dr. Thurber. “Involve your child in all of the big and small decisions about how he or she spends the summer.”

Browsing virtual camp fairs and camp websites together with children is a great way to build excitement for a summer camp experience, particularly with first-time campers. Even the youngest children enjoy watching happy kids doing fun things in camp videos, while older kids may get intrigued by the many activities available to them and the opportunities to form new camp friendships. Of the many valuable youth development benefits associated with a good summer camp experience, two of the most often cited are making human (instead of online) connections and trying new things in a supportive environment, which helps children build self-confidence, resilience, and independence.

Camps have kept up with children’s broadening interests by expanding their specialty programs and electives to include such diverse programs as high ropes and Ninja Warrior courses, cooking, gardening, game modding, yoga, scuba diving, digital photography, circus arts, and retro games. In an extensive research study on the camp experience, the nonprofit American Camp Association (ACA) found that nationwide, 74% of campers said they tried new things that they were afraid

to do at first, and 63% of parents said their child continued to stick with new activities after camp. 96% of campers said that camp helped them make new friends.

And just as camp programs have evolved, so have their websites. Thanks to 360-degree vid-

“Even the youngest children enjoy watching happy kids doing fun things in camp videos.”

eos, drones, and sophisticated technologies, many camps have captured their spirit and activities to make a virtual visit almost as exciting as the real thing (especially helpful during a pandemic), so families can stay safe at home and journey virtually to camps near and far.

Barrie Saias, youth programs coordinator at Delaware Valley University, says, “Camp fairs, whether

in-person events or online platforms, connect parents to camp professionals who can assist with matching and placing your child or teen with the most suitable camp or program. Camp directors are a valuable resource because they can see camp through the lens of a child or an instructor or a parent. We are an integral part of the process because of our interconnectivity. Summer camp contributes to the overall well-being of children, teens and young adult staff. Good summer camps provide experiences that foster team building, strengthen social skills, teach something new, develop confidence, build independence, and develop emerging leaders. When you think about the positive impact of summer camp, now more than ever, it’s ‘yes’ to summer camp, and there is something for everyone.”

Start exploring camps for your kids at UltimateSummerCampGuide.com.

Ellen Warren is Coordinator of the Bucks Camp Expo.



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COURTESY OF ELBOW LANE DAY CAMP

True Grit

Experts agree that summer camp builds tenacity, resilience and grit

Resilience is “the capacity to rise above difficult circumstances, allowing our children to exist in this less-than-perfect world, while moving forward with optimism and confidence,” says Kenneth Ginsburg, MD, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) and author of the groundbreaking book, “Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings.” Penn psychologist and Professor Angela Duckworth, CEO of Character Lab and the world’s leading expert on grit, defines what she calls the secret to outstanding achievement in the title of her bestselling book, “Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance.” While both resilience and grit are now highly valued by parents and educators alike, the question of how to develop these character traits in children is an ongoing source of research and debate.

Michael Ungar, PhD, co-director of Dalhousie University’s Resilience

Research Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is one of the many experts who credit summer camps for producing positive outcomes that include building resilience. “Camps immunize children against adversity by giving them manageable amounts of stress and the support they need to learn how to cope effectively. The better a child succeeds at finding the experiences that bolster his well-being, the better he will be able to cope with life stressors,” says Ungar.

At Elbow Lane Day Camp in Warrington, Directors Bob Lester and Adrian Hazell have seen how camp helped children cope with the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19. Elbow Lane was one of the few camps that opened during the pandemic in the summer of 2020, strictly following guidance from state and federal agencies. “We totally rewrote our policies and procedures so that we could offer the safest opportunity for our

campers to not just survive the summer, but to thrive every day,” says Lester. “We did our best, but we could not predict how the season would feel, until the first day when we saw the happy faces (even through their masks). After three months at home in virtual school and on the computer for hours a day, socially isolated with minimal opportunity for outside play – they needed camp! Their excitement bubbled every morning. Their resiliency was evident as they bounced back from time sequestered at home. Camp was here, swimming was here, sports, crafts, and ceramics were here, archery, nature and adventure was here, but most importantly friends and new friends were here at camp.”

Hazell adds, “COVID-19 made us change everything—arrivals, schedules,

program offerings, how we ate—but the campers adapted and showed remarkable flexibility. They grasped the concept that this virus thing was serious. They embraced our adaptations and procedures. They understood that in order to continue the things that made their camp summers so rewarding and fun, and remain safe, they had to make changes, too.”

To build resilience in children, parents need to practice letting go — a practice made easier when you know your children are protected. Because summer camps create communities where children are supported by nurturing adults, camps are well-positioned to help kids of any age develop grit and resilience skills. Traditional summer camps give kids the freedom to encounter success and failure on their own, in a safe environment where they can learn from their experiences, and where the focus is on the effort instead of the “win.” No matter your skill level at any given activity, you can’t fail summer camp.

“In any summer camp season, the opportunity is there to practice perseverance and tenacity in the numerous, fun, safe activities that the days encompass,” says Hazell. “During a pandemic, the ability to bounce back is tested even more, but in the non-threatening, challenging, creative environment of a summer camp, the chance to try new things, with little fear of failure, leads to success and growth.”

Ellen Warren is Coordinator of the Bucks Camp Expo.



COURTESY OF ELBOW LANE DAY CAMP

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*– Jessica S., Maple Glen, Pa,
Elbow Lane Day Camp parent, Summer 2020*

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Building kids who connect

Summer camp helps kids develop key relationship skills



Connecting with others is more than a basic human need—relationship skills are one of the five competencies associated with social-emotional learning (SEL), a framework that educators say is critical to healthy growth and development. Being able to communicate clearly and build strong relationships helps individuals succeed in school and in the 21st century workplace, and in childhood, the emotional and social intelligence that comes with good relationship skills helps children make and nurture friendships, become better listeners, cooperate in teams, and practice empathy.

Why is summer camp good for kids? Among many known benefits, an independent five-year Impact Study commissioned by the American Camp Association (ACA) found that relationship skills are one of the most enduring and transferable outcomes of a summer camp experience. And, after a year of

“To build resilience in children, parents need to practice letting go.”

pandemic-induced social isolation, children need camp more than ever this summer.

Andy Pritikin, director of Liberty Lake Day Camp in Bordentown, N.J., says, “Years before COVID-19, there existed a worldwide outbreak amongst our youth in technology addiction, social skill deficiency, indoors isolation, and over-parenting. And now, since March 2020, our kids have been living an increasingly bizarre, unnatural life of screens and quarantines, hybrid schooling (if they’re lucky), and enough fear and disappointment to last them into adulthood. Zoom and remote learning have saved us in so many ways. But there’s no substitute for real human connection. Making and strengthening relationships while being guided by loving people is what camp is all about. The essence of camp is in the friendships we forge, something we are all lacking and craving these days.”

“The camp experience is distinct because camp is a place where children and adults come together to form their own community,” says Laurie Browne, PhD, Director of Research for ACA. “They work together to build a unique culture that reflects the character and values of camp and the people who are part of it. It’s in these unique settings where children make friends with people from different backgrounds, build trust in themselves and others, and where they cultivate communication

and social skills. Camp is a considerable learning environment because it engages the child’s whole self.”

According to ACA’s research, camps excel at promoting SEL because they work hard to create inclusive environments that allow children to thrive. For example:

- Camp staff intentionally monitor group dynamics to ensure that no child is left out.
- Many camps have structured programs to recognize and reward positive SEL behaviors, such as demonstrating kindness or being a good friend.
- Camp staff are typically trained to help children practice conflict resolution and team problem-solving.
- Camp communities celebrate both the strengths of individual campers at their own levels and their group connections.
- Camp enables children to unplug and engage with their peers in a safe and supervised space, with diverse opportunities to navigate new social situations.

Pritikin ran a safe and successful summer day camp at Liberty Lake for more than 1,000 children in 2020. Although he and his 250 staff members followed strict safety guidelines and modified the program where necessary, he says the fundamental essence of camp remained intact. “Kids, playing together, mentored by caring staff, and in most cases outdoors. Accord-

ing to the campers, parents, and staff at camps that ran last summer, it was by far their most meaningful camp experience ever, as well as an impactful life event.”

“Our kids need to be out of our homes, playing with other kids, and camps have proven that it can be done safely, even under the most challenging circumstances,” adds Pritikin. “We had a depressed young camper last

summer who hadn’t left his apartment nor gotten fully dressed in months. By his third day of camp, his parents thanked us for ‘returning his childhood to him.’ For many kids, camp is a more important social-emotional antidote than the actual vaccine.”

Learn more about ACA’s 5-Year Impact Study at Acacamps.org. Ellen Warren is Coordinator of the Bucks Camp Expo.



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The Top 25

These 25 questions for camp directors will help you make the right choice for your child.

For more than 100 years, summer camps have offered safe havens where children can breathe, reconnect with nature, make friends, try new things, and be part of a nurturing community that supports healthy growth and development. This summer, meaningful camp experiences will be more important than ever, as children seek ways to increase connection and decrease the anxiety of living through a pandemic.

COVID-19 can affect children's and teens' social, emotional, and mental health due to challenges that include changes in their routines, having to maintain physical distance from family and friends, breaks in continuity of learning, and more, according to the CDC. Yet well-run summer camps can fill all these holes and give children a sense of normalcy, while doing what camps do best - making every day fun!

The first step in giving children the gift of summer camp is finding a camp that meets each child's needs. Some families send all their kids to one camp, select camps that match individual children's interests, or a blend of both, perhaps choosing a traditional day or overnight camp for one or more weeks, and a specialty camp for other periods.

Whether your child is a new or experienced camper, choosing the right camp can be challenging, largely due to the abundance and diversity of summer camp programs available for children in preschool through high school. There are more than 12,000 camps in the U.S., and local communities often provide a wealth of camp programs, from privately owned and school based camps to those run by nonprofit and faith based organizations, municipal park camps, and specialty programs focused on technology, STEM enrichment, sports, horseback riding, performing

arts, cooking, nature and more.

Although 70% of summer camps did not open in 2020 due to restrictions related to the pandemic, the majority of those that did run were successful in keeping children safe, with many reporting no incidences of COVID-19. These camps used data and best practices provided by the CDC, the nonprofit American Camp Association (ACA), and state and local health departments to create sensational summer programs that made camp feel like camp, even if everyone was wearing masks, moving in small groups, and sanitizing hands frequently.

For summer 2021, it appears that many more camps will run, thanks to the lessons learned from operating camps last year, plus new expert guidance. This includes ACA's pandemic "field guide" to help camps access recommendations from specialists in pediatric medicine, camp medicine and nursing, epidemiology, infectious disease management, biological safety, industrial hygiene, organizational design, and other technical specialties, as well as new information from the CDC and state regulators.

Ask the right questions

What does this mean for parents and caregivers? ACA has always advised parents to ask specific questions of camp directors about philosophy, policies, programs, and all the things that will help families choose camps wisely. Summer 2021 will require additional questions about how camps will operate safely in environments where it is likely that most campers and staff will have not yet received a vaccine. ACA also offers educational resources to help parents make good decisions.

As you start your camp search, don't be afraid



to ask camp directors lots of questions—it's likely that they've heard similar questions thousands of times, and good camp directors will gladly address even the smallest concerns. Many camps will provide opportunities to tour the camp facility, either in the off-season or while camp is in session, but always make an appointment prior to visiting and ask about safety procedures. If you're not sure where to begin, try browsing virtual summer camp fairs, on-line search engines, community websites, and local newspapers and magazines, and ask for referrals from family, friends, neighbors, teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, clergy, and colleagues.

Once you've found some camps that look good for your family, these 25 questions will help you choose:

1. What is the camp's philosophy and program emphasis?
2. What makes this camp unique?
3. What is the camp director's background?
4. What is the counselor-to-camper ratio?
5. What does a typical camp day include?
6. Does the camp offer age-appropriate activities

that can grow with your child?

7. Do campers choose activities or move as a group?
8. How are behavioral and disciplinary problems handled?
9. How does the camp accommodate special needs and dietary restrictions?
10. How does the camp handle homesickness and other adjustment issues?
11. What is the camp's policy on cell phones and electronic games?
12. Are medical staff present on the camp's grounds?
13. What experience, certifications, and training do counselors have or get?
14. What percentage of campers return each year?
15. What percentage of counselors return each year?
16. Is the camp sanitized regularly and is hand sanitizer readily available?
17. Can or should siblings and friends be in the same group? (Discuss the pros and cons.)

18. For day camps, does the camp offer early drop off and late pick up? (Is there an extra fee?)

19. What is included in the camp tuition? (Snacks? Transportation? All activities? Field trips?)

20. Does the camp offer discounts for early registration, siblings or referrals?

21. At day camps, how has the camper drop off and pick up policy changed due to the pandemic?

22. Are camp staff permitted to go off-premises during their time off and between sessions?

23. What is the staff doing differently this year due to the pandemic? (i.e. changes in activities, mealtimes, transportation, etc.)

24. What are some things the camp is not doing this summer due to the pandemic (i.e. field trips, all-camp games, etc.)

25. Are all staff and campers required to wear face masks?

For more educational resources about choosing a camp and preparing children for a summer camp experience, visit acacamps.org/campers-families.

Ellen Warren is Coordinator of the Bucks Camp Expo and writes about summer camp.



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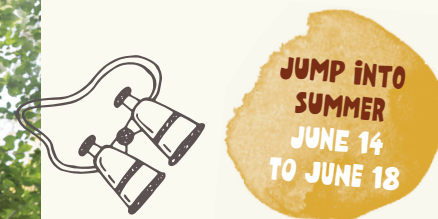


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**JUNE 14TH - AUGUST 20TH
3 DAYS • WEEKLY • AGES 5-11 YEARS**



SPRING MILL ATHLETIC CLUB SUMMER YOUTH CAMP

Our camp is full of fun, excitement and is conveniently located in the heart of Bucks County. We offer a dynamic day of activities and sports in a safe and caring environment where your kids can have fun, develop friendships, and gain confidence and self-esteem. We were open last year, in the start of the pandemic and we were vigilant to make sure everyone stayed safe. All recommended CDC and the Bucks County Department of Health guidelines are still vigorously followed. We offer a full snack bar so your child can bring their lunch or buy.

COUNSELORS YOU CAN TRUST

Our Spring Mill Summer Camp counselors are primarily college students or college graduates, many of whom have majored in education. Our counselors attend pre-camp training sessions prior to the beginning of camp. Lifeguards have additional training and clearances. We offer an ideal 9 to 1 camper to counselor ratio and an assortment of amenities that your kids will love. Our staff loves to have fun and make sure the kids are enjoying themselves.

ACTIVITIES

- Weekly Field Trips
- Bumper Balls
- GaGa Pit
- Foam Machine
- Moon Bounce
- Special Visitors
- Dance Activities
- Swimming- including lessons.
- Archery
- Arts & Crafts
- Carnival Day
- Sports Activities
- Tie Dye
- Face Painting
- Water Balloon Tosses
- Ice Cream Sundae Days
- Cooking with Chef Chris
- A whole lot more!

TO REGISTER

Camp registration is based on a first come, first serve and space availability. Once you have registered your children, a complete camp packet will be sent out to you.

- \$200 Deposit is required to reserve your space.
- Minimum 3 weeks enrollment
- Registrations via phone are accepted with credit card only.
- All campers are required to have a credit card on file.
- **Payment due in full by May 15th** - No refunds after May 15th

CALL 215-328-9400 or email us at camp-swimclub@springmillathleticclub.com

Explore



Create

Compete



MERCERSBURG SUMMER PROGRAMS

2021 Summer Offerings | Ages 8-17

Early-Bird Pricing

NOW THROUGH MARCH 15

mercersburgsummer.com

- Adventure Camp
- Performing Arts Intensive
- Young Writers Camp
- STEAM Camp
- Basketball Camp
- Lacrosse Camp
- Soccer Camp
- Swim Clinic



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- Digital Media, Arts and Industry
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- Coding and Virtual Reality
- App and Game Design
- Life and Environmental Sciences
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Equestrian Riding (on-campus only) and more!

Register Now!

Spaces are limited.

For more information and to register:
delval.edu/summerfun

Kids U! ages 5-13

On-Campus STEAM Camps

Design, build, innovate, experiment and learn something new. Explore your interests and connect with other kids and tweens that love STEAM based, hands-on, adventure and fun.

Online STEAM Camps

We took the best elements of our on-campus camps and moved them into an online platform. Fun, safe, hands-on, live camps with activities delivered to your home and led by our expert instructors and pro partners.

Inspire U! ages 14-18

Summer Programs

Teens will see, learn and try what it takes to have a career in animal studies, creative arts, media, equine management, and more. Transform your interests and talents into the future U!



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700 E. Butler Ave., Doylestown, PA 18901