

When choosing a Jewish summer camp, it's important to explore different options so that the camp experience best suits your child's needs and interests. Below are some questions to consider asking when speaking with or visiting camps. It is important to bear in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. In fact, the answers you find will help you to see the diversity of Jewish camps available to you and your child.

1. Social Environment

The social environment of a camp is comprised of the children who attend the camp, the staff, and the size of the camp.

- a. How many children attend during each session?
- b. What is the male/female breakdown?
- c. On average, how many campers are in a bunk?
- d. What is the return rate of campers each summer?
- e. How does the camp integrate new campers?
- f. Where do most campers come from?
- g. What percentage of campers goes to Jewish day school?
- h. What is the camp policy about camper electronics/packages, etc?
- i. What is the atmosphere for children with special needs?

2. Programming

The program of camp includes the types of daily and evening activities offered, the structure of the day, the amount of individual choice a camper has in determining their schedule, and the length of camp sessions.

- a. How many weeks will my child be able to spend at camp? Two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, or eight weeks?
- b. Is there a trial one-week session to consider?
- c. How much free time is allotted each day? How structured is "free time"? Is the daily schedule elective-based where each child selects their own program? Or, is the schedule cabin-focused where children travel from activity to activity as a bunk and/or age-unit?
- d. Is there camp-wide programming, or is it broken down by age-units?
- e. What programs are unique to this camp?
- f. Are there individual sports or arts training programs?
- g. What types of specialty programming does the camp offer?
- h. Are campers taken off-site on trips? Overnights?
- i. What types of programs does the camp offer for children with special needs?

3. Staff and Administration

Each camp structures its staff differently. Some camps have a large staff with individual responsibilities whereas other camps have teams of leaders that work together.

- a. What is the camper-to-counselor ratio in most bunks?
- b. Do you have a separate specialty staff or are the bunk counselors also program and activity specialists?
- c. What experience does the director have in the areas of education and counseling?
- d. How and how often do staff communicate with parents?
- e. Who will you speak to if there is a health or other issue with your child?
- f. Does the camp post photos online regularly?
- g. How often do parents receive newsletters or updates?

- h. Does the camp have a social worker, inclusion coordinator or someone similar on staff?

4. Spiritual, Cultural and Religious Life

Jewish life at camp can be the most magical part of the experience for a child. Jewish camp is a place where Judaism is integrated into everyday life, so it's important that you learn about the level of Jewish observance, learning, and celebration so that you can determine what may be best for your child and what is best aligned with your family's personal values.

- a. Is the educational mission evident in the camp's program design?
- b. How frequently is Hebrew used, if at all?
- c. Are there song sessions on a regular basis?
- d. How is Shabbat celebrated?
- e. Is there a designated time in the daily schedule for Jewish learning?
- f. Who educates campers about Judaism/Hebrew? Is there a separate staff of Jewish educators or do counselors teach campers directly?
- g. Is there a rabbi (or a faculty of clergy) who resides at camp?
- h. Are there Israeli counselors (*Shlichim*) and/or campers?

5. Facilities

If you have an opportunity to visit camps, here are some things to observe about the physical environment.

- a. Is there a central gathering area on camp?
- b. Are living areas divided by age/gender?
- c. Dining Hall:
 - i. What is the dining hall experience like? How are campers involved?
 - ii. What food alternatives does the camp offer for those with allergies, vegetarians or vegans?
- d. How do the bathrooms look?
- e. What type of sports facilities does the camp have? Is there a ropes course, ball fields, tennis courts?
- f. Is there a lake? A pool? Does the camp offer water sports like waterskiing/sailing etc.?
- g. Is there space for wilderness overnights or are campers taken offsite?
- h. What type of arts facilities are there? Ceramics? Woodworking? Theater?

6. Health, Safety and Security

Each camp has a different approach to health, safety and security procedures. It is important that you know and are familiar with the camp's policies.

- a. If I have a concern, who would I contact at camp about my child?
- b. What are the procedures if my child gets sick?
- c. How is daily medication administered?
- d. Is the camp able to accommodate children with physical or emotional disabilities or disorders?
- e. How is the health center staffed?
- f. How close is the nearest hospital?
- g. Is there a security gate and a security staff?