

From Camper to Counselor: Teens Who Attend Summer Camp Return as Counselors

Working as a camp counselor can be a structured way for teens to grow their leadership skills and revisit childhood joys. Unfortunately, counselors sometimes get the short end of the stick returning to camp as an employee. The transition can also be confusing for teens, especially when returning to the same camp they attended as children, because of the dramatic changes in what is expected of them. Supporting your teen in exploring the prudent and logical considerations that go with this opportunity is a wise way to make the best decision about what to do for the summer.

Seeing Camp without the Rosy-Tinted Glasses

Children often have wonderful dreamy summers at the right camp, escaping the norms of school and growing new friendships and skills in an environment centered on them. If they choose to return year after year, the [best summer camps](#) have programs that grow with children and continue to challenge and stimulate them. It can feel logical to return again as a counselor, yet the adventure does not always continue along the same path. It is common to remember your best experiences much more strongly than dull ones. Camp culture and activities are modeled on what is fun for the children at the center of the experience. So helping teens analyze their time at camp critically is vital for them to have accurate expectations as a beginning counselor. Good questions to bring up might include: Do you think you will still have fun with the same goofy camp songs, especially now that you have to lead them? Do you have a lot of fun hanging out with, and being responsible for, younger children 24/7? And, can you still have fun when you are juggling many new responsibilities and duties?

Going to camp, your teen's counselors were likely their constant companions. As a child it might be easy to suppose they are having as much fun as you, staying at camp for two weeks straight. Yet after the initial exhilaration of returning to camp slips away, counselors can find that the extremely common lack of days off, continuous hours, and redundancy of activities, make them want a chance to get away long before they get one. Especially with rural or wilderness camps, counselors without their own cars can be stuck at camp even on days off.

The art of creating a great summer camp experience is in many ways a bit of a magic show. Convincing little campers that there is actually a mystery in the lake can stop them from trying to go swimming on their own, provide fodder for songs and stories, and make them feel like they are in a delightful place. Yet for teenage counselors, conjuring a mythical atmosphere 24/7 maybe a lot less pleasant than buying into it was. Counselors

lead primarily by example, so they still need to be able to have plenty of fun playing capture the flag, and all the other games, for camp to be enjoyable for everyone. Clearly, situations vary immensely from camp to camp. One important factor to consider is that very often first year counselors end up leading younger children, with the higher risk job of leading older children on a two week backpacking trip going to more experienced counselors. It is essential for your teen to know as precisely as possible what their schedule at camp will be like to make an informed decision. A job facilitating a specific activity that they are still passionate about, like rock climbing or horseback riding, may afford them more free time in the evenings and save them from the frustration of being responsible for a problem camper for weeks at a time. Taking time to research thoroughly diverse opportunities to work at different camps well ahead of time, even if teens remain loyal to the camp they attended, is preparation with insight. With thousands of camps in unique places across the country and around the world, there is a galaxy of possibilities for teens to find a camp or program specific to their talents and goals. While some camps do pay their counselors well, most do not give them an hourly rate, just room and board with a small salary on top. If teens hope to make serious money over the summer, they should compare camp to other potential jobs. Of course, with limited opportunities to spend money and most expenses covered by the camp, it could turn out that camp is a solid money-maker.

A Community Approach to Building Leadership for Teen's Passions

The best camps cultivate a loving and learning community atmosphere where everyone can feel at home. Such a friendship-based support system can be an excellent opportunity for young people to rise to the challenges of leadership, in an environment that blends work responsibilities with social growth. It is crucial to consider how many childhood friends and mentors will still be at the camp this summer, if they are returning to camps they attended as children. One strong indicator of a camp's community focus is the percentage of campers and counselors who return to the camp each year.

Working as a camp counselor is most empowering when it offers teens opportunities to continue to challenge themselves in areas they are passionate about. For example, teens interested in sailing could gain a lot from the chance to plan and captain their campers' sailing trip, and take the boats out with other counselors on days off. Yet, for teens looking at summer as an escape from a strict schedule, the prospect of supervising groups of young campers in doing craft projects all day may not afford them the chance to be engrossed in their own art projects in the way they had hoped. The question can come down to whether camp staff value junior counselors and make continuous efforts to offer them responsibilities catered to their talents and desires.

New Logistics in the Camp Experience: Practical and Social Considerations

Camp Directors depend on their young counselors to keep campers safe and healthy under circumstances that are new and potentially problematic for many young campers. The constant threat of lawsuits from zealous parents can turn awesome activities into logistical headaches for young counselors. Instead of having fun swimming, counselors may be acting as overworked lifeguards, counting fifty heads every five minutes. Counselors may find themselves chasing after campers from one activity to the next, worrying about details such as soggy swimsuits and athletes' foot in the locker-room. Camps often prepare counselors relatively well to consider what the insurance company requirements would be in typical situations. Some offer first aid and other safety

certifications that can be valuable for further work and life experiences. Yet even if the camps do prepare them well, teens may want to ask themselves if they are ready to coordinate an airlift for a camper who they are guessing may have appendicitis three days into a wilderness trip.

As a camper, a child is free to spend his or her time with friends, yet for a counselor the opposite is often true. If a camper has medical or behavioral issues his or her teen counselor may have to share a canoe with the camper day after day, or constantly ferry this camper to the nurse's office. Learning to handle such responsibilities effectively at camp, teenage counselors find that a supportive and skilled co-counselor often makes all the difference. Another good question to ask the camp, therefore, is whether counselors are involved in picking their own co-counselors, because the process is often nearly random. Since counseling teams need to have great working relationships to guarantee a sensational experience for campers, paring them without sensitive consideration may be setting up the teenage counselor for frustration and management problems.

For a child, going to a same sex camp can offer an escape from social pressures, yet for teens the dance with the camp across the lake is probably a poor substitute for the dating opportunities most other summer plans would allow. Furthermore, counselors are almost always held to the same rules as campers when it comes to drinking, smoking, and drugs; teens do not have to be addicts to be dismayed by not being able to have a beer or two all summer. None of these concerns have to be taken as killjoys at a well-run camp, yet if teens fail to consider them, they may begin summer with some nasty surprises.

Growing up with Camp

Growing up as part of a camp community can be such an enriching and fun experience that it makes sense for many teens to navigate successfully the transition to being counselors. The summer is often even more scintillating when camps recruit international staff, another good thing to ask about. When young people consider whether to work at a camp or not, and decide if it is wisest to return to the camp they attended as children, it is prudent to consider how the job will fit into their bigger plans. For young people interested in teaching or outdoor education, staying involved with camp may prove an important asset to develop their career.

Spending time at a camp that immerses counselors in activities they have invested in deeply, and making money doing it, is often a terrific opening for your teen. Yet it can be all too easy for teens to return to camp with the same high expectations for a dynamic summer they had as children, and find the familiar buildings empty of their old enchantment. Becoming trusted leaders and mentors may make working as counselors a pivotal connection to teens' own experiential education. The realizations and peace that many teens find in the wilderness can be reason enough for them to seek a job introducing children to the backwoods. However, parents must make an assessment based on their teen's actions of whether he or she can handle a counselor's authority fairly, even when the campers are full of energy and mischief.

Perhaps the most salient truth for teens considering becoming camp counselors is that fostering wonder and growth in children has the power to be a natural call to action for them to nurture their own maturity and advance their own aspirations.

This information was compiled by <http://www.byparents-forparents.com/camper-to-counselor.html>

