

Summer 2014 Camps

Education & Activities



Chantilly
CONNECTION
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Choosing a Summer Camp

Now is the time to register for summer camp; nearly infinite choices.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Many families with school age children will plan to have their children spend some of the much-anticipated summer season in camp. If you haven't yet selected camps for your children, now is the time.

"Popular classes and programs always fill early," said Kevin Rechen, camp director of Summer at Norwood in Potomac, Md.. "Families that are choosing a camp based on a specific program or class should register as soon as they can."

Whether you choose a traditional day camp, a specialty camp or a sleep away camp, the Washington, D.C. region has a multitude of offerings. The array of options can be overwhelming for some parents, but summer camps can be an important part of a child's development. Local child development experts say there are a few things to keep in mind when choosing for a camp.

"Summer camp is an opportunity for children to develop social skills with their peers," said Linda Gulyn, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Marymount University in Arlington, Va. "Camps give the benefits of social interaction in a more relaxed setting."

When selecting a camp, there are factors that parents should keep in mind. "When parents are looking for a camp they should try to find a camp where they're comfortable with the facility, the programming and counselors and staff," said Rechen.

An array of specialty camps offer children a chance to focus on one activity.

"Developmentally, as children get older they get more specialized in their skills and interests," said Gulyn. "Summer camp is an opportunity to hone in on those skills. Go with the child's interest and skills and further develop those because they are an import part of a child's identity."

Specialty camps can help children develop creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

For example, St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School in Alexandria offers camps that include Quadcopters and Video Editing, MiKiDo Mixed Martial Arts, CSI Detective, Hunger Games, Civil War, Fantasy Battle Gaming, Filmworx Movie Making, Eco-Adventures, Junior Musical Theater, Zooology, [and] Junior Veterinarian, said Linda Stratton of SSSAS.

OTHER SPECIALTY CAMPS include cooking camps, yoga camps and sports camps that run the gamut from tennis to hockey.

"A specialty camp gives children a sense of one particular area for a short period of time and allows them to decide if it is something that they want to pursue long-term," said Bethesda, Md., resident Deborah Helfeld who has taught art and yoga summer camps. At George Mason University, high school juniors and



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY
Campers at Hidden Oaks Nature Center find something interesting while exploring the creek.

seniors will have an opportunity to attend a camp that will give them a head start on college. "It's not your parents' summer camp," said Sudha Kamath.

"Camps give the benefits of social interaction in a more relaxed setting."

— Linda Gulyn, Ph.D.,
Marymount University

fairs, health behavior, history, mathematics, nutrition and public speaking. The sky's the limit as students explore topics like 'Stars, Galaxies and the Universe'

and "The Ecosphere."

Camp Greenway at The Madeira School offers three options for two-week camp sessions with outdoor and indoor activities, said Laura Temple, spokeswoman for school in McLean, Va. "Water sports, games, team sports, music, arts and crafts, and MAD Science are all part of the daily action for campers."

The Fairfax County Park Authority offers camps nature camps that are designed to immerse children in the outdoors. "We want the children to connect with the world around them," said Judy Pedersen, Public Information Officer, Fairfax County Park Authority. "When they leave camp, we hope that they have a deeper appreciation for the world around them for and the environment." You don't need to be a resident of Fairfax County to attend the camps, Pedersen said.

The Arlington Art Center offers summer camps for



MADEIRA SCHOOL PHOTOS
Activities from summer camps held at Madeira School in McLean.

children and teens that meet daily for several sessions throughout the summer, 3550 Wilson Blvd, Arlington. Classes range from portfolio development to drawing, acrylic painting, and contemporary landscapes with oil paint.

ANOTHER OPTION is sleep away camp, which can sometimes be a nerve-wracking but rewarding experience for both a parent and a child.

How does a parent know that their child is ready for to make this leap? "It is going to vary from child to child and family to family," said Michele C. Garofalo, Ed.D., assistant chair, Department of Counseling and a professor of Psychology at Marymount University in Arlington. "I think if a child has spent time having sleep overs with friends and has done ok, and is independent and feels comfortable sleeping at friends' houses then it should be fine."

"When they leave camp, we hope they have a deeper appreciation for the world around them and the environment."

— Judy Pedersen, Fairfax County Park Authority



MADEIRA SCHOOL PHOTOS

Garofalo suggests that the first sleep away camp experience should be brief.

"I think you want to do a shorter experience to get them ready. The first summer, send them to a four-day camp to test the waters. Their first experience should be at a camp that is close to home. Don't send them to a camp in California the first time."

An open dialog between parent and child is key. "Explain to the child that they are going to be on their own and tell them what will be expected of them," said Garofalo. "Parents can prepare their children and have an honest conversation about what will happen at the camp."

Those who think they can't afford the cost of summer camp should research financial aid options.

"Many summer camps offer financial aid and there are foundations that give grants for camps," said Rechen.

Ideas for Summer

Avoid those dreaded words: 'I'm bored.'

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Molly McAlister enjoys the freedom of summer, but there are three words she dreads hearing: "Mom, I'm bored." Creating activities to keep her three children busy during the summer is a task she enjoys, but it isn't always easy.

"I love taking the kids swimming or on bike rides, but sometimes I run out of ideas," said McAlister who lives in Centreville.

Many parents allow "screen time" to keep children happy, but it's important to interact with them as well.

"Some parents will give their child an iPhone or an iPad to entertain them," said Michele C. Garofalo, Ed.D., assistant chair, Department of Counseling and a professor of Psychology at Marymount University in Arlington. "Interacting with children and being involved with them rather than giving them electronic activities is important. It is important for kids to figure out how to interact with their parents and friends."

"Summer is a wonderful time for parents to get to know their kids and interact with them in a different way," said Garofalo, who lives in McLean.

One way that families can spend quality time together is by creating art, said Dabney Cortina of the McLean Project for the Arts in McLean. In addition to summer camps, McLean Project for the Arts offers family workshops where parents and children create art together.

"The whole process of creating is so important to a child's development and it's so important to be with your children and create something together," said Cortina. "I see the smiles as the children and adults put their heads together to create things. I think it's also a wonderful release for adults."

COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS are a great way to spend time and help

children learn during the summer. "Let them spearhead a yard sale," Garofalo said. "Kids gather the items, make flyers and put the flyers in everyone's mailbox. They can donate the money to charity so you can tie in a service project."

Spend time in the kitchen. "You and your children can do a lot of baking and donate the items to a homeless shelter," said Garofalo. "With parental approval and guidance, kids can also do dog walking or water flowers for neighbors who are away."

For families who want to spend time in nature, Len Annetta, Ph.D. Professor in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University suggests the Manassas National Battlefield Park. The park, which is home to more than 160 species of birds, has been recognized National Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area.

"Our area has so much history," said Annetta. "Most of these place don't cost money but can immerse students in something educational, which is really critical."

FOR PARENTS who plan a summer of varied activities, specialty camps as well as parent-child activities are worthy options. Even one or two sessions of week-long specialty camps can add to a child's summer.

Deb Burger of the Potomac Horse Center in North Potomac, Md., said they offer camps where children learn equestrian skills and are given information about the history of horses, breeds, colors, markings, anatomy, horse care and grooming. "Campers also do horse-related arts and crafts," said Burger. "They have a good time, make friends, increase their love of horses and improve their ability to ride. Kids come from Maryland, Virginian and even overseas."

Tony Castrilli, Director of Public Affairs for Fairfax County says the county is offering nature camps during the summer.

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Summer Learning

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

derstands and helps build oral communication skills," she said.

When summer vacation begins and school ends in a few weeks, learning doesn't have to take a hiatus. Students can keep their academic skills sharp without entering a classroom or even sitting down with a pencil and paper.

Local educators say opportunities for reading, math, science and history skills are plentiful and none require that children set foot in a school. From a walk in the park to a trip to the grocery store, teachable moments are virtually everywhere.

"There are a thousand ways to do it, but reading is critical," said Marjorie Myers, Ed.D., principal, Francis Scott Key Elementary School in Arlington. "I think the most important thing to do is read in a fun way. Read as a family. Parents can read challenging books to their children. Go to your local library and take advantage of fun activities there.

Some elementary schools encourage their students to read and discuss what they are reading with their parents.

Blake M. Giliotti, staff development teacher at Potomac Elementary in Potomac, Md., said, "We ask kids to read and then have discussions with their parent about what they are reading. We don't ask them to do anything written because we don't want them belabored by school work during summer."

The book discussions or questions that parents ask their children about books don't need to be complicated, Giliotti said. "It can also be as simple as saying, 'Tell me about what you are reading.' Engaging in a natural conversation about a book can give you insight into what your child un-

WHEN IT COMES TO science, Len Annetta, Ph.D., professor of Science at George Mason University says he and his wife Jennifer spend a lot of time at the Smithsonian museums with their two children, Samantha, 13, and Joey, 11.

"We particularly like the Air and Space Museum," he said. "It keeps them engaged in science. We walk around together and we ask them questions after we leave a museum. When they get home they get to go online and do more research on things that interest them."

There are subtle science lessons to be learned even when taking a summer stroll. "We're out for a nature walk and we see an animal or plant and we start talking about it," said Annetta. "We also look at and talk about grasses and trees and animals."

For parents who don't have a science background, Annetta suggests looking up information on a smart phone during a walk or museum trip.

A shopping trip can also be an opportunity for a math lesson, said Myers. "Take your children to the grocery store and use actual money instead of credit cards, so the children can see a value for money and numbers," she said. "Give children an allowance so they can make the connection between money and the cost of things they want to buy. Sitting in a class room with fake money doesn't quite get it."

This area offers an abundance of locations for history lessons. "I go out to the battle fields near Manassas," Anetta said. "There are placards that help describe what is going on. There are a lot of local museums that offer the same opportunities."

Keeping a journal is another way to keep skills sharp outside of a structured setting.

"Keeping a travel or camp journal is a fun and easy way to support academic skills," said Benita Cathey, director of admissions at Grace Episcopal School in Alexandria. "A travel or camp journal reinforces writing, geography and social studies and organizational skills."

SUMMER READING PROGRAMS

The Fairfax County Summer Reading Program encourages children and teens to read for pleasure during summer vacation. The library summer reading program runs June 20-Aug. 30. Children from birth to sixth grade read 15 books. Students in grades 7-12 read eight books. Learn more about Fairfax County Public Library summer reading program www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/srp.

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