

SUMMERS THEY WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER



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SUMMERTIME 2026



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GREAT SUMMERS START HERE.

“CAMP IS SO FUN

I just don't want it to be over.” : Reentry Tips for Families

Campers and Counselors alike have enjoyed summer days together learning new skills in activities, living in a small tent family, learning self-care, gaining self-confidence, developing new friendships (and cherishing old ones too), having the courage to try something new - the list goes on. This week, we find many campers experiencing many emotions - excitement to be home with family mixed with sadness about leaving camp and good friends. One teary-eyed camper said, “Camp is so fun, I just don't want it to be over. I'm excited to see my brother because I miss him, but I don't want to leave camp.”

Beth Arky of the Child Mind Institute offers some advice for parents as they prepare to welcome their campers home from camp:

As parents we spend months readying our children for sleepaway camp, from finding the right camp to choosing between iron-on tags and Sharpies to mark every last duffle bag-bound item with the child's name. We anticipate summer camp experiences good and bad, from making new friends and learning new skills to homesickness and pinkeye. What moms and dads are less likely to anticipate is that just as going to camp is a major transition for a child, so, too, is coming home.

With the bulk of campers homeward bound over the next several weeks, it's worth noting that while many kids who enjoyed stretching their wings will have a relatively smooth reentry to the nest, others will have a bumpier landing.

Dr. Michael G. Thompson, a psychologist and author of



Homesick and Happy, says: “I think that the majority of kids come home pretty satisfied, more grown up, and very proud of themselves,” he says. These kids try to show off their newfound maturity, setting tables and pitching in on chores, just as they had at camp.

[These] kids...may have learned to water ski or overcome their fear of bugs but, more importantly, “they conquered a huge developmental piece. They managed without their parents,” says Carolyn Meyer-Wartels, a Manhattan psychotherapist who's worked with families on after-camp problems. They even had the chance to play with their personas: Maybe they'd be the funny one, or the serious one, at camp. Plus, she says, “there's a whole new group of friends and adults to rely on.”

But Dr. Thompson says children's new thoughtfulness doesn't tend to last too long. “Generally, grown-up behaviors fall away and they return to baseline” in the context of home, he says. “There's usually

a brief honeymoon and then a bit of a crash,” Meyer-Wartels agrees. “Camp has a lot of rules but it's fun, you're never alone, and the group is doing chores like clearing the table together. But then the child comes home and there are the different rules and expectations of family life.”

Dr. Thompson describes another group as the ones who come home and are quite “campsick” for a few days. Missing the friends, the independence, and the routine of camp, they find themselves “flopping about the house, and they don't want to be home,” he says. This often hurts parents' feelings. “They're very glad their child had such a good experience at camp but are a little miffed he's saying so quite so loudly.” He encourages parents to wait it out and not take it personally: This unhappy transition usually lasts only two to four days.

Along with the sadness at the end of camp may well be the

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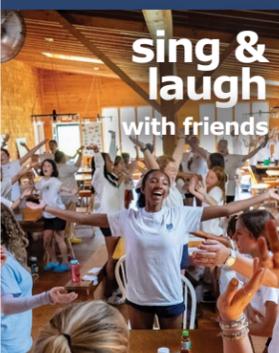
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NOT THE LAZY DAYS OF SUMMER

Experiences that build emotional development

Summer is not an intermission. It is an opportunity.

The structure of the academic year is defined. Days are scheduled, expectations are prescribed, outcomes are measured. Summer, by contrast, is open. That openness can be wasted, or it can be used with purpose. Increasingly, research and experience suggest that what children do during these months carries lasting developmental weight.

The Exchange Family Center notes that community, once assumed, is no longer a given. "Back in the day, community living was a given."

In its absence, families must be more deliberate in constructing the environments that shape their children. Summer becomes one of the clearest windows in which to do so.

The question is not whether

children should rest. They should. The question is whether rest is paired with experiences that build capacity, reinforce values, and expand independence.

Summer camps stand apart in this regard. They are not simply recreational. At their best, they are structured environments designed to accelerate development across social, emotional, and behavioral domains.

Experience as a Developmental Engine

Childhood and adolescence are defined by a series of tasks that cannot be completed through instruction alone. Research identifies three central developmental challenges:

- **Creating an identity to call their own**
- **Establishing a reasonable degree of independence from their parents**

• **Creating more durable and sustainable relationships within their peer group**

These tasks require action. They require settings in which young people can test themselves, encounter resistance, and adjust.

Erik Erikson described adolescence as "identity vs. role confusion," a period in which individuals attempt to establish continuity in who they are.

Identity is constructed through experience—through trying on roles, observing outcomes, and refining choices.

Summer provides time. Camps provide structure within that time.

Away from the routines of school and the immediate presence of home, children are required to navigate decisions with greater autonomy.

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NOT A LAZY SUMMER From Page 5

They must manage relationships without parental mediation. They must confront challenges—physical, social, and emotional—and respond.

Children recognize the effect. They often describe camp as “my second family.”

The phrase reflects a setting in which belonging is earned through participation and contribution.

The Power of “Thick” Environments

Not all summer experiences are equal. What distinguishes camps from more casual activities is their density—the degree to which they engage the whole person.

David Brooks, drawing on research by James Davidson Hunter and Ryan Olson, describes these environments as “thick” institutions.

They are characterized by:

- Physical proximity and sustained face-to-face interaction
- Shared rituals and daily routines

- Collective responsibilities and tasks
- Extended time together, often in close living quarters

These features matter. They create accountability. They remove anonymity. They require individuals to be known, and to know others, in ways that are increasingly rare.

Joe Benjamin, reflecting on his time at camp, wrote, “Living with new and different people for seven weeks is not always easy... However, there is no better way to get to know people than to live with them.”

The experience is not always comfortable. It is effective.

In these environments, young people cannot retreat easily. They must adapt. They must cooperate. They must persist.

Mentorship in Real Time

Summer camps also provide access to mentors in a concentrated form.

Counselors, coaches, and staff interact with campers throughout the day—during activities, meals, conflicts, and unstructured moments. The frequency and variety of these interactions create opportunities for

influence that are difficult to replicate elsewhere.

The process is well documented. Freud observed that identification depends on emotional connection.

Young people adopt traits from those they respect and trust. They internalize behavior through observation and repetition.

Effective camp staff contribute by:

- Encouraging exploration across activities, interests, and relationships
- Supporting independence as children adjust to time away from home
- Modeling and teaching social skills necessary for friendship and cooperation

These are not abstract goals. They are daily practices. Over time, they shape how children approach challenges and relationships.

Character Built Through Repetition

Character development is often discussed in general terms. Camps provide a setting in which it becomes specific.

The Great Schools Partnership

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

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THE IMPORTANCE of Camp

With children and adolescents battling anxiety and depression at a rate never seen before, parents and educators are searching desperately for ways to keep kids healthy and safe. Among their best strategies are spending time outdoors and making friends; getting off devices and avoiding social media; and being physically active. Summer camp, especially a multi-week, overnight experience, is a great place to do all of these. And though it can be difficult at home to break out of old habits and routines, children often thrive at summer camp. In a new environment – and a digital detox – children connect with nature, find confidence and resilience, and recharge their mental batteries.

An August 2020 Massachusetts General Hospital study identified social connection as the strongest protective factor for depression. Summer camp provides a unique environment for children to cultivate essential interpersonal skills. Campers are immersed in a diverse community where they share cabins, meals, and activities with peers from various backgrounds, ages, cultures, and perspectives. This exposure fosters empathy, understanding, and appreciation for differences. As they navigate this environment of varied personalities, they learn to adapt, communicate, and collaborate effectively. Through engagement in collective adventures—from hiking trips to late-night campfires, bonds and memories develop that transcend ordinary friendships. Whether conquering a ropes course or performing a cabin skit, they learn to rely on one another, celebrate victories, and support each other during challenges. These skills extend far beyond camp life, enriching their social interactions in school, family, and beyond.

Summer camp also serves as a powerful arena for nurturing resilience and confidence in young people. At camp, children encounter new challenges, like sleeping under the stars or attempting a new water sport. These experiences

encourage campers to step out of their comfort zones. When they take calculated risks and sometimes face setbacks, they learn that failure is a steppingstone, not an obstacle. The supportive environment allows them to dust themselves off, learn from mistakes, and try again. This resilience becomes

a life skill that helps kids overcome challenges in school, relationships, and future endeavors. Camp provides a unique opportunity for children to survive without parental safety nets. Away from home, they learn to make decisions, manage their time, and solve problems independently. This newfound autonomy boosts their self-confidence and prepares them for life beyond camp.

Finally, a summer at camp provides a refreshing escape from the digital noise and constant connectivity of our modern lives. At camp, children step away from technology and immerse themselves in nature. There is time to notice the cries of the loons, the scent of pine, and the lapping of waves. This direct communion with the natural world has a profound impact on mental health, reducing anxiety and fostering a sense of wonder and grounding. Without constant notifications or virtual comparisons, campers learn to be present in the moment, allowing their minds to recharge. They trade screens for face-to-face conversations. The absence of screens and distractions promotes mindfulness and allows campers to forge genuine connections.

Summer camp is a transformative



experience that shapes children in profound ways. It allows for growth in interpersonal skills, where campers learn to communicate, collaborate, and appreciate diversity. Through shared adventures and calculated risks, campers build resilience; learning that perseverance, not praise, is the achievement. Moreover, camp provides a screen-free environment, allowing kids to connect with nature, reduce anxiety, and recharge their mental health. Many residential summer camps are multi-year allowing lessons learned to be internalized and transferable to situations and experiences in the months outside of camp. Summer camp isn't just about fun; it equips children with essential life skills, confidence, and a deeper appreciation for the world around them and in today's climate, that is more important than ever.

Karen Malm is Director of Programs, Alumni Relations and Council Operations, and Assistant Camp Director at Camp Agawam





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July 20-31

Key Learning Themes

- Public Speaking & Communication
- SSAT Prep & Academic Skill Building
- Outdoor & Experiential Learning
- STEM Innovation & Design Thinking



NOT A LAZY SUMMER From Page 7

identifies a set of traits associated with growth:

Curiosity — Eager to learn, asks questions, shows interest

Gratitude — Recognizes and expresses appreciation

Grit — Persists through difficulty

Optimism — Reflects on setbacks and continues effort

Self-control — Regulates behavior and emotions

Social intelligence — Navigates relationships and resolves conflict

Zest — Engages with energy and enthusiasm

These traits are practiced. A camper persists through a difficult hike. A group resolves a conflict in a cabin. A child learns to wait, to listen, to contribute. Each instance is small. The accumulation is not.

Angela Duckworth noted that “Thick

cultures are the crucible of character.”

Camps, by design, create such cultures. They combine expectation, repetition, and feedback in a way that produces measurable change.

Emotional intelligence develops alongside these traits. Posie Taylor describes it as central to long-term success, emphasizing skills such as empathy, cooperation, and self-awareness.

These are learned through interaction—through living with others, navigating conflict, and sharing responsibility.

Independence, Tested

One of the defining features of summer camp is separation from home. This separation is not incidental. It is developmental.

Children must manage daily routines without direct parental oversight. They must make decisions, experience consequences, and seek help when needed. They begin to understand themselves as capable actors.

James Marcia’s work suggests that identity development accelerates when

young people are forced to consider who they must become to meet real demands.

Camp provides those demands in a contained environment.

The result is not independence from family, but independence within it—a growing capacity to contribute, to decide, and to take responsibility.

A Finite Window

Summer is limited. Its impact, however, is not.

The absence of structure can produce drift. The presence of intentional experience can produce growth. Camps offer one of the most consistent and research-supported models for that growth—combining mentorship, community, and challenge within a defined period.

They do not replace the work of the family. They extend it.

The months of summer, used well, provide something the rest of the year cannot: uninterrupted time in which young people can step outside familiar roles, test new capacities, and return with a clearer sense of who they are and what they can do.

RE-ENTRY From Page 3

realization that summer is coming to a close and the school year is looming, adds Meyer-Wartels. And if the child is coming home to a stressful family situation, that's going to show up, too. She says it's very common for campsick kids to become obsessed with maintaining their camp friendships, spending large chunks of time online posting photos, chatting, and FaceTiming. This isn't necessarily bad; technology can be a blessing for kids who don't have many—or any—friends at home. They've forged strong bonds, perhaps for the first time. Parents can try to arrange play dates and get-togethers, but when this is a geographic impossibility, the Web can be a beautiful thing.

While making this transition back to life at home is emotional and can be tough, we try to look at it as a gift. How lucky our campers are to be part of a community that affects them so deeply - no

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RE-ENTRY From Page 12

matter what their emotions when they head home, we hope that each camper leaves ALC feeling thankful for her time at camp, thankful for the friends she has made here, thankful for all she has accomplished and how she has grown. How we hope that they will stay connected with one another - not only online, but by continuing the letter writing habits developed at camp.

Over the years, we have found that many campers will share lots of stories in the days after they return home, but that camp stories will also appear throughout the year - often when something happens that reminds them of something at camp. How awesome!

We thought it might be helpful to offer some questions you may want to ask your camper in the upcoming days and weeks as she reenters life at home. She may share stories readily, but it may also take some coaxing to get a full sense of what her experience has been. Things we hope she is thinking about include:

Which activities did you enjoy the most? What happened that made them significant to your summer?

Who were your good friends this summer? What do you like about those friends?

How might you stay in touch with them this winter?

What were some funny things that happened at camp this summer?

What was challenging for you at camp? How did you handle these challenges?

What made you proud this summer? What did you accomplish that you did not expect to do?

Whether or not your camper comes home excited and enthusiastic about all she accomplished, sad that summer is over and camp had to end, or some combination of both, we hope that you will see change and growth in her. Not only has she enjoyed all of the joy and fun at camp, she has also learned to navigate more difficult moments - things are not always perfect at camp: we all make mistakes and experience hard feelings, and at camp, we are lucky to have the time to work through these challenges. These

challenging moments are also important lessons that develop our character. We hope that the confidence gained through all of her experiences at camp will shine through at home, and that the lessons learned here at ALC will carry her into her new adventures this school year. We are so thankful for each and every camper, and we hope they continue to carry all of our discussions about being a good citizen, good friend, and a kind and thoughtful person who has the ability to make a difference each and every day.



Whitney Ryan

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Questions? Email: merrowvistacamps@ayf.com



Session A:
June 28- July 17
Session B:
July 19- August 7
SUMMER 2026 DATES

A CALL TO ONE'S BEST

On my morning commute up into the Ossipee Mountains of New Hampshire, I measure my progress with landmarks. The Maine/New Hampshire state border greets me, and I know I am 26 minutes from site. I reach the western terminus of State Highway 25 - only 15 minutes to go. With eight minutes remaining, I crest a hill, and a striking view of the White Mountains and a beautiful red barn meet my gaze.

At four minutes out, my last landmark is Camp Hill, known by locals as the place where cell service drops, but better known by our campers as the entry point into the magical world of Merrowvista. At the bottom of the hill, pavement transitions to dirt, and forests become wide open fields with meandering streams. The Ossipees rise mightily in every direction, encircling our camp community. Everything in the valley is caught in the middle of an embrace between earth and sky. This is our camp home.

The landscape, however, is not the real magic of Merrowvista. It is just the canvas upon which our campers tell their stories, unfettered by the noise of the outside world. The true magic of Merrowvista can be reduced to 10 words written on three small signs our campers pass at the camp's entrance: My Own Self, At My Very Best, All The Time. This is the

motto of Merrowvista and of the American Youth Foundation, which has remained the same for over 100 years. The call to one's best underpins everything we do, and year after year, our campers respond to this call with the same power and might of mountains rising towards the sky.

Merrowvista is an "everything" camp. Our summer programs are intentionally designed to

and the world. At Merrowvista, we cultivate an environment where your child feels safe and supported to take healthy risks in alignment with their age and experience - free from the distraction of technology - so they may know confidence, agency, and joy.

For our youngest campers, this might simply be the act of leaving home and discovering a new

journey and summiting Mt. Katahdin, they always return to us standing a little bit taller (and a whole lot muddier!).

Pursuing one's "best" does not mean being rigid, uncompromising, or perfect. It means meeting each day with an openness to what is possible. It means assuming the best of each other while we learn and grow, and treating each other with respect. It means approaching conflict with shared understanding that our community is composed of individuals striving towards their best. Knowing this, difficult conversations are much easier and more productive, and meaningful resolution is routine.

The Merrowvista magic ebbs and flows with the season but is always there. In this season it is the quiet flicker of a flame because our campers are away burning brightly in their home communities. I can only imagine the stories they will write this summer in the company of leaders and friends, ablaze in pursuit of their own, best self.

I dare you to join the Merrowvista community and help your child embrace the timeless call to their best.

I am your partner in this journey and am available to answer any questions you may have.

Madelyn Cook, Ph.D., Camp Director, Merrowvista



Madelyn Cook, Ph.D., Camp Director, Merrowvista

help young people discover their capacities and provide opportunities for growth. We are in the business of healthy dares: daring our campers to try new things, to make a new friend, and to discover not what it means to be the best, but what it means to be their best.

When we do an activity for the first time, we step out of our comfort zone and into our growth zone. When our campers persist and prevail through a challenge, they experience a sense of empowerment that transforms the way they view themselves

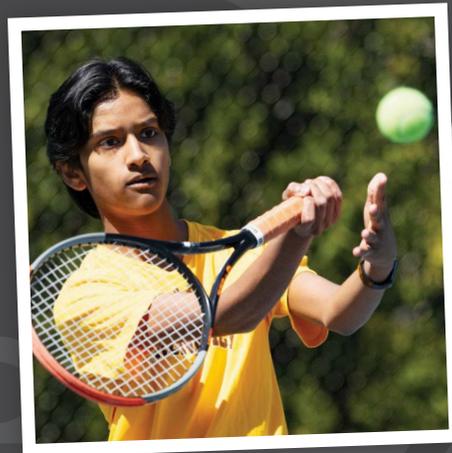
place with new people, or trying an activity like sailing, archery, or high ropes for the first time. For our middle school-aged campers, this could be participating in an overnight backpacking trip to the Ledge, our beautiful mountain lookout, or participating in Vista Views, our camper-run newspaper. For our oldest campers, this might look like embarking on a 16-day backpacking trip and hiking the 100-Mile Wilderness on the Appalachian Trail. These are our Odyssey campers, and they are rising seniors

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SUMMER 2026

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