

SUMMERS THEY WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER



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SUMMERTIME 2026



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“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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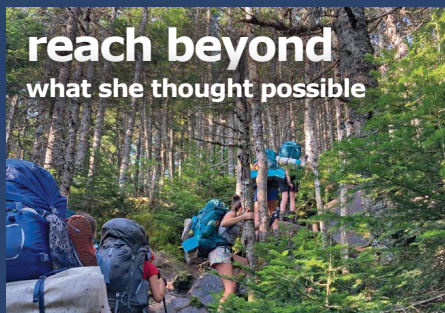
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NOT THE LAZY DAYS OF SUMMER

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.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



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Ridgefield Academy | Landmark Preschool

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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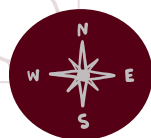
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CAMP as a Countermeasure to Rising Youth Anxiety and Depression

Children and adolescents are experiencing anxiety and depression at levels that have drawn sustained concern from clinicians, educators, and policymakers. In response, families are searching for environments that provide not only safety, but formation—places where young people can develop habits and relationships that support long-term mental health. Research points consistently toward several protective factors: strong social connection, engagement in structured activities, physical movement, and reduced exposure to digital stressors. Summer camp, particularly the traditional multi-week residential model, brings these elements together in a single setting.

The importance of social connection is well established in current research. Data drawn from the National Survey of Children's Health show that adolescents with strong peer relationships, consistent family communication, and participation in extracurricular activities report significantly lower rates of depression, according to a study published in *Current Psychology*. That same body of research emphasizes that isolation and disengagement are among the strongest correlates of poor mental health outcomes. A broader review published in *The BMJ* reinforces this conclusion, stating that "connections with family, peers, and community have a critical effect on development," and are central to emotional stability and resilience.

Summer camp provides a setting where these connections are not incidental but required. Campers share living quarters, meals, and daily responsibilities with peers from different regions, backgrounds, and perspectives. These conditions demand cooperation and communication. A child must learn to listen, to compromise, and to contribute to the group. These are not abstract virtues; they are practiced daily. Whether working through a disagreement in a cabin or collaborating on a group activity, campers develop interpersonal skills that extend beyond the camp environment.

Shared experiences reinforce these bonds. Activities such as hiking, team sports, and group performances require collective effort. Success is rarely individual; it depends on coordination and trust. Through these experiences, children learn to rely on others and to be reliable

themselves. These lessons, formed through repetition and necessity, shape how young people engage in school, family life, and future workplaces.

Camp also introduces measured challenges that foster resilience. A growing body of research identifies resilience as a critical buffer against mental health difficulties. A 2021 review published through the National Institutes of Health found that higher levels of resilience are consistently associated with fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression in children and adolescents, even when they face significant stress. Importantly, resilience is not fixed. It is developed through exposure to manageable difficulty in supportive environments.

At camp, such challenges are routine. A child may attempt a new physical activity, navigate unfamiliar social dynamics, or spend time away from home for the first time. These experiences require adaptation. Failure, when it occurs, is not final but instructive. A camper who struggles with a skill or falls short in competition is encouraged to try again. This process—effort, setback, adjustment, and renewed effort—builds confidence grounded in persistence rather than praise.

Independence is another central feature of the camp experience. Removed from immediate parental oversight, children are required to make decisions, manage time, and resolve minor conflicts on their own. This autonomy contributes directly to self-confidence. Research on adolescent development consistently finds that opportunities for independent problem-solving are associated with stronger emotional regulation and decision-making skills. Camp provides these opportunities in a structured setting, where guidance is present but not intrusive.

Equally significant is the removal of digital distractions. Many camps enforce strict limits on device use, creating an environment that contrasts sharply with daily life. The constant notifications and comparisons associated with social media have been linked to increased anxiety and reduced attention among adolescents. By eliminating these inputs, camp alters the pace and quality of experience.

In their place, the natural environment becomes central. Campers spend extended periods outdoors, engaging directly with their surroundings. Public health research

has increasingly linked time in nature with reduced stress and improved mental well-being. The absence of screens also changes the nature of interaction. Conversations occur face-to-face, without mediation or interruption. Attention is sustained rather than fragmented.

This shift promotes what researchers describe as mindfulness—the ability to remain present and engaged. Without digital interruption, children are more likely to observe, reflect, and participate fully in activities. These habits contribute to emotional regulation and a sense of stability that carries beyond the camp setting.

The structure of many residential camps reinforces these benefits over time. Programs often extend across multiple summers, allowing lessons to be repeated and internalized. Skills developed in one season—cooperation, persistence, independence—are revisited and strengthened in subsequent years. This continuity increases the likelihood that these behaviors will persist outside the camp environment.

Summer camp does not operate as an isolated intervention, but as part of a broader framework of healthy development. Research on the social determinants of mental health emphasizes the role of stable relationships, supportive communities, and safe environments in reducing the risk of depression, according to studies examining adolescent well-being through a social-ecological model. Camp aligns with these conditions by providing structure, supervision, and community engagement in a setting removed from many of the pressures of daily life.

The case for summer camp rests on evidence as well as experience. It offers sustained social connection, structured challenge, opportunities for independence, and relief from digital saturation. Each of these elements corresponds with established protective factors in adolescent mental health research. Together, they form an environment in which children are not only occupied, but formed—equipped with habits and capacities that support long-term well-being.



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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.



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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

Summer Session & Sports Camps

SUMMER 2026

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