



Summer Camps

Summer camps can be a great way for children to learn new skills, socialize and explore. In contrast to the demands of the academic school year, camps can offer valuable active play experiences, as well as opportunities to build confidence, leadership, and connect with nature. For some children who attend school or daycare, this may seem like a seamless transition, but for some families, camp may be a new experience entirely. The following guide is intended to serve as an overview of topics related to summer camps. If you would like assistance finding camp options for your family, please contact CMU's [Family Care Concierge Service](#).

Timeframe

Summer camps typically operate from June to August, during the months when public school districts are usually closed. Spaces are limited in these camps, so we recommend beginning your search in February to secure your child or children a space in the camp of your choice.

Duration

Some camps require registration for the entire summer, but it is more common that camps will allow you to register just for the weeks you want while planning different programming week by week. This makes it possible to mix and match camps. Some camps also run hours shorter than a typical work day. It is important to take note of the operating hours to ensure you have the transportation and care needs of your children covered. *Please note that most summer camps do not provide transportation for campers.*

Cost

It is common for summer camps to charge by the week. The rates for most day camps in the Pittsburgh area will be between \$140 and \$340 per week; however, specialty camps can be more expensive. The cost of camp can be burdensome for some families, especially if tuition is paid in advance. Some families choose to use a [Dependent Care Reimbursement Account](#) to set aside funds for summer camp, although not all camps are eligible.

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Health and Safety

The CDC offers some [considerations](#) for comparing the health and safety practices of different summer camp programs. Summer camps in Pennsylvania are generally exempt from child care licensing by the Department of Human Services if the program does not offer year round, full day child care. Camps which offer outdoor living experiences for longer than five consecutive days are regulated by the Department of Health. If you have questions about the health and safety practices for a camp, it is best to contact the director of the program. The American Camp Association also outlines some [topics to consider](#) when looking at camps, in addition to questions to ask camp staff, which may be helpful when contacting a director.

Types of Camp Models

Virtual — Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, summer camp programming provided in an online environment has increased in popularity. These camps can provide engaging learning experiences and opportunities for socialization that children can access from the safety of their homes.

Sleep Away — These camps can be a great way to allow children to learn independence and take time away from technology to enjoy nature. There is no best age for sleep away camp; it depends on your child's maturity and how secure their attachments are. You know your child best and are the person best able to decide if they are ready for an experience like this. The length of the camp can make a difference as well. Is it a few days, or a few weeks? Which experience would benefit your child the most?

Day Camps — Day camps can range in programming, with certain camps providing a sort of extension of after care programs and others providing unique themed experiences concentrated on specific learning goals. These camps typically offer care during work hours and are the most common type of summer camp that parents select.

Camp Themes and Topics

Some examples of specific themes for camps are listed below.

- Sports — soccer, football, martial arts, tennis, basketball, gymnastics, and more
- Academic Topics — writing, STEM, robotics, architecture, science, etc.
- The Arts — theater, fine arts, music, dance, animation, cinematography, photography
- Religious — camps that reinforce the values of specific religions and teach about their culture and history
- Nature/scouting — public parks, sleep away camps, girl scouts and boy scouts
- Special Needs — intended to provide enriching experiences while providing additional support and programming to support children with additional needs

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