

Robotics And Beyond...

Inspiring young minds in STEM and design

April, 2017

Over fourteen years of providing summer camps, we have identified a number of factors that parents and campers should consider in choosing a summer program, regardless of the theme of the camp. Some factors are obvious and others not so obvious: the topics offered; camp structure; suitability for campers with special needs; timing; cost and financial assistance options; and camper safety.

Topics offered and instructors:

Do the topics fit the child's personal interests well enough? If not then camp can be a very disappointing experience for the child, difficult on instructors and poor use of your money. Often, a child may need to be pushed to attend a camp but as long as there is enough interest it can be a very successful experience.

Are multiple Topics offered or is it a highly focused camp with one topic for an entire week or one topic per day? If the camp is highly focused then it is even more important that your child has high personal interest and the level of knowledge needed for that topic and Group. Too many children end up in an intensive class that remains ahead totally beyond their ability. If intensive, is it guaranteed to remain true to the description? Or, if enough campers are incapable of the materials, is the camp at risk of being greatly simplified such that it is a waste to those students who are up to the level? Younger campers or those new to the general theme of a camp are usually best suited to a camp offering exposure to a variety of topics.

Is there an opportunity for campers to try something they noticed others doing but did not sign up for? Can individual or group time be provided for personal interests after camp hours or on the final day of the week?

If multiple weeks will be spent at the same camp, is enough variety or depth of topic available to keep the camper's interest level high and the material meaningful?

Who are the instructors and assistants, and what is their qualification and experience as instructors of young people? Peer-instructors and mentors (middle school, high school and college students) are often ideal as long as they have the experience needed and the topic material is of good quality.

A ratio of campers to activity leaders and assistants of 6 or less is ideal but can be higher for older highly motivated and skilled campers.

Camp structure:

Are campers separated into fairly narrow age ranges for topics or is there a high degree of age integration? A broad age range has many benefits as long as the topic material is appropriate for the entire group.

Are topics held in individual rooms such that little visibility of other topics is possible, or are topics integrated into a large, more open area? There is great value in campers being able to see a wide range of activities. Camps involving outdoor activities and crafts are a great example. Robotics And Beyond has a similar approach where all topics are in a 6500 square foot school library with many designated areas for various topics at a given time.

Suitability for campers with different learning needs:

Any camper with special learning needs, or behavior styles, needs an environment that embraces and can serve those needs. Young people with traits consistent with Autism, Asperger's, Down's or Tourette's syndrome, OCD, ADHD, and others often have wonderful talents in certain areas that finally find an outlet in the proper environment. Be sure to ask the camp director about their ability and experience in working with such individuals.

Camp timing:

Do you want sleep-over or day camp?

If a day camp, what hours do you need and is there an option for early drop-off or late pickup?

Is there any help for identifying car pooling options with other campers?

Cost and financial assistance:

Far too many young people never get the opportunity to attend high quality, educational summer programs due to cost. In western CT alone there are many 1000's of youngsters who have no chance of exploring new areas or developing their talents in the many great summer programs offered.

However, there are many good sources of help.

NEW THIS YEAR! United Way of Western CT has created a program providing funds to many towns just for out-of-school enrichment programs. For more information and where to call in the nine western CT towns served by this program, see this site:

<https://www.uwwesternct.org/aliceenrichmentfund>

Parents in other towns can call their own United Way representative or town social services office and ask about the “United Way ALICE Enrichment Fund” and other sources of financial help for summer camps.

Many camps have some amount of aid to offer if applied for so ASK! Applications may require very little information or may ask for your latest tax return plus a personal summary of your need.

Most towns have at least one organization like Lions Club, PTO or town government office that has a budget to help with summer camp costs.

What is the policy about deposits and cancellation fees? Do not expect the refund of a deposit if you cancel within 2-3 weeks of the start of a camp week. If your space can easily be filled then you might be offered a partial refund of a deposit but significant time has already been spent on your child’s attendance.

Camp safety:

All camps registered and licensed with the State of Connecticut must have certain medical response personnel on-site and other safeguards in place. Camps are not required to obtain this license and many camps that are all or mainly in-doors or academically oriented do not pursue this license. However, all camps should have personnel on-site with training in basic first aid, CPR, choking, allergy response medication, etc.

All camps need procedures for monitoring campers exit of the main instruction area such as for bathroom use.

There are other important factors to consider but we hope this helps your child to have a successful and rewarding experience in a summer camp this year!

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