

Camp Readiness: Conrad Overnight Camp at Mystic Seaport Museum

MYSTIC SEAPORT MUSEUM



How do you know if your child is ready for overnight camp? As every parent knows, each child is different but there are some foundational pieces that will help ensure that your child has the best possible experience at overnight summer camp. Talk with your child, assess the list and make a decision together about the best time to start camp. If you start the conversation early enough, you have a whole school year to work together marking things off the list.

- ✓ Are YOU ready for your child to be gone for 5 straight days, and nights? If you're reluctant or nervous, your camper will pick up on it and they will also be reluctant and nervous.

Tip: Don't send your child to camp until you're ready. Do your research: email the camp director, ask all your questions. Conrad camp is technology free and doesn't allow parents to call and talk to their campers during the week. If you can't go 5 days without checking in with your child, Conrad Camp is not for you.

- ✓ Involve your child with camp selection! Talk about going to camp with your child. If they're asking to go to camp you know they're ready. Look at information about the camp together.

Tip: Don't try to talk your child into going to camp. Talking into, begging, and negotiating are not recommended. Also, don't surprise them with camp if they haven't already been talking about wanting to go to camp. If they're a little worried about being away from home, going to camp with a good friend or family member might ease that worry.

Tip: Make sure your child knows what to expect at camp: especially that Conrad Camp is a sailing camp, they'll be sleeping on a ship, it is technology free, and there is no option to call home every night.

- ✓ Can your child get dressed, brush teeth and hair independently and show some independence during daily routines? At summer camp, and especially sleepaway camp, your child must be independent enough to do things like brush their teeth, shower, dress themselves, put sunscreen on, and clean up after themselves.

Tip: if your child is not independent, start working with them now to get them to become independent. Camp counselors and CITs will remind campers about their personal hygiene, but it's most important that they already know how to do this.

- ✓ Your child has spent at least one night away from home.

Tip: if your child has never slept away from home please don't make a week long camp their first experience. Have a sleepover at a trusted relative or friend's house and see how they react. If you have to pick them up early or if they complain the entire following day about not seeing you last night. They may not be ready for a week long overnight camp.

Tip: Involve your camper in packing their own bag for camp. Make sure to pack some comfort items from home like a stuffed animal or favorite book. (Sneak in a few photos of the family and

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a note for them to find). DON'T pack priceless/irreplaceable mementos: your child will be worried the whole time about losing or damaging them.

- ✓ Your child is comfortable verbalizing concerns or needs to adults. If an issue comes up, it's best if your child knows how to ask an adult at camp for help. We're here to help your child have the absolute best camp experience!

Tip: Have a conversation with your child about speaking up and talking to our counselors and instructors if they need anything. Talk with your child about specific scenarios and how to handle them. What if they're feeling sick or have a headache? What if another camper is being mean? What if they forgot to pack toothpaste and need to borrow some?

- ✓ Your child is comfortable sharing and cohabitating with other children.

Tip: Before heading off to camp, get them ready to room share by teaching them to respect others' space and the importance of keeping their belongings organized in their own space. Explain to your child how to talk to another camper if they have a disagreement with them. These are all great things that camp teaches children; if they have some expectation of how to navigate shared spaces and peer interactions before camp, it will be a more successful week for them.

- ✓ Your child is comfortable expressing and controlling emotions.

Tip: This one is hard. We don't expect perfection, camp can be overwhelming at times, but you should prepare your camper to expect a range of emotions at camp. Everyone has good days and bad days, and learning to cope with them is part of the experience. Teach your child a couple small coping mechanisms to get through feelings of anger or frustration: deep breaths, large sip of water, etc.

- ✓ Your child is a fairly easy eater (excluding dietary needs/allergies which will be accommodated). Meals at Conrad Camp are catered by an outside company – making a specific meal for each individual child is not an option. Other than giving campers additional snack items there's not a lot our camp staff can do if your child refuses to eat at meal time.

Tip: If you have a child that won't eat anything at all but french fries and chicken nuggets, camp is going to be a challenge. If food is still in the bargaining stage, give it another year and keep pushing food variety. You can even use camp as a motivating force: "You need to learn to eat something besides chicken nuggets if you want to go to camp next summer. I really think you should try the chicken casserole I just made for dinner."

- ✓ Your child is confident when trying new things. Going to summer camp or sleepaway camp is an opportunity to experience new things, make new friends, and adapt to new surroundings. Think about your child's previous experiences with meeting unfamiliar children, meeting new teachers, or exploring new classrooms. Were they excited, or were they upset and tried to avoid the situation? Going to camp can help nudge your child out of their comfort zone, but it's best that they welcome new things and activities with open arms, at least for the most part.

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Tip: Conrad Camp is primarily a sailing camp. If your child is terrified of water, they are not ready for this camp. Get them used to the water by bringing them to the beach or a swimming pool to have positive experiences around water before signing them up. While being a strong swimmer is not required for sailing camp, if your child is not comfortable swimming/being in the water it could cause some anxiety around being in boats. You can sign them up for a swim class or work with them on their swimming skills so that they feel more confident.

- ✓ Your child takes direction well. Camp life is filled with schedules, planned activities, changes in plans, and rules. Does your child follow instructions well? Do they listen, remember directions and follow through on what they're told?

Tip: If your child still has tantrums when they're told what to do, they may not be ready yet. While children are not expected to act perfect at camp, many camp rules are designed for child safety. When they're not followed, the consequences can be disastrous. Your child should be willing to follow instructions given by adults, whether that's going to bed at a certain time, moving on to a new activity, or remembering to do something for safety's sake.

Tip: If your child does have trouble with these things, camp is a great place for them to work on these skills. Please let our staff know so that we can give them some extra help!