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**Comfort Play  
& Teach:**

A Positive Approach to Parenting™

**Every Day**

## Invest in Kids® Guide to Selecting a Camp or Recreation Program for your Child

### A Comfort, Play & Teach® Checklist for Parents

Going to camp or attending recreation programs can be a fun, safe way for young children to have new experiences, to develop skills and to make friends. Usually around age five or six, children show more signs of readiness for participating in such organized programs. There are many things for you to consider when selecting an appropriate camp or recreation program for your child. Include your child in the decision-making process and try these **Comfort, Play & Teach®** tips from Invest in Kids. You just may find that you're better able to select a program that meets your needs as well as the needs of your child.

**Comfort** is the first thing that children need from a parent. By using these comfort tips, your child will know that you care about what's important to her and will feel secure, loved and valued. **Play** is the work of children. These play tips will help you find a program where your child will learn to explore and discover the world and his role in it. **Teaching** is how parents help their children learn. These teach tips will give you a chance to model, share and include your child in experiences that will expand her knowledge, help her learn how to think, solve problems and get along with others.

#### When selecting a program:



### Comfort

- **Keep your child's interests in mind when selecting a program.** Your child may need a chance to try a few different programs (e.g., art, dance, team sports) before finding the one that he really likes. Be patient during this process. Consider a program that will expose him to more than one activity, like a sports camp where a variety of sports is played.

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**Comfort Play & Teach™** activities



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- **Consider your child's temperament.** If your child is quiet and needs extra time to explore, a "fast-paced" program might be overwhelming. A more active child who enjoys change might be bored in a program too focused on one activity. Try to find the best match between what the program offers and what you know about your child.
- **When selecting a program, meet the leader or other staff, and make sure that the environment is safe.** Before you enroll your child, watch the program in action – and keep doing so even after she has joined – to be sure the program is a good fit for her needs and interests.



### Play

- **Explore a number of programs, to find one that will be a good fit for your child.** In addition to asking friends whose children have attended camps and recreation programs, you should also collect brochures, check the newspapers and research online to find out about programs you might want to explore further. The choices may include arts and crafts, sports, music, drama, dance, discovering nature, etc.



### Teach

- **Talk to your child about what a camp or recreation program is and what goes on there.** Has your child had prior experience in a group program such as daycare or a drop-in centre? Discussing a new experience like attending camp will be easier if your child can relate this idea to something he is familiar with. Talk about some of the experiences he might have and all the friends he will meet or make to build his comfort level with the idea of participating in a new program.

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- **Ask if the program reflects the diversity of your community.** Are there instructors who speak different languages? Do snacks and meals reflect different cultures? Are activities tailored to include children with physical or intellectual challenges? Find out if the program you are considering reflects the uniqueness of your child and your family.

When you are ready to enroll your child in a program:



### Comfort

- **Ask about the policies around observing and visiting your child.** Are parents encouraged to drop in and participate in the program? Is there an observation window where you can watch your child? It is important that you feel comfortable with the program's policies and reassured that your child is having a great time.
- **Find out what training (if any) the program's leaders have.** In the early years, children are learning values and social skills as well as doing activities, so parents need to make sure those working with their children have enough experience and prior knowledge to provide a well-rounded learning experience, and will model the behaviours your family values.



### Play

- **Discuss with the leader what your options are if your child doesn't enjoy the program once enrolled.** If a problem is identified later on but can't be solved, you may decide to try a different program. It's important to know what your options are after enrollment. Will you get a partial refund or will you lose all of your fees? In general, it's a good idea to have your child try a variety of programs in the early years, instead of specializing too soon. Avoid placing your child in so many programs at once that she begins to feel stressed, or has no time left to relax or play with friends in an unstructured environment.

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### Teach

- **Ask what measures are taken to protect your child.** Inquire about the level of supervision at every point during the day (e.g., arrival by bus, throughout the planned activities, lunch and group play). For day camps with pools or access to a lake, you want to be sure there are enough adults present for each group of swimmers.
- **Find out what considerations have been made for preschoolers with regards to washroom routines.** For example, are the bathrooms in view of the leaders or care providers? Are visits to the bathroom monitored (e.g., in case a child needs assistance with hand washing)? What is the policy for a child who may not be fully toilet trained?
- **Tell the leader if your child has any special needs, such as an allergy.** If the program provides lunch or snacks, they must know about any food restrictions. If your child needs allergy medication or uses an EpiPen®, make sure that you provide the instructor with appropriate medical documentation.

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