

CAMPER READINESS

By Rachael Abrams, LCSW-C, CT
and Orlee Krass, MS Ed

We hope that the following camper readiness milestones, and general camp information, will help your child better understand the structure of the camp day and practice skills to prepare for a successful summer.

PROBLEM SOLVING AND INDEPENDENCE

Overnight camp provides a developmental opportunity to promote independence and problem solving skills. Begin fostering these skills by looking for increased opportunities for your child to practice independence leading up to camp.

- ❑ Help create systems for keeping track of belongings and develop a plan for finding lost items.
- ❑ Encourage children to look for missing items (book, swearshirt etc.) themselves rather than swooping in to find it for them.
- ❑ Prompt kids to create a process, rather than offering them a solution.
- ❑ Encourage kids to exert independence across different areas (i.e. preparing snacks, organizing school belongings, taking care of a pet, making age appropriate decisions.)

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS

Camp involves a variety of executive functioning skills. Here are a few to work on before your child arrives at camp:

- ❑ Practice completing tasks from start to finish and avoid distraction (i.e. daily care, upkeep of space, tracking belongings.)
- ❑ Practice mental flexibility regarding the ability to handle a changed schedule, not getting your way or participating in an activity, even when it's not your favorite.
- ❑ Assign small, daily chores for your child to help them prepare for daily *nikayon* (cleaning.) Tasks can include: tidying living space, making bed, changing sheets, returning things where they belong, picking up personal belongings from around the house, wiping down tables/sinks after use, hanging up wet towels and taking out the garbage.

COMMUNAL LIVING AND SHARED SPACE

Help children understand what it means to share space with others and the importance of compromising. Use different examples from your own family.

- ❑ What might they enjoy? What might be new? What might bother them? What is their role in making the experience enjoyable for others? What behaviors should they engage in to be respectful of others?
- ❑ Practice social interactions with other children and process these experiences together.
- ❑ Help children identify an independent, quiet activity (reading, puzzles, drawing etc.) to do during down time or when they need a moment away.
- ❑ Help children practice self advocating for their needs. Remind them that they can always ask for help anytime they need assistance.

THE OVERNIGHT CAMP DAY

The day at overnight camp is longer than a day at day camp. At 4pm, campers still have afternoon activities, showertime, dinner and evening activity. Help children understand that they might be tired the first few days but will adjust to this schedule. Consider what specifically your child needs to practice to manage a longer day.

MORNING ROUTINE

Each morning, *madrachim* (counselors) wake up *chanichim* in a gentle way. At this time, *chanichim* are expected to get out of bed, wash up/brush teeth, put away pajamas (either in laundry or in a place to wear again) and get themselves dressed. If you child struggles to wake up in the morning, practice what morning wake up will consist of at camp.

NIGHTTIME ROUTINE

After evening activity, *chanichim* return to the bunk to wash up/brush teeth and get into bed. At camp we have *hashkavah*, a night time ritual that helps campers to wind down and prepare for bed. It might include *madrachim* reading a story, singing a song or inviting in a special guest. After the *shemah*, *chanichim* may have a few minutes of quiet flashlight time to read or talk together. A bathroom/closet light is left on and there may be light noise while campers wind down for the night. If your child has trouble falling asleep, help them identify and practice some useful strategies.

PERSONAL CARE

Have children practice an **independent** daily self care routine that they can continue at camp.

- Brush teeth twice daily
- Shower daily (practice taking an efficient shower that includes washing/conditioning hair and fully removing the soap, washing face and washing full body in a short amount of time.)
- Brush/comb/style hair
- Clip nails
- Apply sunscreen
- Thorough, frequent and routine handwashing (for at least 30 seconds!)

LAUNDRY AND CLOTHING

Help children practice caring for, tracking and organizing their clothing.

- Chanichim* (campers) have cubby space (approximately 3, plus closet storage) to store their belongings. Consider an organizational system that works for your child. (Packing cubes or small baskets are helpful to contain items.)
- Practice placing dirty laundry in a drawstring laundry bag. (Try hanging it off of a doorknob as the bag will likely be placed on their bunk bed in a similar way.)
- Practice folding and putting away laundry.
- Remind children that certain items (sweatshirts, etc.) can be worn a few times before washing.
- Pack with your children: *Chanichim* should recognize their own clothing so that they can collect their belongings from the laundry each week. (Laundry is washed by bunk each week and separated together.)

TECHNOLOGY DETOX

In light of the pandemic, screentime use for children over the past year has increased significantly.

- Explain to children that no personal screens/devices are allowed at camp, aside from screenless MP3 players, (our campers tell us how much they value this screen break!) and help them understand what this means for them.
- In the weeks leading up to camp, decrease screen time in order to prepare for a screen free summer.
- If your child decides to bring a screenless MP3 player to camp, ensure that they practice using this at home.

EATING MEALS AT CAMP

Meals are eaten by bunk and are shared together as a community. Help children understand what it means to eat together with other children (similar to a larger family) and how to exhibit appropriate and respectful table manners. A variety of foods are served at each meal. Have children practice eating what is served at each meal AND remind them that they should always ask for help if they are having trouble finding something to eat.

T'FILLOT

T'fillot (daily prayers) are a part of our daily community culture at Ramah Poconos. *T'fillot* take place in a variety of settings and formats and are designed to engage and teach campers at any level. *Chanichim* should come to camp understanding this component of our program and recognize that participation is always encouraged, regardless of level of familiarity. *Chanichim* should know that there may be moments where they do not feel like actively participating AND are still expected to be respectful and remain together with their peers.