



1:00 pm  
Currently:  
74

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## Summer camp helps youth battle 'nature deficit disorder'

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(ARA) - With a growing number of researchers reporting that millions of children suffer from a lack of outdoor exposure and play, summer break can increase parents' concerns about children spending beautiful days in front of the television, computer or gaming station.

Even in today's challenging economy, savvy parents counter concerns by investing in kids' futures through summer camp experiences -- a safe and nurturing place that fosters healthy open-air recreation, while building important life skills.



"Children are simply happier and healthier when they have frequent and varied opportunities for experiences in the out-of-doors," says Richard Louv, author of "Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder" and chairman of the Children & Nature Network, in a recent American Camp Association (ACA) article. "Free play in natural areas enhances children's cognitive flexibility, problem-solving ability, creativity, self-esteem and self-discipline."

ACA reports camp provides the right setting for building self-confidence, social comfort, peer relationships, environmental awareness and a deeper sense of values. "Overnight" camps result in even higher levels of success in fostering relationships and building life skills.

"My camp experience taught me new skills, gave me a sense of accomplishment and created lasting relationships nationwide," says Steve Coke of Dallas, former camper and counselor at Camp Lincoln/Camp Lake Hubert in Minnesota's Lake Country which will celebrate its 100th anniversary with alumni on Labor Day Weekend. "I have vivid memories of sailing beautiful waters, observing wildlife on canoe trips and riding horses in the forest of towering trees, teaching life lessons that made me what I am today."

Along with the benefits of supervised, outdoor recreation and play, there are other reasons to consider camp as an important part of youth development:

- \* Build self-esteem -- Studies show self-esteem comes from feeling competent and having successful experiences, and youth report significant increases after attending camp.
- \* Learn life skills -- Camps provide fun and positive ways to define and cultivate life skills, whether learning patience through archery, building confidence by zip lining or working as a team playing water polo.
- \* Get kids outdoors -- Summer camp teaches youth to be "more green" by connecting campers with their outdoor surroundings and opening awareness for our planet. The Children & Nature Network, an organization that is dedicated to help children experience nature's joys and lessons, supports summer camps as a way to connect children with nature.
- \* Build leadership skills -- Camps play a critical role in fostering leadership skills by giving young people responsibilities unavailable in other settings, such as self-selecting activities, maintaining camp areas and mentoring younger campers.
- \* Push comfort zones -- Trying new challenges is the key to building self-confidence, and ACA research shows 75 percent of campers push themselves to learn new things at camp. ACA accredited camps like Camp Lincoln/Camp Lake Hubert, must comply with up to 300 health and safety standards.
- \* Have fun -- Counselors help campers discover how fun the great outdoors can be designing safe, engaging activities that let kids be kids, while teaching valuable life lessons.
- \* Develop quality relationships -- Camps create community cultures that minimize social pressures, making campers feel more themselves. Camp fosters an environment for supportive adult relationships, like those between counselors and campers, which research proves is a source of emotional guidance.
- \* Gain independence -- While the idea of sending kids away to camp may give parents uneasy feelings, ACA reports the experience of achievement and social connection away from home can nurture a child's independence.

More information on ACA accredited camps and related studies are available at [www.acacamps.org](http://www.acacamps.org).

Courtesy of ARAcontent

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- 1). Yes  
 2). No