



## FOR PARENTS

# THE MAGIC OF CAMP

Quality camp experiences offer kids a path to confidence, community, and growth.



### Considering summer plans for your kids?

In a digitally-dominant world, summer camp programs offer a crucial antidote to youth disconnection. They give kids space to unplug from the pressures of their daily lives, explore their interests, and learn new skills.

At Farm & Wilderness, we recently conducted research into our own programs to better understand how summer camps help kids grow. We found three key areas of development were most impactful for campers: building confidence through new skills, learning to be part of a community, and discovering more about who they are. Seeking out summer camps that focus on these areas can help your child thrive and grow, both during the program and long after it ends!

Balance of structured activities and unstructured exploration.

#### Why It's Important

Helps kids new skills while having time for creativity, self-directed learning, and social skill development.

#### What to Look For

- Shorter structured time and more free play for ages 5-8
- A more even split for ages 9-12
- For teens, longer periods of focused activities interspersed with free time can be beneficial

Variety and flexibility in structured activities.

#### Why It's Important

Helps foster decision-making skills, and promotes engagement and personal growth.

#### What to Look For

- Some choice and flexibility within structure
- A culture that encourages kids to try new things
- Giving kids freedom to set personal goals or to customize projects

An emphasis on social-emotional learning.

#### Why It's Important

Helps kids navigate relationships, manage emotions, and build resilience.

#### What to Look For

- Structured social-emotional activities paired with free time for kids to practice skills naturally
- Time and safe spaces for kids to reflect on their experiences and emotions
- Integration of mindfulness/stress-management

A focus on both leadership and community mindedness.

#### Why It's Important

Helps kids learn how to guide and inspire others and contribute positively to their community.

#### What to Look For

- A culture of belonging and collaboration
- Focus on learning to be supportive teammates
- Organized service projects, paired with flexibility for kids to plan and lead their own initiatives

# SPECIALIZED CAMP PROGRAMS

Specialized, focused camp programs offer valuable opportunities for skill development and exploration, but it's crucial to balance these focused experiences with broader activities that foster well-rounded growth and diverse interests in children. To ensure your child gets both, look for the following in each of the specialized programs below:



## Outdoor and Nature Programs

Look for...

- Guided nature and outdoor skills education alongside exploration time.
- A balance of outdoor adventure (like hiking or canoeing) and quiet observation and reflection.
- Opportunities for kids to learn about and practice sustainable living skills.
- A safe space for children to take calculated risks and develop resilience in natural settings.



## STEM Programs

Look for...

- A combination of structured learning with open-ended problem-solving.
- Opportunities for hands-on experimentation and creative applications of concepts.
- A balance between structured technology/screen time and offline activities.



## Arts Programs

Look for...

- A balance between instruction of specific techniques and free expression and experimentation.
- Opportunities for kids to explore different mediums and styles.



## Sports Programs

Look for...

- An emphasis on skill-building and teamwork, not just competition.
- Opportunities for free play within the sport, like scrimmages or creative drills.

## About Farm & Wilderness Camps

For 85 years, Farm & Wilderness has operated summer camps in central Vermont, nurturing youth through intentional programming rooted in strong values. Our recent report, "Decoding the Magic of Camp: Designing for Self-Efficacy, Community Mindedness, and Identity," informs this guidance. Learn more at [farmandwilderness.org](http://farmandwilderness.org).

