



Oswegatchie Educational Center

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Seven Questions Parents Should Ask When Choosing a Camp

As you look at different summer camps for your child, it's important to have insight into camp operations. Most camps in New York are well regulated and operated camps. The NYS Department of Health oversees all camps that are 5 days or longer in duration. Their permitting process includes a lengthy annual application process. Their staff will visit pre-camp and at least once during the summer season unannounced.

In addition, most camps in NY that still operate after decades have worked hard to stay vital. It takes a strong parent organization or a very dedicated full time staff to stand the test of time. It takes cultivation of facility, employees, and campers to be the best that they can. There are many different camps and each camp will have its own unique program, culture, and facility.

Cost is a common denominator for comparing camps. Certain camps will charge exactly what they want for each camper. Other camps work diligently to reduce camp costs to make the experience available to as many people as possible. For example, Oswegatchie engages in fundraising and is open year round to make it as affordable as possible. Our program fee is half of what is charged by camps offering what we do.

Beyond cost and programs, the following are the 7 questions recommended by the American Camping Association (ACA) for what all parents should ask of a summer camp. We have taken this opportunity to give Oswegatchie's answers as well.

1) What is the camp's philosophy and program emphasis?

Oswegatchie Camp focuses on leadership development, environmental education, and outdoor recreation. By mixing these endeavors together, campers get unique opportunities that only happen outside of a classroom. Imagine seeing through the trees from horse back or using teamwork to portage a canoe over a peninsula. For 5 days and 5 nights, campers work together in campsite groups or in small classes to experience everything Oswegatchie.

Going back to its origin, the camp was purchased by the NY Future Farmers of America in 1946. They wanted farm boys to have a place to get away from the farm to learn leadership and conservation skills. To this very day, the camping program still serves teenagers. However, the camp has more females than males, and 90% of the campers are not farmers. The camp is still offering valuable experiences in the outdoors.

Lastly, our program is focused on the developmental needs of teenagers. Each year there are new opportunities and responsibilities that a camper's can utilize. Whether it be getting named as "Junior Counselor", being a "Counselor in Training", or simply doing something that you never did before. A next step is there for every camper.

2) What is the camp director's background?

Oswegatchie has 4 full time employees. Our administrator has been overseeing operations at Oswegatchie since 1991. He also has a master's degree in education. Our program director has been managing summer camp since 2000 and has a bachelor's degree in education. Our 2 asst directors have been working at the camp since 2002, and working full time for multiple years.

Our full time staff has an intuitive understanding of our goals and camp philosophy. We work year round with the very students that attend summer camp. We all live at the camp year round, so we know the facility, the acreage, and our neighbors.

3) What training do counselors receive?

All program staff is present for a 10 day training schedule. A large amount of time is spent learning the details that are needed for being effective when dealing with campers, but also for being as safe as possible. During that time, counselors improve teaching abilities, cover safety training, and practice camp skills. We also spend time preparing the property and learning about the camp.

4) How are behavioral and disciplinary problems handled?

Behavioral and discipline problems are a bit different at Oswegatchie. Since our campers are teenagers, they are only at camp since they want to be at camp. At that age, you don't get sent to camp unless you want to go to camp.

If there is an issue, it is usually dealt with by the summer counselors. If the problem is a disagreement between the counselor and camper, the situation gets presented to the camp director. The camp director will speak one on one with the camper to find the root of the problem. Between personality conflicts, fatigue, and simple misunderstandings, most problems are easily resolved.

In more serious cases, any camper who shows disrespect for other people or fails to follow camp policies will be sent home. No alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs, weapons, animal abuse, or violent behavior will be tolerated. Parents are expected to be available to pick up their child if removal is needed. No refunds will be issued.

5) How does the camp handle special needs?

Oswegatchie is not set up well for campers with special needs. We lack wheelchair accessibility or elaborate "on site" medical facilities. However, over the past 20 years,

we have had campers with cerebral palsy, downs syndrome, diabetes, epilepsy, severe allergies, autism, limited vision, hearing loss, and wheelchairs.

If your child has a special need, contact should be made with the camp to discuss if Oswegatchie is a good fit. If a visit is possible, that is the best step to make sure the camp experience will be a good one. We recommend writing out explanations for care or having phone dialogues with our medical staff. In the past, some campers have even brought assistants to deal with higher end special needs. This should be discussed with the camp staff before registering.

Most importantly, an adventurous attitude by the camper is what makes or breaks a week of camp. Camp is not like being at home or school.

6) What about references?

A list of references can be acquired from the offices at Oswegatchie. Call or email us to get acquire this list.

7) Is the camp accredited by the American Camping Association (ACA)?

Oswegatchie is not accredited by the ACA. We are regulated by the NYS Dept of Health as both a “Summer Camp” and as a “Temporary Residence”. We are inspected yearly for both, and also receive surprise inspections throughout the summer season.

Oswegatchie uses the “*ACA Accreditation Standards for Camp Programs & Services*” as an additional resource for planning our summer camp. It is a great way to be thorough about camp programming. However, to be accredited, you must pay a yearly membership fee. For Oswegatchie, that would be an annual \$2,500 expense. Plus, the accreditation process only happens every 3 years. We would much rather pass these savings on to our campers.

Further discussion on our relationship with ACA standards can be made by contacting Oswegatchie year round staff.

“Seven Questions Parents Should Ask when Choosing a Camp” can be found at:

http://www.acacamps.org/media_center/about_aca/tips090417.php

We have year round opportunities for all ages; go to www.oswegatchie.org to learn more!