



## Tips for Selecting a Summer Camp for Your Child with a Disability

Every child should have the opportunity to go to camp, including children with disabilities who have unique needs that present a challenge to attending camp. The following are some tips to ensure that those challenges do not prevent your child from attending and enjoying the experience.

- **Start early!!** Most camps begin the registration process in March. Begin to make inquiries in January or, if special accommodations will be needed, even earlier.
- **Research the options.** Summer camps can include specially designed programs for populations with particular disabilities (i.e. muscular dystrophy, asthma, cancer, etc.), cross-disability programs (i.e. Easter Seals, Variety Club, etc.), or mainstream camps that accommodate children with special needs according to ADA regulations.
- **Determine what type** of summer camp program you would like for your child.
- **Locate camp programs** through directories found in publications, on-line, through local parent groups, your child's school, support organizations specific to your child's disability, local houses of worship, or civic organizations.
- Once you decide on possible camps to attend, call, write or e-mail contacts to begin the process of **communication**.
- Ask to **visit the facility and meet with the director** to see if the camp is accessible to your child, and if it will meet his/her needs. Ask if the camp and counselors have had experience with children with special needs in the past and if so, what kinds of accommodations they are comfortable with.
- **Share information regarding your child with the camp**, including their strengths and challenges and the accommodations needed to successfully place your child in the camp. Put it in writing for camp staff and counselors, and include a plan for regular and emergency communication.
- **Reach out to other parents** whose children have attended the camp. Ask the camp director for references from other parents.
- **If your child needs an aide**, most camps, especially those with regular programming, will not provide one. The search for potential funding sources should also begin months before the camp commences. Various sources may include, but are not limited to:
  - Extended School Year (ESY) through the school district
  - Division of Developmental Disabilities
  - Private insurance and Medicaid programs (speak with case management)
  - Private charitable organizations
  - Local civic organizations, such as the Lion's Club or the Rotary Club
  - Organizations specific to the disability such as the Muscular Dystrophy Association or United Cerebral Palsy

## What To Do if Your Child is Discriminated Against

Sometimes, no matter how much preparation and planning is done, the opportunity to attend camp or some of its activities is denied because of the child's disability. In cases of disability based discrimination, children are protected by federal and state law.

### Federal Law

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), is codified in the United States Code, 42 U.S.C.A. § 12101 *et. seq.* The ADA is a federal law that protects disabled individuals from discrimination. Title III of the ADA prohibits disability based discrimination in places of public accommodation, 42 U.S.C.A. § 12182. Camps are considered to be places of public accommodations pursuant to 42 U.S.C.A. § 12181.

For information on how to file a complaint with DOJ, go to <http://www.ada.gov/t3compfm.htm>.

### State Law

State law also provides protections for children with disabilities pursuant to the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (NJLAD), N.J.S.A. 10:5-1 *et. seq.* Like the ADA, NJLAD prohibits discrimination, N.J.S.A. 10:5-12(f), in places of public accommodations, such as a camp, summer camp, or day camp N.J.S.A. 10:5-5.

NJLAD also allows an aggrieved individual to file an administrative claim with the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR) within 180 days of the alleged act of discrimination, or file a complaint in Superior Court in the county where the child lives or where the camp is situated, within 2 years of the discriminatory act.

For information on how to file a complaint with DCR, go to <http://www.nj.gov/oag/dcr/filing.html>.

### Reasonable Accommodations

Both the ADA, 42 U.S.C.A. § 12182(b)(2)(A) and NJLAD, N.J.A.C. 13:13-4.11 provide for reasonable accommodations to be given to individuals with disabilities in places of public accommodations. An accommodation is not an absolute right, as it depends on the nature of the camp, the cost of the accommodation and whether the accommodation will impose an undue burden or fundamentally alter the program and services being offered by the camp. Therefore, an individual might not get the accommodation he/she requests but may get an alternative reasonable accommodation.

For more information, please contact DRNJ.

#### Disability Rights New Jersey

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