



University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service



4-H Youth Development

Exercises to Prepare Your Child to Thrive at 4-H Camp

Camp is an exciting opportunity for youth, but a group living environment with a high level of independence can also be stressful. To ensure your child maximizes their potential for success at camp, we suggest these ten exercises. Work through these with your child within the weeks leading up to camp. Through all your practices remind your child that it's okay to feel overwhelmed in a new environment and that it is okay to ask for help, our staff and volunteers want every child to thrive at camp and are committed to support your camper!

1. Campers are required to keep their belongings contained in their luggage/bunk area. Pack with your child and have them practice maintaining their belongings in their suitcase for a couple of days prior to camp. A tip to help your child stay organized is by packing their clothes in Ziploc bags, labeling the bags with the day. Then they can put the dirty clothes back in the bag.
2. When campers leave their cabin in the morning they usually do not return until after morning classes. Talk them through and practice packing their backpack for items they may need for class time. Ideas of items they may need include a towel, Ziploc bag for a wet bathing suit after swimming class, sunscreen, water bottle, hat, and sunglasses. Talk through how to do a mental check that they have all their belongings before they leave an area. Counselors work with campers during camp to prepare their bags for the next day and go over the schedule.
3. In addition to packing, most campers will not be able to keep items in the bathroom/bathhouse. Help your child pack their bathroom items. Best practice would be to have a small backpack for dry items and a caddy or waterproof bag for items that will get wet. In the weeks leading up to camp have your child use their caddy and take it back and forth to the bathroom when they bathe, brush their teeth, get ready for the day, or prepare for bed.
4. At camp there are designated shower times so the lines can get long. To help move the process through quicker, encourage your child to monitor their time in the shower. In the weeks leading up to camp practice taking a 5 minute or less shower. For children who are modest, they can always shower in their bathing suit!
5. While at camp everyone is expected to "pitch in" to keep camp clean. Practice with your child, sweeping, making their bed, wiping the kitchen table after meals. To get into the routine, have them make their bed daily in the weeks leading up to camp.
6. Camp is busy and there's no time to waste. Help your child monitor time and talk about monitoring their surroundings. During the first day of camp take note of landmarks as they're getting acquainted with the campgrounds. You can find a map of your campground on the 4-H website and go over the map with your child to help them begin feeling comfortable with the camp layout. There's lots of walking at camp so use the weeks leading up to camp to take family walks so your child is ready!
7. Since there is so much walking and its summer, help your child understand the importance of drinking water and staying hydrated. Calculate with your child how much water they should drink, take their body weight, and divide it by two, that's the number of ounces they need a day. In the weeks leading up to camp, find the water bottle they'll take to camp and have your child practice keeping track of their water intake.





8. No one likes moldy clothes! Show your child how to use a clothesline, have them practice spacing out items so they may dry properly.
9. The group living environment can be stressful for new or returning campers. Talk with your child about how to recognize when they need a break and explore ways your child can find personal quiet time in a busy environment. Your camper can reach out to their counselor if they need some quiet time. Talk through managing emotions with your child. Give them a scenario and talk through what they should do if they encounter this.

Remember to debrief with your child as they practice these exercises for camp. Use these questions to guide processing.

1. What worked?
2. What did not work?
3. How can you do better next time?
4. How do you think you'll use this at camp?
5. How can you use these skills to be a leader at camp?

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