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# Day Camp Handbook

A complete how-to-guide for local church directors and staff

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*The Day Camp Handbook* was created at the request of the Adventist Association of Camping Professionals and the North American Division Camp Committee.

Tracy Wood, North American Division Youth and Young Adult Ministries Director  
Bill Wood—Coordinator, North American Division Camp Ministries

Editors: Bill Wood, Tracy Wood

Technical Editors: Cassie Martsching

Cover Design and Page Layout: Claudia C. Pech Moguel

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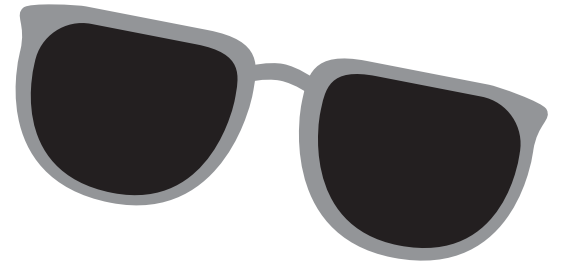
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# Introduction to Day Camp Ministries

Since its beginning, Seventh-day Adventist Camp Ministries has offered children and youth of all denominations a positive environment where they can discover more about God, themselves, and their world. The camp setting provides a great environment for the study of the Bible and nature. It also offers an opportunity to learn how to develop wholesome social relationships and experience positive recreational activities.

In the current economic environment, people are careful with resources. Faith-based organizations have the power to bring a day camp to their community for the benefit of all. While Vacation Bible School is irreplaceable, day camp can have a powerful impact too because it lasts all day.

Day camps provide a great opportunity for local churches to reach out to their community's children and youth. Day camps are generally held on a Monday through Friday schedule. Some camps are scheduled for only one week, while others may last for several weeks. Day camp means that campers go home each night. This feature allows for camps to impact children and youth who may not have access to an overnight camp experience.

## DEFINITION & MISSION OF DAY CAMPS

### DEFINITION OF DAY CAMPS

#### (NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION CAMP MINISTRIES)

Day camps are conference, church, or school-sponsored ministry-focused events for young people. The sessions are the responsibility of the sponsoring entity. Each entity operates and staffs the day camp which may take place at a church, school, park, or other appropriate location. Day camps are designed to provide creative, recreational, and educational opportunities in a group environment which contributes to each camper's mental, physical, social, and spiritual growth. Campers go home to parents/guardians each night, except for an occasional overnight.

### STATEMENT OF MISSION—NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION CAMP MINISTRIES

The North American Division Camp Committee (NADCC) provides an intentional Christian environment committed to strengthening each camper's relationship with God and all His creation through scripture, nature, and recreation.

### OBJECTIVES OF DAY CAMP MINISTRIES

It is important that the objectives of a church or school's day camp be clearly developed and understood by all who work together to make it happen. The objectives should focus on the core reasons for facilitating a day camp ministry and the impact that all intend to make through it.

1. To uphold Jesus' example while helping young people get to know Him as their Best Friend.
2. To assist the local Adventist church and school in their work to reach and help families in the community to know Jesus.

3. To help young people grow socially, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.
4. To help staff grow closer to Jesus, develop their leadership skills, discover career pathways, and strengthen their intergenerational relationships.

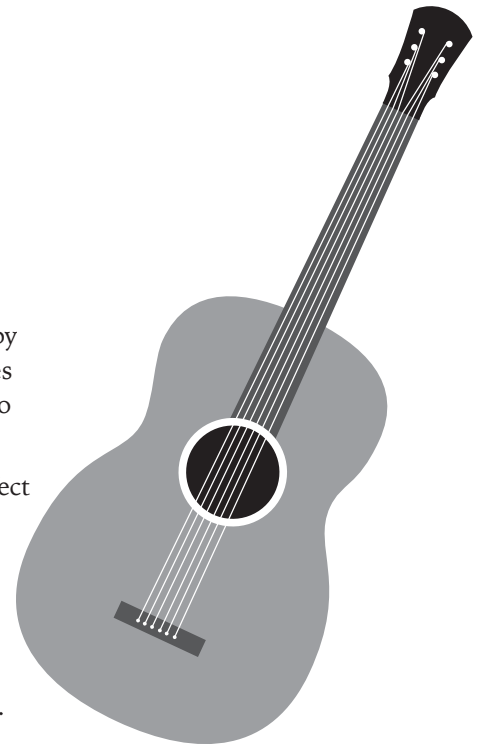
## PURPOSES OF A DAY CAMP

With a distinctive emphasis on recreation, worship, group games and activities, young people enjoy daily activities and field trips which are planned and hosted by a nurturing and caring day camp staff. The Christ-centered environment promotes proper social, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development and can also foster opportunities for community outreach.

1. Day camp offers programming for young people grades 1–10. It's the perfect time to provide a wide range of activities that involve fun and spiritual elements. If possible, try to offer three camps:
  - a. Adventurer Camp, grades 1–4
  - b. Junior Camp, grades 5–7
  - c. Teen Camp, grades 8–10

If this is not possible, combining different age groups may be appropriate.

2. Day camp is cost effective. You do not need a large facility to host a day camp. Registration fees can cover most expenses, with possible assistance from the local church and conference camp ministries department. Equipment needs are minimal. Staffing needs depend on the number of campers, the size of the facility, and the activities planned.
3. Day camp brings the camp experience to young people in their own neighborhoods. Here, you have the potential to reach and teach more children and youth about Jesus, including those whose families do not attend your church.
4. Day camp provides employment opportunities for youth and young adults ages 16 and older. Young people involved in day camp ministry have opportunities to train for leadership and service. In some conferences, they can earn a scholarship to an Adventist academy or college.
5. Day camp builds community bridges to young people and blesses their families. Campers from the community can join an Adventurer Club or Pathfinder Club, enroll in an Adventist church school, and may become church members. Day camp ministry offers the church or school opportunities to practice creative evangelism in their community.
6. Day camp gives young people an opportunity to meet new people and make friends. This will benefit the campers by giving them opportunities to interact with and understand different people. Helping campers strengthen their abilities to get along with others and appreciate everyone's differences are integral parts of social and spiritual training.
7. Day camp contributes to the social physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development of young people. Activities are intentionally planned and designed to build and strengthen campers to grow in all these areas. Service projects and care for others are an integral part of day camp ministries.



### NOTE

Staff who directly supervise campers must be 18 years or older.





# Getting Started

It is important to begin planning for your day camp six months to a year in advance. It is best that you take the time to plan effectively and develop your planning calendar. Anything that is worth doing well takes time to develop. The order of planning is very important. Start with assessing and determining the needs of your community. Then determine the site location that will work best based on your community needs. Finally develop your planning calendar so that you do not miss any items. The success and effectiveness of your day camp is directly related to your planning. Lets get started!

## DETERMINING THE NEEDS OF YOUR COMMUNITY

What do you know about the community around you? What are the needs of the parents and children in your community? What are the goals of your local church? These are the questions you need to ask before planning a day camp program in your church, your school, or your community. Make sure you address these questions.

- How does the day camp fit into the local Seventh-day Adventist church or school's overall mission? Discuss this with your pastor, church board, and local conference.
- What are the needs of area residents? Talk to community residents, take surveys, and check with community agencies. It is especially important to obtain input from local church members and their children.
- What other organizations within the community offer day camps? You need to find out if you're duplicating something already in place, just around the corner from your church.
- Are there niches in summer programming that aren't being filled in your community? Examples might include art, crafts, music, drama, computer, gymnastics, basketball, soccer, football, and baseball camps.

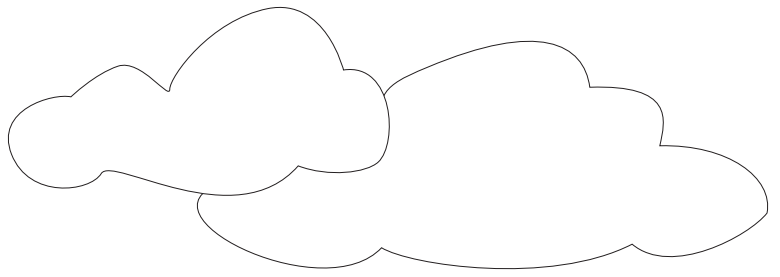
## CHOOSING YOUR SITE

The site chosen for the day camp must be a safe and clean environment. Parents and caregivers should feel comfortable leaving their children there. The camp site should provide shelter, safety, places for recreation, and restroom facilities. Below are some factors to consider when choosing a site.

### SHELTER

Your site should feature a shelter big enough for all the children and staff. There are several places in your community that could serve as an appropriate location, such as:

- Churches
- Schools
- Campgrounds
- Farms
- Outdoor education centers
- Parks
- Community buildings



- Civic group buildings
- Conference centers
- Private property
- Undeveloped public land (tents/canopies could be used to provide shelter)

## SAFETY

The safety of the site must be a high priority. The area should have easy access but not be near main streets or highways. All areas must be clearly visible, clean, and in good repair. Qualified persons should conduct a complete site inspection. Some factors to consider include:

- Clearly marked and well-lit fire exits
- Approved smoke detectors that have been inspected before camp starts
- Fire extinguishers that have been inspected yearly
- Proper lighting
- Easily accessible doors and crash bars leading to the outside
- Proper ventilation
- Signs or barriers for places where campers could slip, trip, or fall
- Shelter in case of storms, rain, tornadoes, etc.
- Facility in good repair
- Access to an AED machine
- Recreation

Having adequate space for recreation, whether indoors or outside, is important when choosing your site. This may include:

- A large gymnasium
- Ball fields or soccer fields
- Parks with covered areas
- A lake with a swimming area with lifeguards
- A public swimming pool with lifeguards

A lake or a swimming pool nearby also adds to your programming choices. If a lake is used, a certified lifeguard should check out the waterfront to ensure it is safe for swimming. See Chapter 4 for additional water safety protocols.

## RESTROOM ACCOMMODATIONS

The American Camping Association provides the following restroom facility recommendation:

Toilet facilities should have one seat for every 30 females, and one seat for every 50 males. There should be one washbasin or equivalent per 30 persons with a minimum of two basins for each toilet facility designed to serve more than five persons at the same time. If the facilities do not have enough toilets, you could rent some portable toilets as well.

You'll also want to be sure you are meeting local and state codes for these facilities.



## DEVELOPING YOUR PLANNING CALENDAR

### DETERMINE DATES OF OPERATION

Operating a day camp is not a last-minute decision. It requires lots of advance planning. The dates of operation for a day camp should be set nine to ten months in advance, or at least by early fall. Consider the following dates when planning:

- Ending and starting of school
- Holidays
- Vacation Bible School dates
- Availability of facilities
- Operating dates of other day camps in the area

### CHURCH/SCHOOL BOARD APPROVAL

After all options have been thoroughly researched, it is time to submit a proposal to the local church or school board for approval. Because day camps are a ministry of the local church or school, all planning must be approved by church board or school board action and recorded in the board minutes. Any changes or updates to the day camp calendar, schedule, or plans must also be presented and approved by the board and recorded in the minutes.

Board approval gives official authorization for day camp participants to be transported and involved in off-premises activities and allows for insurance coverage to be available for campers. Also, this enables day camp staff to have insurance coverage for injuries through the church's/conference's liability insurance up to the policy limitations.

### STATE AND PROVINCE REQUIREMENTS

Some states and provinces require that camps (including day camps) be registered and receive a permit before starting operations. Check with your local county, state or province to determine if this is a requirement in your area.

### CONFERENCE SUPPORT

In most cases the local conference youth ministries department will give guidance to your day camp operation. There are items that the conference may be able to assist you with in your planning:

- Advertising to other churches and schools in your area
- Insurance questions about coverage and limitations for campers and staff
- Finding experienced day camp staff with licenses and certifications necessary for activities
- Day camp staff training and resources
- Parental Consent & Transportation forms for taking minor campers to off-premises activities
- Possible financial assistance from conference evangelism funds
- Get connected to the Association of Adventist Camp Professionals (AACP) where you can network with other day camp directors from around the North American Division
- Learn about and get accredited with the American Camping Association (ACA) which brings public credibility to your day camp ministry



## SUGGESTED TIMELINE

There are tasks that need to be accomplished throughout the year so that you are ready to launch your camp on time. In the Appendix you will find a Checklist for Day Camp Planning (Sample). Use this sample as a guide for you to develop your planning calendar.

