



Kids and Overnight Camp—the Process of Letting Go

By Andrea A. Firth



During the Mountain Camp Water Regatta, teams take the Peace Canoe across the lake Photo Andy Hancock

“One of the great things about summer camp is that kids get away from their parents and get a chance to be independent...to grow up a little bit,” states Scott Whipple, the owner of Mountain Camp—a co-ed summer resident camp that is a popular destination among Lamorinda youth. Whipple notes that mom and dad can also benefit from taking a step back from parenting for a week or two, and with resident camp this means getting away from emailing and calling.

Whipple describes the phenomena of helicopter parenting that abounds today—well-intentioned baby boomers who “hover” over everything their kids do.

While he acknowledges the importance of parent involvement in child rearing, Whipple explains, “Parents want to be involved, and they expect to know exactly what is going on and to have instant access.”

However, Mountain Camp’s communication policy can be simply stated—No phone calls. “We don’t allow kids to call home. We don’t pass along messages. We use the old-school method of letter writing to communicate.” But he admits, “We do have email access now, and that has been in response to the culture.”

However, Internet access is a challenge due to the remote location—Mountain Camp is located on the shores of Ice House Lake in the El Dorado National Forest off Highway 50 on the way toward south Lake Tahoe—so email communications are delivered to campers once a day like written correspondence. On ce parents get over the need for the daily informa-

tion upload, what ensures a positive resident camper experience for the child? “Pretty much any kid can be successful at camp,” states Whipple. With the wide variety of camp opportunities available today, he feels the research done by parents to identify the right camp for the child is a big part of how successful the experience will be.

“I like to think that just about anybody can be successful at Mountain Camp,” adds Whipple. “We really put a lot of time into coming up with activities that meet a wide range of interests including music, drama, sports, and water and climbing activities. We try to balance the high-thrill activities with the more quiet individual things.”

While Whipple encourages parents to research camps to find the best fit, he strongly discourages parents from promising to bring them home early if they don’t like it. “Don’t make a deal with the child before going to camp,” states Whipple. “We see many examples of kids who are having a great time at camp. But there are a

couple of times during the day when some kids will get homesick—it’s times that they are usually around their family such as dinner or bedtime. If they get sad and this deal is out there—they just work it.”

Whipple feels that working through homesickness can be a valuable life lesson, however campers are not left to manage the process alone. To deal with those tough parts of the day, Whipple’s staff works to build rapport and emotional trust with the kids along with ensuring that they are staying busy and making friends. “When kids are busy and they have friends, they don’t think about home nearly as much,” notes Whipple.

“The essence of going to sleep away camp for any kid is living on his own in a cabin with peers, trying some new activities, and hav-

ing some success with those,” explains Whipple, who is approaching his 16th summer running Mountain Camp. “We are very fortunate that we are in the Sierras, on this beautiful lake—it opens up all manner of things to do. But at the end of the day what we are hoping for is that the campers try some new things, make some new friends, have a good time.”

For more information about Mountain Camp go to www.mountaincamp.com.



Mountain Camp campers posing for their cabin photo. Photo Mountain Camp Staff