

How Camp Helps Special Needs Children

Article by: *Melissa Martz for OurKids.net, Canada's trusted source for camps and schools.*

Did you know that there are [special needs camps](#) in Canada offering a range of services that meet the needs of children with specific physical, emotional, behavioral or medical challenges? Some of these camps focus on children with cancer or other medical conditions; others have programs for [children with autism](#) or attention deficit disorder.

Whatever their mandate, and whether the camp provides shadows or support staff or requires parents to send someone familiar and experienced in working with their child, these camps have staff trained to cope with children with special needs, as well as challenge and offer them a rewarding time at camp.

The medical staff and facilities at these camps are adapted to meet the needs of the children they serve.

How are children with disabilities welcome at camp?

- The key in finding the right camp for children with special needs is to offer a wide range of services to meet the needs of kids with specific physical, emotional, behavioral, or medical challenges.
- Even if a disability is present, the individual can enjoy all the activities that make camp what it is. These activities might just be adapted a different way for them to participate.
- Some general [overnight camps](#) and day programs integrate a number of children with various special needs. This is crucial. It's called being inclusive.
- There are camps that focus on meeting specific adaptations and support for children with special needs to enjoy camp. Camp facilities are designed for those with physical disabilities, for example.
- Families can enjoy peace of mind knowing that their family member is at camp with trained, dedicated staff.
- No disability is "turned away." There are camps for many different disabilities: cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, brain injury, autism spectrum disorder, epilepsy, quadriplegia, paraplegia, arthritis, hearing or visual impairments, Down syndrome, diabetes, heart problems, cancer, strokes, ADD, ADHD, Celiac disease, fetal alcohol syndrome, learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia) and intellectual disabilities.

Is day or overnight camp better for children with special needs?

- It depends on the child as everyone is different. Age is not necessarily a factor in whether your child is better suited for a day or overnight camp. The most important factor is comfort level and readiness for a camp experience that lasts longer than a day.
- Depending on your child's disability, you may need or want to send your son or daughter's own worker (e.g., special services at home worker) to work one-on-one for your peace of mind. This helps the day camp be truly inclusive, ensures your child is comfortable, and gives the camp even more support staff. [Disability camps](#) – Gives a comprehensive list of "specialty" camps and camps for campers with disabilities throughout Canada and the U.S.

In all cases, campers are encouraged to try new experiences, to gain confidence, improve co-ordination, enhance communication and grow personally.