

Relationship Thinking In The World of Camping: Seven Questions Today's Parents Ask (and One Answer!)

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I was recently asked to present a keynote address at the Ontario Camps Association/ American Camping Association (Upstate New York Branch) 2013 Conference in Niagara Falls. Although not an unusual activity for me, the response to the last five minutes of my presentation was quite remarkable and as a result of audience interest and at their request I am writing this brief paper.

The topic of my keynote was *Relationship Thinking in The Camp Setting* and the objective was to bridge my work as a social worker with families and in the media with my participation as a previous camper, staff, director and currently as a consultant to the world of camping. As a so-called "expert" in two related fields of practice, my talk focused on the relationship aspects of running a children's summer camp and building relationships with all of the stakeholders in the camp's setting. At the end of the keynote I suggested that in the world of working with families, a number of questions that are being fielded by parents and professionals can often be answered with the simple phrase "Send your kids to camp."

When asked to answer questions such as "If I send my child to camp (or your camp) what will my child get out of the experience?" ,the camping community has always been able to talk to parents about the notion of friends, building great memories, fun, and skill development. Today's parents are more specific in their questioning and have new challenging ones for professionals in the community. For many at the camping conference it seemed new and of interest to them to see the questions of today's parents laid out one at a time and followed by the answer "send your kids to camp". This five minutes was perhaps a sudden moment where we all rediscovered that camping and recreation are so much a part of the solution to many of the problems and issues faced by our community and the families therein.

The Questions that I suggested come from my practice in social work; my work as a speaker for parenting groups and the follow-up Q and A's; and, from my work in television, radio and print media talking about issues facing today's parent. If you are a parent, you may have already asked them and may be pleased to find camping is a place to begin answering them.

Here they are (with answer included) for the year 2013:

Parent Question 1.

How can I stop being a helicopter parent and give my kids a safe way to grow, to become more resilient, to experiment with the idea that "failure is the new success" and to make mistakes and learn from them?

Joe Rich Answer 1. Send them to camp.

Parent Question 2.

How can I get my kids off the couch?

Joe Rich Answer 2. Send them to camp.

Parent Question 3.

What can I do to fight obesity in children in my own family and to avoid “making my kids crazy” (reference recently published book “The Heavy”) about diet and exercise?

Joe Rich Answer 3. Send them to camp.

Parent Question 4.

How can I increase my kids understanding that Facebook friends aren’t friends?

Joe Rich answer 4. Send them to camp.

Parent Question 5.

How can I help my kids have a break from travelling between two homes every week all year in this co-parenting divorce agreement?

Joe Rich answer 5. Send them to (overnight) camp.

Parent Question 6.

I’m a single parent and I’m going nuts. I need a break. Any suggestions?

Joe Rich answer 6. Send them to camp.

Parent Question 7.

How do I limit screen time in my family all day long during holidays and the summer break?

Joe Rich answer 7. Send them to camp.

The questions were designed to inform and encourage camp directors to see their place in the community and in working with children and their respective families.

It turns out that parents know the questions and those that already send their kids to camp can think about that in new and different ways. For others who don’t yet send their kids to camp, they may not know what a great solution sending their children to camps can be.

Winter camps, summer camps, specialty camps, overnight camps, day camps, travels camps, canoe trip camps, education camps camps. Your local Camping Association can sort out the details. In the meantime, I'll try and be on the lookout for new questions and search out answers that I hope can work for families.



Joe Rich, msw, rsw is a social worker in the Toronto area and likes to answer questions that families and camps ask. You can meet him or reach him at www.joerich.ca