Safeguarding Alert,
Choosing a Camp For Adults with Developmental Disabilities
CHOOSING A CAMP FOR ADULTS

WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
SAFEGUARDING ALERT FROM OPWDD
For Campers, Families, Advocates
and Service Providers

THOMAS A. MAUL, COMMISSIONER
New York State Office of Mental Retardation
and Developmental Disabilities
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, New York 12229

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CHOOSING A CAMP FOR AN ADULT WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

A day camp, sleep away camp or travel camp vacation should be a fun living and learning experience and provide an opportunity to develop new skills and friendships. A camp experience may have a great impact on a person's life, so it is important for the campers, families and agencies to make an informed decision in selecting a camp. Not every camp meets the needs and abilities of every person, and not every person would benefit from a camp experience.

Before choosing a camp, you have the right to ask any question you wish so that you can better understand a camp program. Not only do you want to know that it meets the needs of the camper, but you must be sure that it is a safe environment.

Camps that serve persons with mental retardation or developmental disabilities are not certified or regulated by the New York State Office Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). However, by statute, no person with mental retardation or developmental disability can be unsafely cared for or supervised by any person at any time, and as a result OPWDD is concerned with the conditions at summer camps serving this population.

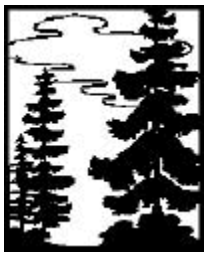
Under NYS Department of Health regulations, there are two categories of camps or camp-like settings: One category covers children's camps (for ages under 16 or 18, depending upon the type of camp), and a second category addresses temporary residences, which includes adult camps.

Adult camps must have a permit to operate issued by either a local or NYS health official. Health regulations provide only that the camp must meet basic safety, health and sanitary requirements. For example, it must follow sanitary food handling precautions, and ensure basic fire safety.

Some camps are accredited by national organizations, requiring that certain basic guidelines and standards are met. These national accrediting organizations may visit those camps to make sure they continue to meet their standards.

It is important to note that national accreditation does not necessarily guarantee that a particular camp offers a safe or sanitary environment. Likewise, having a permit to operate does not mean that a camp is suitable to meet the needs and abilities of all persons. *Therefore, before making a selection, it is very important that every aspect of the camp is thoroughly considered and that you are satisfied it is the best possible choice.*

When selecting a camp it is highly recommended that you visit and tour the camp's facilities.



IS THE PERSON READY FOR A CAMP EXPERIENCE?

- What does the person want most from a camp experience - increased socialization, an opportunity to improve certain skills, time away from the everyday routine?
- Is the person ready for camp? How does he or she relate to new people, new routines?
- Are there medical conditions that call for more than routine care?
- Are there behaviors that require frequent intervention or close supervision?

WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE CAMP DIRECTOR AND COUNSELORS?

- Who is the director and what are his or her qualifications?
- What are the qualifications of the staff - age, education?
- How are staff trained? Are they given an overview of developmental disabilities? Are they instructed in recognizing signs and symptoms of illness, emergency medical procedures, evacuation procedures, missing camper procedures, reporting and documenting significant events?

- What is the counselor-to-camper ratio? What is the professional staff-to-camper ratio? Senior counselors, waterfront staff, medical personnel? Since there are no mandated ratios for adult camps, keep in mind the person with the developmental disability, and include such factors as cognitive ability (i.e. understanding and following directions, communicating); ambulation ability (i.e. needs assistance, uses a walker) and health care needs to determine a ratio that is appropriate for the camper.

For Comparison:
DOH regulations for children's camps serving 20% more campers with developmental disabilities require a camp director with a B.A. in a relevant human services filed and a minimum of one year experience in the DD field.

WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE?< /B
Setting and Programs

- What is a typical day like? What are the activities? Do campers have a choice of activities?
- Are activities varied for different age groups and abilities?
- What do campers do on rainy days, or other "down" time?
- Are off site activities adequately supervised?
- How are challenging behaviors handled?
- What is the overall appearance of the campsite?
- Are there facilities for indoor and outdoor activities?

- Where are the kitchen and dining areas? Are they clean?
- Are there sites within the camp that are air conditioned?
- Are cabins in good repair? Do they have safety equipment?
- Where are the bathroom and shower facilities? Are they clean?
- How many counselors sleep in each cabin?

For Comparison:
DOH regulations for children's camps serving 20% or more campers with developmental disabilities require a camp director with a B.A. in a relevant human services field and a minimum of one year experience in the DD field.

MEDICAL AND NUTRITION

- Who are the medical staff - doctor, nurse? When are they available?
- Is there an infirmary? Are services adequate to meet the camper's medical needs?
- How are medical emergencies handled?
- In case of an emergency, which hospital will be used? How close and accessible from the camp is it?
- What health care monitoring procedures are in place to address specific health care needs? Are staff trained in those procedures?
- Is there a written health care plan that includes a description of medical, nursing, and first aid services?

It is critical that current and accurate information be shared with the camp about the camper's immunization history, past illnesses, allergies, special diets, and any medical information related to a particular disability. This information should be used to develop a plan for that camper, and a mechanism to monitor that plan should be clearly outlined.

- What are the medication administration policies and procedures? Who administers medication?
- What is a typical menu? Who prepares the food?
- Does the camp serve foods the person enjoys?
- Are provisions made for special dietary needs?

WATERFRONT SAFETY

- What are the qualifications of the waterfront staff? At a minimum, there should be a certified lifeguard on duty.
- Are campers supervised at all times in the water? The camper's swimming abilities should be assessed and other factors such as seizure disorders and ambulation abilities should be taken into consideration when determining the necessary level of supervision.
- What is the lifeguard-to-swimmer ratio? Supervision in the water cannot be the sole responsibility of the lifeguard. Counselors or other waterfront staff should be in the water with the campers.
- Are off site pools, lakes or beaches used? If so, what kind of supervision is provided?

For Comparison:
DOH regulations for children's camps serving 20% or more campers with developmental disabilities require
a 1:5 ratio during swimming pool and waterfront activities. That ratio increases to 1:1 for campers with seizure disorders.

REFERENCES

before you decide . . .
consider the experience of others
The camp you are considering should be able to provide you with names of others who have attended their programs. You may find it helpful to call and ask about their camp experience.

get answers to your questions from the camp:

- brochures
- web site
- open house visit

WHERE CAN ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BE OBTAINED?

Camp Guides are available from a variety of sources including:
Resources for Children with Special Needs (212) 254-4070
A Guide to Accredited Camps (800) 777-CAMP
American Camping Association (800) 428-CAMP

Suggested Web sites:
ACAcamps.org
www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/camps/camp.htm
www. epilepsyfoundation.org

Camp Regulation Information is available at:
www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/phforum/nycrr10.htm
Within this site,
Regulations for children's camps can be found at:
10NYCRR Subpart 7-2 Children's Camps
and
Regulations for adult camps can be found at:
10NYCRR Subpart 7-1 Temporary Residences and Mass Gatherings