

## Road Map to Resident Camp Success

### A Proven Road Map to Successfully Preparing Your Children for Camp

The decades old tradition of sleep away camp has been a fun, exciting, popular experience for children of all ages. While Day Camp programs can serve as good introduction to camp the heart of the summer camp experience lies in Residential Camp programs where children can experience the independence and joy of the moments that happen between programmed events. Parenting comes in all shapes and sizes and camp is just another tool to help parents build character in their children.

Parents send their children to camp for a variety of reasons.

Why do we send kids to camp in the first place? Parents may have attended the same camp and loved it. They learned new activities that build self-esteem and made lifelong friends. Parents may have learned to stand on their own, away from their own parents – enjoying the independence of camp. Perhaps the parents didn't attend camp themselves but are aware of the benefits and want their child to experience something they themselves never had the chance to do.

How do you know if your child is ready to leave home for a period of time?

Parents might recommend camp to their children is great but it can be even better when the idea of attending camp comes from the child.

My family has been involved with running summer camp for over 69 years and from our experience we have developed a Road Map to prepare your child for a successful stay at camp.

One day we had a group of young children visit the ranch and I took them on a tour. I showed them the horses, the buildings, the activity areas, and the lake. A week later the young kids had either drawn pictures or written sweet thank you letters.

To my surprise, the part of camp that made the most impact were the bubbles escaping from the shallow water of the lake... while I thought it would be the horses or ropes course. I was wrong. Kids and adults can look at the same thing and see something completely different.

### Here are some ways to prepare for your child's new adventures.

- Visit the camp in person – or through videos. Our camp DVD is available to view on our website: [www.cloverleaf ranch.com](http://www.cloverleaf ranch.com)
- Show your kids the activity areas. Large areas can be overwhelming. Talk about the places and point out the fun of learning new skills.
- Many children are lucky enough to have their own room. If children have not shared a room before, explain how that works and how we share with others that may come from different homes.

- Meals can be challenging. The refrigerator isn't always available. Your favorite might be on the menu or there might be certain foods you haven't tried before. Feel free to ask for sample menus ahead of time to get an idea of what camp offers. You never know... your child may find their new favorite vegetable or other memorable treat!
- Adult time isn't the same as kid time. If your child is going away, be specific about the length of stay. Get a calendar and mark off the days. Mark the first day they will be gone and each day they will be in camp. Then mark off the day you are picking them up. Be on time!! Nothing can ruin a camp stay more than when you are the last one to leave.
- Ask camp director to fill in the special events during the campers stay on your calendar. Give the kids visual aids to increase their excitement about new activities and games.
- It's fun to share your camp/youth experience with your child. Please avoid talking up your own camp experiences. They may appear to be bigger than life or blown out of proportion. I have seen parents over dramatize their experience and ruin the child's experience. Let your child's camp experience be their own.
- Remember, we do not think or reason the same as a child.
- One very difficult task for parents is to let go of your child and release your control for a brief period of time. That means do not call your child. Do not send a cell phone. You have done your homework before you sent our child to camp. Now let your child stand on their own. This helps with other challenges in life also. While we understand the challenge of providing your child with this kind of independence; it will help their growth in the camp experience. If you are struggling with the transition we encourage you to contact our office and reach out to one of our helpful camp managers who can update you on how your child is doing.
- Choosing the right camp is paramount for success. The American Camping Association is the only nationally recognized program that has strict accreditation standards and evaluations. Check out their website at: [www.acacamps.org](http://www.acacamps.org)

**Bless you and your children. Happy Camping**

**Ginger DeGrange  
Cloverleaf Ranch Owner 1976 - 2005**