

Dear Parents of Campers new to Oconto,

We are excited to have your daughter join us at Oconto and we are honoured that you have given us the responsibility of your child, we will be sure to keep her safe. We will help her be independent, have fun, learn new skills, and make lifelong friends! The lessons she will learn at camp will stay with her forever.

We have prepared this booklet to help you and your daughter get ready for camp.

***What do you suggest that I, the parent, say when talking with my child about camp?***

- Make sure you convey the fact that Camp Oconto is a welcome and friendly place, a place where she is going to make friends and will feel at home very quickly.
- Talk to her about making friends and what she can do to help herself feel comfortable quickly. You are the best judge of what will help your child to feel comfortable.
- Set a few goals with her. Stress the wide range of activities which she will be able to participate in.
- Be very careful in your choice of words when talking about camp. Positive, warm, fun words will lead to that kind of experience.
- Also, never give your child the idea, by words or gestures that she is in any way being "shipped off". If you do, even if you are only teasing, you may have a very unhappy daughter who will feel insecure during her time at camp. Your daughter will have a positive experience if she is helped to start camp with the right attitudes.

***Are there any statements which we should avoid saying to our daughter?***

- Avoid making statements such as, "If you don't like camp, we will come and get you." The power of suggestion is very strong. It may make her want to give up at the slightest problem or feeling of uneasiness. Life is not always smooth, nor is camp. A big part of camp is learning life skills, problems solving, learning to cope with upset feelings, but most of all having a blast! Be positive and talk about the many great opportunities that she will have at camp.
- Any new situation is going to have a few awkward moments. We do our best to make everyone's introduction to camp GREAT! However, there will be 'bumps' and times when she has to make a special effort - please don't let her think everything will be 100% - 100% of the time.
- Avoid giving her any negative ideas: "You will probably be very homesick" or "we are going to miss you very much". Try giving her positive reinforcements i.e., "You are going to have so much fun" or "what activity are you looking forward to the most?" It is very important to be realistic. It is natural for her to miss you, but if she keeps busy and focuses on camp, she will be too busy to miss you. Comments like, "We are going to miss you, but we know you are going to a very safe place, with lots of fun things to do," will help her to make the most of her experience.
- Talk to her about what to do when she is missing home and what she can do to help herself. Suggest talking to her counsellor. Getting busy with a friend by playing a game, or reading a book if it is rest hour. Please do not suggest that she sit and look at pictures of her family, or write you a letter as a cure for feeling homesick.
- Please do not suggest that she "may phone home at any time." The telephone is not available to campers. There is only one telephone at camp and it is for emergencies and business purposes only. It has been our experience that a camper who is missing home feels lonelier after speaking with family members. At any time during your daughter's stay you can call camp to find out how your daughter is doing. A staff member, working closely with your daughter, will call you back
- A favourite teddy bear is a wonderful comfort – they are also great to take to breakfast on Sunday mornings!

### ***Missing Home: What can you do to help?***

Your daughter may miss home. We consider these normal and natural feelings. Please discuss this with your daughter and let her know that everyone misses home sometimes. Different people cope with feeling homesick in different ways. There is nothing wrong with her if she feels sad and misses home or things at home. Please stress that it is important for her to ask her counsellor for help. Some kids are really good at hiding their feelings and suffer in silence. Most often, it is best to acknowledge that it is a natural way to feel. Please discuss with her why she is at camp; to have fun, meet new friends, try activities, etc. Discuss a plan, for example; when and where to go and to which activities, and suggest she challenge herself. Usually, it is best to try and get their minds off of home and whatever they miss and to get busy and be active. Discuss what she can do if she does miss you, example; talk to a counsellor, play a board game, read a book etc. Most sad feelings happen at rest hour or bedtime, reading often really helps! Camp is a place for fun, friends and learning! You know your child better than anyone else! If you feel that she is ready, and she feels secure within herself, then there's nothing left to worry about. Please don't expect an absolutely smooth transition to camp life. It won't happen. Camp is different – there are bound to be a few bumps along the way! If you would like further information about adjusting to camp, check out the website [www.campparents.org](http://www.campparents.org).

### ***Tips to Prepare for Summer Camp***

1. Arrange a tour of camp. If possible, visit camp ahead of time so that your daughter will be familiar with the cabins, zebos and general surroundings. You are welcome to visit the camp beginning in mid May. Just call our office at 613.375.6678 ahead of time and we will be delighted to arrange a tour. *It is important to call ahead as there is not always someone in camp, especially on weekends.*
2. Discuss what camp will be like before your child leaves for camp. Acknowledge her feelings and consider role-playing camp situations such as using a flashlight to find the bathroom in the dark.
3. Arrange to have your daughter sleepover at a close friend's or relatives or consider hosting a campout in your own backyard for your daughter and her friends. This is a great way to get a sense of nature, sleep under the stars, and allow her time to adjust to feeling more comfortable away from her familiar surroundings.
4. Mail a letter to your daughter *before camp* begins so she will have a letter on the first mail day.
5. Pack a favourite stuffed animal.
6. Please attach a recent photograph of your daughter to the Camper Information form. This will help us to get to know new campers much quicker!
7. Please do not put pictures of the family all over her trunk or suggest she put them on her wall – she does not need constant reminders of you.

### ***Should we drive, or arrange for our daughter to take the chartered bus to camp?***

If your daughter is coming to camp at the beginning of a four week session, when the chartered buses are available (i.e. Sessions #1, #2, #4, & #5), we suggest you use the bus service. The buses are a great "melting pot" and an opportunity to meet new friends! Be sure to introduce your daughter to one of the camp staff at the bus and from there she will be well taken care of.

### ***Driving my daughter to camp: What time should we arrive?***

If you are driving your daughter to camp, please arrive between 1:00 and 1:30 p.m. You will be greeted at the gate.

### ***What can we expect once we arrive at camp?***

You will be greeted at the gates by girls in purple shirts. They are the first year of our two year CIT program and are called QCs. A QC will take you to meet your daughter's Section Head and then on to see her cabin or zebo and meet her counsellor. Once you have done this, please say goodbye soon after. Do NOT un-pack your daughter.

Please DO NOT make her bed – her counsellor will take over for you. We need to focus on your daughter and the other campers at this time and to make campers feel comfortable, as quickly as possible. A big part of the learning experience at camp is developing self-reliance and independence – drop off is a good place to start. Have a safe trip!

Do not expect a tour of camp at this time, we need to focus on your daughter and the other campers.

### ***What should I know about picking up my daughter at the end of her camp session?***

Departures from Sessions #1, #3, #4, and #6: When picking your daughter up from sessions 1, 3, 4, or 6, at the end of each month, it is very important that you be on time. Please arrive between 10:00 and 10:30am – we don't want you to meet the camp bus on our narrow road.

Departures from Sessions #2 and #5: These dates coincide with Visitors' days for our four week campers. Be aware that there will be lots of extra activity and traffic on these days. Feel welcome to stay and see your daughter participate in morning activities, and enjoy a buffet lunch with us.

### ***What do we need to know about VISITORS' DAYS?***

- **Visitors' days are for parents of four week campers only!**
- **DO NOT BRING LIQUOR OR WINE TO CAMP!**
- **DO NOT BRING PETS TO CAMP!**



- These dates coincide with departure dates for sessions # 2 and # 5 so be aware that there will be lots of activity on these days!
- Parents of four-week campers should arrive between the hours of 9:30 and 10:00am.
- Observe your daughter in regular camp activities from 10:00am to 12:15pm.
- At 12:15 a wonderful buffet lunch is provided or you may prefer to bring a picnic lunch to eat with your daughter.
- After lunch join us on the beach for a singsong, free swim (bring your bathing suit).
- We ask you to bring your daughter to the beach between 3:00 and 3:30 for a special program. Her counsellor, or another counsellor from her section, will be there to leave her with. We ask that you do not take your daughter to the parking lot to say good bye.

### ***Should we take our daughter out of camp on Visitors' Day?***

You are welcome to take your daughter out during the day, but we ask that you do NOT take her out of camp overnight; this is disturbing for the other campers in the cabin or zebo group, the counsellors, and most importantly to your daughter.

### ***Do the majority of campers use sleeping bags or blankets and sheets?***

The majority of campers bring sleeping bags to camp, but also a bottom sheet, so they can open up their sleeping bag like a comforter, and not have to sleep in the sleeping bag for their entire session. Sleeping bags are convenient to use when out of camp on over-nights and canoe trips, and can be aired out easier during cabin clean up. If your daughter has a tendency to wet her bed, please send at least two sets of sheets with her. The counsellor will be very careful to remove her soiled sheets from the bed and replace them with clean ones in a very discreet way. Please make sure that the counsellor knows she wets the bed. If you did not mark it off when you registered your daughter, please let us know before the start of her session.

### ***When is the Oconto camper T-shirt worn?***

The T-shirt is worn *everyday* for dinner; as well as to chapel and lunch on Sundays. It is worn with any colour of shorts.

Be sure that every article of clothing is carefully labelled with your daughter's name. You can purchase laundry markers, similar to ball point pens, in any department store; they are great time savers! Another option is using name tags. These are available for order from Mabel's Labels ([www.mabelslabels.com](http://www.mabelslabels.com)).

### ***Are swim lessons mandatory?***

Yes, swim lessons are mandatory – we are on a lake and many of our activities center around the waterfront. We teach the Lifesaving Society swim program.

***What swim level must my daughter pass in order to participate in sailing, canoeing and kayak activities?***

Campers must pass the Lifesaving “Swim to Survive” test (equivalent to LSS level ‘Swimmer 2’ and comparable to Red Cross Aqua Quest level 4) in order to sail, canoe and kayak. The test requirements include; roll into deep water, tread water for 1 minute, and swim 50 metres in deep water to pass the ‘Swim to Survive’ test.

If your daughter cannot swim well enough to pass the ‘Swim to survive’, she will be given extra time at swim lessons. This will enable her to pass as soon as possible and participate more fully in the camp program. It’s a good idea to have your daughter swim in a lake or river before coming to camp. Swimming in the lake is very different from swimming in a pool.

***What swim level is required to participate in Windsurfing?***

Campers must have a swimming ability equivalent to Lifesaving Level ‘Swimmer 4’ in order to participate in windsurfing. We do have children’s rig boards so that the younger or smaller girls may give it a try.

***Do all the girls go on an over-night canoe trip?***

**Tads (7, 8, & 9 year olds)** will go to a campsite near camp for a cookout dinner and return after dinner.

**Campers 9, 10, and 11 years of age** will go on an overnight trip. The girls paddle to a camp site and set up their tents; cook dinner, swim, sing, sleep, have breakfast, and then paddle back in time for the second activity period in the morning.

**12 to 15 year old campers** may sign up for an *optional* canoe trip, typically 3-6 days long. Sign up is done at camp on the first night.

***Is special equipment required for the Riding program?***

English riding instruction is available as an *optional activity* to campers of all ages. Campers receive approximately 40 minutes of instruction, every other day. They also receive instruction in stable management, grooming and feeding of the horses. All riders must have a Pony Club A.S.T.M. approved riding helmet, as well as hard-soled footwear with a heel of no less than 1.5 centimetres, and long pants (stretchy).

***Should I send a care package to my daughter?***

Yes! Campers love them, but please **DO NOT SEND FOOD TO CAMP**. Any packages arriving at camp are opened in front of counsellors and food is taken away. Why?

- ☹ We live in nature and animals are attracted to food (skunks in cabins are not fun).
- ☹ One camper getting food or other extravagant packages makes other campers feel left out.
- ☹ Some people at camp have life-threatening food allergies!

Please do send packages with books, comics, t-shirts or toys!

***Parcelled With Love*** If you are looking for an easy and convenient way to send care packages to your daughter at camp, we recommend [www.parcelledwithlove.com](http://www.parcelledwithlove.com).

### ***Should I send mail to camp?***

Yes, please do – campers love to get mail! The mail service is available five days a week, with the exception of holidays. Please send several short letters to your daughter at camp. The security of hearing from you and a quick "hello" is great. This is better than a few long letters.

When you do write, talk about the fun she must be having at camp, the new activities she's learning, and new friends being made. Don't dwell on how much you miss her. Also, do *not* mention all of the activities she's missing at home - it may result in an unhappy camper! One suggestion is to give your daughter some challenges, i.e. suggest she try something new, or work especially hard at a particular activity. Your challenge is to help her focus on camp! In addition to your daughters' name, please include her section (when you know it) and her age. This really helps us in sorting the mail. It's also important to include *your return address* on the envelope in the event that mail may arrive after your daughter has left camp and will have to be returned to you.

### ***Receiving mail from camp!***

Please send self-addressed, stamped envelopes and writing paper with her. Please realize it may take up to one week for mail to go from camp to its destination.

If you receive an upsetting letter please wait for the next letter, to see if your daughter's tone has changed. Sometimes girls will write a first letter that shouts for attention and makes parents feel that camp is awful - every girl is a different individual and will react to situations in different ways. Most often by the time this letter has been received at home, the child has adjusted to camp and is happy. However, some campers give the outward appearance that they are happy, when they are not. Please help us give your child the best experience possible, the more we know, the better prepared we are! If you are concerned, please phone Lisa and she will check into the situation. Your daughter's happiness is our top priority! We do not have campers use the phone as we find it very disruptive.

### ***What is the camp policy regarding Tuck?***

Dry Tuck is available daily to purchase necessities such as toiletries, batteries, etc. and wet Tuck is also available for treats such as chips and candy. However it is limited to approximately \$2.00 per child, per time, and only twice a week. There is no need for cash at camp as these purchases will be added to your daughter's account and included on your invoice at the end of the camp session. The tuck charges may also include Life Saving or other manuals required for the higher swim awards, and/or extended trip fees etc. Other tuck items include water bottles, sun hats, and toques.

### ***Does Camp Oconto have Medical Staff on site at all times?***

Yes, Camp Oconto does have a rotating professional, medical staff consisting of two nurses and one physician; two of whom are on site at all times. We also have a small Health Centre where we can examine and treat minor illnesses such as colds, flu sprains, scrapes, etc. We do maintain and dispense a small stock of over-the-counter and prescription medication to get campers started on treatment if required. We then fill prescriptions at the pharmacy, which is fifteen minutes away by car. If your daughter needs medication while she is at camp, it will be charged to her account.

**The camp nurses dispense all medication** to ensure that campers are taking the correct amount of medication, at the appropriate time, and to prevent medication being taken in error. It is imperative that accurate information about your daughter's medical needs/conditions.

**Accident and Illness:** Campers will stay overnight in the Health Centre if they have a fever, are contagious or require observation, otherwise they are often more comfortable in their own bed. If there is an emergency we will telephone you as soon as possible. No charge is made for routine services, but special medicines, x-rays, etc. will be charged to your daughter's account. **We DO NOT carry extra accident or illness insurance for campers; this is considered to be your responsibility.** Please ensure you have adequate coverage to your satisfaction and include a copy of your Health Insurance coverage on the enclosed Camper Health History form for our records.

## ***Should I check my daughter for lice before sending her to camp?***

### **YES!**

- Please check their children for lice and nits *the week before and the day before* they come to camp. Notify the director if you find any.
- If a child arrives at camp with nits/or lice and has not been treated with lice killing shampoo and had the nits picked out, she may need to be sent home until clear!
- If your daughter has lice and is in the process of being treated, the camp director must be notified in advance of her arrival so that we can continue treatment at camp.
- Please realize lice do not winter at camp.
- They are only able to get into camp if they come in on someone's head.
- Please don't send lice to camp.
- If we have to treat your daughter for lice, which she brought into camp, we will charge your account

## **The Tough Stuff – and How We Can Handle Them Together; Bullying, Homesickness and “I’m Too Cool for Camp”**

Growing up in today's world is indeed a challenge. So is being a parent! At camp, our hope is to help equip children with the skills they need to deal with today's challenges. Here is some information for you to consider as you prepare yourself and your daughter for camp.

**Bullying** - Most children are exposed to it at least a couple of times in their life, either as a bully, a victim, or a bystander. We need to do what we can to help children understand what is happening when they encounter a situation, and how to deal with it – in whatever role they are involved in. To run away from it and pretend it doesn't exist, doesn't help.

We are asking for your help. Parents, please talk to your daughter(s) before camp. Let her know that camp is a safe place. It is safe to talk to her counsellor, section head or Lisa at any time. We will listen, IN CONFIDENCE. We know how to try and change the behaviour of the bully as well as the victim. No one should feel alone at camp! Please let us know as quickly as possible, if your daughter writes home and is concerned about anything or anyone. We need to know if there is a problem.

**Homesickness** - Yes this happens at Oconto. It is very normal. In numerous studies it has been documented that about 90% of kids who stay at overnight camps for more than two weeks, will experience some degree of homesickness. Homesickness is typically very mild; most girls will have a great time at camp and not be bothered by it. They will learn to cope in different ways. Girls today, need coping skills for many different parts of their life. Homesickness can be positive, it will teach her great life skills such as; perseverance, setting goals, and appreciating her family! Children use more than one strategy to help them deal with homesickness. Different individuals deal with life in different ways. We have some suggestions to help your daughter deal with the inevitable times that she will miss you. Homesickness builds confidence. We at camp and you as parents need to help make your daughter's experience as positive as possible. Please help her by;

- Making decisions about camp together,
- Practice being away from home at sleepovers,
- Share your optimism and excitement for camp,
- Help her to set goals for camp,
- Never make a deal that you will pick her up after a few days – she needs to know that you have confidence in her ability to enjoy camp. If you tell her that if she tries camp for a few days and doesn't like it, you will pick her up.... guess what? Chances are, whether she's happy or not, after a few days she'll want to come home. You must give her positive thoughts
- Write your daughter frequently at camp, short, happy letters help a lot.

▪ Please do not give bad news while she is at camp if it can be avoided. If you must, please call Lisa to discuss the situation first and how you and we at camp can handle it most effectively.

Please encourage your daughter when she's at camp to;

- Keep busy and to focus on camp and activities, not on what is happening at home
- Keep positive
- Make new friends
- Help another girl who is homesick by keeping her busy
- Don't send several pictures of family and friends and pets to camp— encourage short looks at a family photo and then off to be busy. To illustrate this point...we had a camper who had a ton of fun, all day, every day, until she went to bed. We quickly discovered that she had plastered the bottom of the bunk bed above hers with family photos. So every night, guess what she saw – Mom and Dad and guess what she did – cried. Be confident – Realize that being homesick is very normal - it means you love your family – that is a good thing.
- Getting over homesickness takes time, even a few days.
- It's o.k. to talk about it with your counsellor, or Lisa but you need to stay confident and help yourself get over it
- Remember, if you are homesick that means you miss your family, you love them and they love you – what could be better than that!

***"I'm Too Cool for Camp"*** - Sometimes kids feel as they grow older that camp has no challenges left for them. Please help your daughter to set goals for themselves before camp. Perhaps they can try activities that they have rarely tried before or they can aim to achieve a higher award level in a particular activity, or try drama and dance, or how about special arts? Maybe, she can set a goal to get to know the Awakening campers (the small camp within ours that is for girls with physical disabilities). To be bored at camp is such a waste! But, sometimes campers need help to look at camp differently. Camp is a great place to learn the 'soft skills' we all need in life. To learn to get along with all kinds of people, to settle differences, to really get to know someone by living with them, to cooperate, to help and to be positive. Please help your child think about camp and how she can get the most out of it.

Please call the camp office, if you have any questions.

613.375.6678