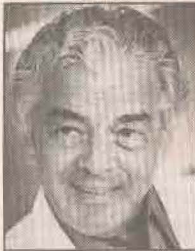


Kids' summer camps loosen apron strings

More than 6.1 million pre-teens or teens will spend a week or more at sleep-away summer camps across the USA this year. According to the National Camp Association, that's up about 100,000 from a year ago, despite the fact that most parents are under financial pressure.



Plain Talk
By Al Neuharth
USA TODAY Founder

In the olden days, summer camp often meant sleeping under a tent in the woods. Now most campers live in air-conditioned comfort, many in dormitories on college campuses.

For most kids, their first camp away from home is a dream come true. For many parents, it's a week or two of worry time.

Because I was blessed with camp-age kids when I was in my 50s and now again in my 80s, my experiences and perspective may interest you.

Back then, parents were more reluctant to let kids go or let go of kids. My first wife, Loretta, and I didn't send kids to camp until they were in high school. Now, my wife, Rachel, and I have sent them at age 8.

Two examples:

► Dan, now 54, went to a Don Budge tennis camp when he was 14. He came home with a certificate for "Honorable Mention Best Dressed."

► Andre, 10, came back last week from an Orlando Magic basketball camp with a trophy for "Best Hustler."

Whatever distinction kids earn at camp, they realize they did it on their own. If parents accept that, they won't try to keep them tied as closely to mom's apron strings or dad's belt.

With thoughtful discussion, the more parents loosen up on camp-age kids, the more kids will discover and do. Both will benefit.

Feedback

Other views on summer camps

"Summer camp is a good way to practice separation between you and your child. It gives a child confidence that he can cope without leaning on his parents."

— Jeffrey Solomon, executive director, National Camp Association

"Research is clear: A week or more at camp accelerates children's development. Kids love who they become at camp."

— Christopher Thurber, Ph.D., psychologist, and camp expert

Check ACACamps.org for more statistics

Not true

Check out my DVD to learn how to prepare kids

WINDMILLS 1/6

