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Take a Hike?and Other Summer Camp Ideas for Kids With Cancer [1]

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For those of us across the United States who are still recovering from yet another wallop of winter weather, summer seems like nothing more than a far-off dream. However, many parents are already thinking about packing bug spray, hiking boots, and sleeping bags as they start planning and registering for summer camp.

Going off to summer camp, whether it?s for a few days or a few weeks, can be a wonderful way for children and teens with cancer or cancer survivors to have fun and talk with other kids who really understand what it means to live with cancer.

Most programs offer everything you?d expect from a summer camp experience?swimming, canoeing, hiking, cookouts, campfires, sing-a-longs, and arts and crafts?combined with specially trained staff to care for kids with special needs. Most camps even have cancer doctors and nurses on staff to provide medical care to campers when necessary. Of course, if you are considering sending your child to camp, it is important to talk with his or her doctor first.

According to a number of research studies on the topic, going to camp with other kids living with cancer improves self-esteem and body image and reduces fear and anxiety. Camps offer kids with cancer the chance to learn from and interact with peers who are experiencing (or have experienced) similar treatments and side effects, develop skills to help them cope with the challenges of living with and beyond cancer, and be more independent?all while meeting new friends and getting to just be a kid.

Depending on the program, campers may be encouraged to invite siblings to come as well. There are also camps specifically for kids who have a parent with cancer. Cancer.Net provides an up-to-date list [2] of some of the national and international camps, retreats, or weekend gatherings for children, adults, and families occurring this year. To make these programs accessible to as many people as possible, most are available at low or no cost.

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