

Frequently Asked Questions by Parents of Cedarkirk Campers

Though your child is the one who is physically here at camp, parents often have many questions and concerns about their child's camp experience. As a parent, you play an important role in preparing your camper to come to Cedarkirk. The following are some frequently asked questions by parents that may help enhance your child's camping experience and assuage some of your concerns. If your question has not been addressed here or you would like additional information, please contact Matt Shick, Program Director, at 813.685.4224 or matt@cedarkirk.org.

Why should I send my child to camp?

This is an excellent question, and one that many parents often don't consider before signing their child up for camp. The answers to this question are many and varied, so the most commonly cited benefits of camp are listed here. Camps offer opportunities for fun – both in unstructured recreation and structured activities and games. Camp provides an environment for children that frees them from technological distractions and asserts the importance of interpersonal relationships and cooperation. Camps are excellent places for children and youth to improve athletic, artistic, and intellectual skills in a supportive and non-competitive setting. The community-oriented nature of residential camp allows campers to more easily make friends and develop social skills. Camp can further self-esteem and self-confidence by providing experiences in which campers challenge themselves to the extent they feel comfortable – as individuals and as part of a group. Group-building initiatives and games are instructive in illustrating that failure is useful as a learning experience and can be turned into success through critical thinking and trust amongst a group. Small-group camping emphasizes the development of skills and traits gained from having an ever-present, positive adult role model.

What can my child expect during his/her camp experience?

While at Cedarkirk, your child will be part of a “family group” comprised of a group of boys (with their male counselor) and a group of girls (with their female counselor). It is with this family unit that the camper will experience most of Cedarkirk's activities. In the evenings, these small groups come together for worship, snacks, and an evening activity (such as a campfire, night swim, field games, or line dancing). We believe this small group camping model provides a nurturing and safe environment and fosters meaningful relationships amongst campers and between campers and counselors. Camp days are filled with a variety of activities including Bible study, the climbing wall, archery, the high-ropes challenge course, swimming in the pool, canoeing, the low ropes initiatives course, arts and crafts, singing, the zip lines, a variety of games, and other activities.

What kind of training has the staff received?

Cedarkirk believes that a quality, well-trained staff is crucial to a successful and safe camping experience. All of our staff members are enthusiastic and dedicated Christians who have been interviewed, carefully selected, and trained extensively to ensure an exciting and meaningful camp experience for every camper. All summer staff members are at least 18 years of age, certified in CPR and first aid, and undergo three background checks (including a fingerprint analysis through the Department of Children and Families and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement). The entire staff receives eleven days of intensive training at the beginning of the summer, with ongoing instruction and skill checks throughout the camp season. Our training equips the staff with skills that enable them to create a physically and emotionally safe environment for all campers.

What are some of the best ways to prepare my child for camp this summer?

One of the best ways to physically and emotionally prepare for camp is to pack for camp with your child. Work together with your child in selecting clothes and packing the items on the “What-To-Bring” list. The Directors of Cedarkirk have many years of experience in their field and have compiled this list for you... PLEASE READ IT; far too many children arrive at camp unprepared. Many parents remember their own summer camp experiences as sunny afternoons by the pool or lake and have forgotten the chill of overnight camping or the occasional rains. By packing together, your child will be aware of what they have brought for use throughout the week. Do remember that the camp environment can be rough on clothes: it is not necessary to spend money on new clothes for camp. Older shirts, shorts, pants, and shoes that your child will not mind getting dirty, muddy, or wet are excellent to pack for camp. Other suggestions for packing include labeling the camper's belongings with his/her name and including a plastic bag to hold dirty clothes.

Packing together also provides an excellent time for talking about what your child can expect at camp and about any fears or concerns your camper might have. It is often helpful to share your own positive experiences at summer camp and what you hope they will get to experience during their stay at Cedarkirk. It is important to let your child know that you are interested in what will be happening at camp and will be excited to hear what he/she has learned and experienced after camp is over. It is also an opportunity for you and your child to pray about any anxieties and concerns they have.

How can I help with homesickness?

Homesickness is the distress caused by actual or anticipated separation from home or beloved objects. During their time at camp, nearly 95% of all campers will experience some kind of feelings related to this separation; even adult staff experience these feelings to some degree. The good news is that most campers have a wonderful time at summer camp. Cedarkirk counselors are well-trained to respond to homesick campers.

There are a number of ways parents can help prevent homesickness:

- Include your child in preparing, packing, and planning for camp.
- Use a wall calendar to chart how many days until camp starts and note how many days your child will be at camp.
- Talk frankly about homesickness with your child.
- Discuss the things from home your child may miss while away at camp, but emphasize the new friends they will make and all the fun activities they will have an opportunity to experience.
- Talk about the length of camp in perspective to other positive overnight experiences your child has had, such as staying at a friend's or relative's house.
- Set up a time to practice staying away from home overnight.
- Try to avoid planning stressful events just before or during the camper's stay at camp (such as moving, a divorce or separation, or the departure of a family member for military service).
- During the camp, send mail or email to your child highlighting how proud of them you are and how you are excited to hear all about what they've been doing, but not stressing how much you miss them. (It is a good idea to send letters the weekend before your child's camp starts so that they arrive on the first or second day of camp. You may also bring letters with you to Check-In and give them to your child's counselor for distribution throughout the week.)
- Try to avoid making deals or promises with your child. Do not suggest that your child can call home if he/she gets homesick. It is our policy that campers are not allowed to use the phone while at camp. Campers are also not permitted to bring mobile phones to camp. If your child has a bad case of homesickness or if there is a medical problem, a Director at Cedarkirk will contact you immediately.

If a child chooses to leave camp due to homesickness, please help your child understand that homesickness is a perfectly normal part of the growing process and never something for which a camper or parent should be ashamed. The camper will already be dealing with guilt and embarrassment about leaving camp. Let them know you are proud of them for giving camp a try and discuss the positive aspects of the experience so they will be willing to try an overnight camp or trip when they are ready.

How can I communicate with my child when they are at camp?

Whether it is a piece of mail, an email, or a fax, campers love to receive word from home! All mail (faxes and emails included) are distributed to campers after lunch, typically at the beginning of rest time. The first full day of camp is an excellent time for mail because many campers are just starting to get comfortable and settled within their groups and the camp itself. If you plan to write a letter early so that it will be here on the first full day of camp, the letter would need to be mailed before the child leaves for camp or discreetly passed to a staff member or the child's counselor during opening check-in. Fax and email are quick ways to send messages to your child. If you plan to send your child a "care package", send puzzles, comic books, stuffed animals, etc.; please do not send snacks or other food items. Cedarkirk provides all of the snacks your child will need and extra goodies tend to attract bugs and critters into the cabins and lodges. Write to your child and let them know that you are thinking of them and that you are proud of them.

Mail may be sent to the following address:

[Camper Name and Group or Village] (Group/Village information will be given to you at Check-In)
Cedarkirk
1920 Streetman Drive
Lithia, FL 33547

You can also fax letters to **(813) 689-9170** or email messages to **kirkcampermail@cedarkirk.org**. Please include the camper's first and last name in the subject line, along with their Group or Village, and limit all email and faxes to one page in length. We are unable to process attached files. Please read "How can my child communicate with me?" below if you want to receive a reply back from your camper by fax or email. In order to maintain a community-focused program, we do not allow campers to use the phone, but we will make sure they receive any emergency phone messages.

How can my child communicate with me?

Parents always want to hear from their child and are often disappointed if they do not receive a letter. There are two ways your child can contact you during his/her stay at Cedarkirk. Your child can send letters or postcards. Postcards and envelopes should be pre-addressed and stamped (Cedarkirk does not sell stamps). Summer campers can also send faxes or email home to their loved ones. At opening Check-In, email/fax sheets will be sold (a packet of three for \$1.00), which campers can use to write messages. If you purchase email/fax sheets for your camper, please encourage them to write to you during rest time or before bed! Completed

pages are then faxed or emailed to friends and family. As mentioned above, in order to keep Cedarkirk “a place apart”, it is our policy that phone use (including personal mobile phones) is not available to campers.

How do I register my child for camp?

The easiest and fastest way is to visit the Cedarkirk website (www.cedarkirk.org) and click on the “Summer Camp” tab on the left-hand side of the page. You will be able to see descriptions and up-to-date availabilities in all of our summer programs and register your child for camp. You may also fill out a Registration Form and mail it to us at the following address: Cedarkirk, 1920 Streetman Drive, Lithia, FL, 33547.

What time is opening Check-In?

Check-In for all camps except SHL and CLIP is from 4:00 pm—5:00 pm on the first day of the camp you registered for. SHL and CLIP Check-In takes place from 2:30 pm—3:30 pm on the first day of the camp you registered for. When you arrive at Cedarkirk, signs and staff will be posted to direct you to the location of your child’s Check-In. You will receive a confirmation email or letter reiterating Check-In procedures after you register your child for camp.

What time is the Closing Program?

The Closing Program for all camps is held at 3:00 pm on the last day of your child’s camp session. We feel it is important for parents to be present during this time of closure and strongly recommend attending in support of your child if you are able. Signs and staff will be posted to direct you to the location of the Closing Program.

Can my camper come with a friend?

Yes! However, you must indicate your camper’s roommate request on their registration application and both campers must request one another for this request to be honored. Our policy is that each camper can request only **ONE** roommate.

My child is attending camp with many friends. Why can’t they all be in the same group?

One of the greatest values of the camp experience is the community and camaraderie that develops within a group as the week progresses. We recognize that a week of camp could further strengthen the bonds of friendship and trust your child already has with his or her friends. However, when many campers in a group already know each other, the group-building process is hindered and the campers that aren’t associated with the group of friends often feel marginalized. To ensure that all campers have the best possible experience, we spread out groups of friends across several camp groups.

Are there scholarships available?

Yes! Many churches offer scholarships to families with financial need and love to send kids to summer camp! If your church does not offer camper scholarships, please fill out the Scholarship Request Form on our website (www.cedarkirk.org/summer) to see if we can help you with a scholarship. All scholarships are based on financial need and are entirely confidential.

Can my child attend more than one week of camp?

Certainly. Please note, however, that campers may not stay at Cedarkirk over the weekend.

Can I register my child for a camp they are not old enough for? What if my child is older in age, but has not finished a certain grade yet?

At Cedarkirk, we register campers by the grade in school that they have most recently completed. If a camp is designated as being for campers in 6th – 8th grade, participants must have finished 6th, 7th, or 8th grade by the start of the summer. Breaking registration up by grade level helps us most appropriately place campers with others that are on the same developmental level to ensure a better experience for all campers.

Can my child bring food or snacks to camp?

No. During their week at camp, more than enough food and snacks will be provided to your camper (three meals a day with multiple options and an evening snack). If your child does arrive with food, they will be given a choice to share it with the group, or have it held in the office and returned at the end of the week. Having food in our cabins and lodges tends to attract bugs and critters into our buildings.

Is there a camp store? Should my child bring money for the store?

Our camp store is open only during Check-In and Closing Program each week and sells t-shirts, water bottles, and other items. The camp store is not open while camp is in session and does not sell food or drinks, so there is no reason for campers to bring money with them for their week of camp.

What happens during severe weather like a bad thunderstorm or hurricane?

During a typical Florida thunderstorm – a common occurrence in the summer months – campers on site move to buildings like the Pavilion or a Lodge to ride out the storm. In staff training, we instruct our staff on seeking the best shelter options during inclement weather no matter where their group is located. Throughout the summer months, we stay tuned to weather forecasts to help us know the latest storm information and plan accordingly. In case of a tornado watch or warning, campers gather at Cedar Lodge, the lowest shelter point at camp. If an approaching hurricane threatens the surrounding area, parents of each camper are called and campers are picked up prior to the storm's arrival. Counselors are trained in teaching and leading alternative indoor activities during periods of bad weather and in spite of rainy days, campers have fun playing and laughing inside Cedarkirk's facilities.

What is Cedarkirk's discipline policy?

Throughout your child's stay at Cedarkirk, staff work hard to ensure the emotional and physical safety of your child. All campers are required to sign a Camper Agreement before coming to camp, which promises their understanding of camp life and our rules. Each group also creates a covenant at the beginning of the week, which lays out expectations agreed upon by the campers within each group. When a camper's behavior damages the dynamics of their small group, staff will intervene and attempt to resolve the conflict in a healthy, positive way. Counselors are trained in speaking with campers about what is bothering them and what might have prompted a behavior. If this does not resolve the issue or encourage a change of behavior, the camper will be asked to meet with directors. If the camper is non-compliant with the safe environment we have created, they may be sent home. It is our hope that we can intercede and work to resolve conflict in healthy ways before this drastic step must be taken. Violent behavior is never tolerated at Cedarkirk: campers acting violently towards self or others are removed from their group and sent home immediately.

Do you have medical staff available?

Yes. We have a nurse on site each week to assist your child with any medical emergency. We also require all of our staff to be certified in first aid and CPR. Emergency personnel are located less than three miles from the camp gate and a hospital is located twenty minutes from camp.

When is my deposit due?

The deposit for summer camp is due at the time the application is submitted. If you register online, a \$50 non-refundable deposit is due at the time you register – either by credit card or EFT (electronic funds transfer). If you submit a paper application, a \$50 non-refundable check must accompany the application in order for it to be processed. The deposit will guarantee your place in a registered camp.

What is your withdrawal/cancellation policy?

We understand that complications arise and that you may have to withdraw your child from their registered program prior to the start of camp. The initial \$50 deposit is non-refundable and will not be returned to you. However, if you have paid any additional amount toward your balance, or paid it in full, that money will be returned to you in the method you paid for camp (i.e. if paid by credit card, the fee will be credited to that card; if paid by check, the fee will be returned to you via a check from Cedarkirk, etc.). If your child is asked to leave camp because of behavior issues or chooses to leave due to homesickness, your camp fee will not be refunded.

At Cedarkirk, we strive to provide the best possible environment for your child. If there is any information that would help us to care for your camper better, please let us know prior to their arrival or let their counselor know at opening Check-In.

We are looking forward to your visit to Cedarkirk!