

THE PARENT CONNECTION

a newsletter for parents of Lavaca County youth ages 10 and up



Beyond the Backyard: The Benefits of Summer Camp for Texas Youth

HELPING CHILDREN BUILD INDEPENDENCE, CONFIDENCE, AND FRIENDSHIPS
—ONE SUMMER EXPERIENCE AT A TIME.

BY MELVIN E. ATKINSON, CENTER DIRECTOR, TEXAS 4-H CONFERENCE CENTER

If you asked your child how they feel about spending a week away at summer camp, what might they say? Would they immediately start talking about swimming, campfires, and new friends? Or would they hesitate and ask if they really have to go? And if we are honest with ourselves as parents, the bigger question might be this: how do we feel about sending them?

For many families, the idea of summer camp brings both excitement and a little bit of worry. Recent news coverage of flooding in the Hill Country around Kerrville has reminded many parents that sending a child away, even for a short time, can feel like a big step. Those feelings are normal. Our instincts as parents are to keep our children close and safe.

At the same time, adolescence is a season of life when young people begin learning how to navigate the world with a little more independence. Just as we gradually give our kids more responsibility at home, experiences outside the home can help them build confidence and resilience.

For generations, summer camps across Texas have provided exactly that opportunity. Camp is a place where youth can try new activities, build friendships, and discover abilities they may not have realized they had. Whether it is paddling a canoe for the first time, working together to solve a challenge, or simply learning how to keep up with their own belongings for a week, these small experiences add up to important life lessons.

Research backs up what many parents and former campers already know. Youth who participate in high-quality camp experiences often show increases in independence, social awareness, willingness to try new things, and stronger friendships after camp. These are the kinds of “soft skills” that help young people succeed in school, future careers, and relationships.

Camp also offers something many families struggle to create during the busy school year—time away from screens and time spent outdoors. Being outside encourages curiosity and creativity, while shared experiences help campers build friendships quickly. Many young people leave camp with new confidence and a sense that they belong to something bigger than themselves.

Of course, parents want to know that their children will be safe. Reputable camps take this responsibility seriously. Most have trained staff, established safety procedures, and clear plans for weather events and other emergencies. Asking questions about accreditation, supervision, staff training, and safety plans can help parents feel confident that they are choosing a program that fits their child.

Here in rural Texas, we understand the importance of community and trust. Often the best recommendations come from neighbors, friends, or other parents who have sent their children

before. Just like choosing a school activity or sports team, finding the right camp often comes down to finding a place where your child feels comfortable and excited to learn.

Summer camp will not replace the role of family. Instead, it complements it. It gives youth a chance to practice independence while knowing they will return home to the same support and encouragement they have always had.

And when they come back from camp, you may notice something new. Maybe it is a little more confidence, a new story about a challenge they overcame, or even a friendship they are excited to tell you about. Sometimes the experiences that help our kids grow the most are the ones that take them just a little bit beyond their comfort zones.

Camp by the Numbers



89% gained **greater independence**



78% improved **social skills & teamwork**



72% increased **confidence**



93% built **friendships** with **new peers.**

Source: American Camp Association youth development research

Summer Fun

Check out these opportunities

Texas 4-H Conference Center:

<https://texas4hcenter.tamu.edu/services/youth-camps-and-retreats/>

<https://www.pvamu.edu/admissions/spao/camps/>

District 11 4-H Opportunities:

Jr. Leader Lab

July 7

Saltwater Pavilion

Rockport

<https://d114-h.tamu.edu/events-and-contests/junior-leader-lab/>

Leadership Lab

June 9-11

Splashway

<https://d114-h.tamu.edu/events-and-contests/leadership-lab/>

Lavaca County 4-H Robotics Camp

Dates/location to be announced

3 ½ days within the last two weeks of July

Lavaca County 4-H Summer Sewing Days

Dates to be announced

Lavaca County Extension Office

email natalie.knesek@ag.tamu.edu if

interested in signing up

no experience required



Ask the Coalition

Have a parenting question you would like answered?

Perhaps, you have a concern or issue you would like the coalition to address?

Use this form to contact coalition members:

<https://forms.gle/G7BRQYPft9hUf2H39>

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