

Frequently Asked Questions by Parents

How do I find out more about O-AT-KA if we are considering camp for the first time?

The best way to become familiar with Camp O-AT-KA is to visit during the season. You can call the Camp office to make arrangements for a tour. If possible, families interested in camp should visit the summer prior to their son's first anticipated season. It is also possible to visit O-AT-KA before and after the season, although there is no substitute for seeing camp when the program is underway. Both the Summer Director and Executive Director are always happy to answer any questions about our informational materials. You can also arrange for an Open House with a personal visit from the Summer Director or another member of the staff who can give you a more in depth idea about camp and answer any questions in your own home.

What is the best age to send my son to overnight camp?

The "right" age can vary greatly among boys. In our experience, one of the best indicators is the attitude of your son. If he is expressing interest and says he is ready, then he is probably right. We will accept campers as young as age 8, but most boys begin Camp O-AT-KA at age 9 or even 10. We view the opportunity to have your son at camp as an investment and hope that once he has experienced a summer at Camp O-AT-KA, he will return for countless summers thereafter.

How can I best prepare my son for his first experience away from home?

In our experience, we have found that sending your child away to camp is harder on the parents than the children. Summer camp is a gift you are giving your child to give him an opportunity to develop coping skills on his own, build independence and confidence, self reliance and social skills that he will use throughout his life. A few tips we have found to be helpful include: involving your son in the decision to spend time at camp, give him as much control over the process of preparing for camp, talking about what to anticipate at camp, meeting staff or other campers before the opening day of camp when possible, and using a calendar to show the length of time your son will be away. We find most importantly that parents need to be careful in expressing their own anxieties or ambivalence to their son. Do not make a "pick up plan" or any deal with your son that you will bring him home if he does not like camp. This sends the message that you as the parent do not have confidence in your son's ability to be on his own, and sets an expectation in his mind that he won't like camp before he ever tries it.

We also know from research published by the American Academy of Pediatrics Council that what parents say beforehand is critical. Talking about homesickness does not cause it, but how a child is prepared to be away from home can make a significant difference. The American Camping Association publishes a DVD-CD set titled "The Secret Ingredients of Summer Camp Success" that can be helpful for parents and campers who will be separated for the first time. Also know that if your son is consistently homesick, our staff will contact you and consult you in how we are helping your son through this transition.

What are the Camp's strategies for handling homesickness?

To begin with, we recognize that some homesickness is a normal and expected part of being away from home. During staff training, we have seminars with outside experts like Dr. Chris Thurber who is a board-certified psychologist, father and researcher with over years of camping experience as well. Our staff is trained in multiple strategies to help children through a period of homesickness. We recognize that "just keeping them busy" is not the universal solution for homesickness.

What is the Two-Weeker program?

The Two Weeker program is offered at the beginning of each session and in the second two weeks of the first session. It is meant to give boys (and their parents) a shorter experience initially. This opportunity is available your first summer at Camp O-AT-KA only. Once the application is accepted, we will inquire if your son has the option to extend his stay to the full session, if he chooses, once he is here. At the beginning of the second week, if your son would like to stay, he will have the opportunity to call you and get your permission to extend with his Unit Head staff member near by to answer any questions.

When is the best time to apply to camp?

Camper applications are accepted as early as the previous summer. Many boys complete their applications for the next summer before ever leaving camp. Applications are accepted on a first come, first serve basis. For this reason, if you and your son believe that Camp O-AT-KA is right for you, please get your application in early. We expect a waiting list for the Middle and Senior Units by late winter every year.

Does Camp O-AT-KA offer financial aid?

Yes. Every summer camperships and aid at varying levels are offered to a number of boys. Families who are interested in applying for financial aid should fully complete the request for aid forms and submit them as soon as possible with the camper application.

Is there a discount for families sending more than one son to Camp O-AT-KA?

Yes. We offer a \$200 discount for each brother in the immediate family

What training do O-AT-KA staff members receive?

All members of our staff attend a week-long training session before the start of camp. Our staff training week includes all areas of camp life and seminars given by outside specialists who are psychologists and lawyers and have significant experience with children and camping. The week of staff training addresses all areas of camp life with the most focus on safety and working as a team.

How is the health and safety of my son ensured while he is at Camp O-AT-KA?

Our counselors' minds are always on safety first. Insuring that you have completed the comprehensive medical form helps us to know first hand any of your son's own personal health issues. We always have two RNs on staff full time, and for part of the summer, we have a child psychologist on staff as well. We have a local primary care physician in Standish who serves as our camp doctor and reviews our standing orders every summer. For emergencies, Bridgeton Hospital is within 18 miles and Maine Medical Center in Portland is within 30 miles. Parents are notified immediately if any health concerns arise at all.

When can I visit my son?

We understand that many parents want to visit their son while he is away at camp. While it is not necessary to visit your son, we do allow parents to come and visit on the second or third Sunday in the first session and the second Sunday in the second session. We ask that you visit between the hours of 12:00 pm and 4:30 pm. You are welcome to arrive at camp earlier on the visiting Sundays, but your son will not be permitted to leave until after 12:00 pm, after we have gathered as a community in our chapel. You are always welcome to join us for that gathering. You are welcome to join us for Sunday dinner served at 12:45 pm. Advanced reservations are necessary so that we can accommodate you family in our dining commons. You **MUST** check in at the office when you arrive and sign your son out of camp, if you will be leaving the property. We request that all campers be back in camp by 5:00 pm on Sunday evening for the special programming that always occurs on a Sunday evening. When you return, you **MUST** sign you son back in to camp at the office. Campers are not permitted to leave camp with anyone, but their parents unless the office has written permission on file.

Can I speak with my son on the telephone?

No. We ask that even in an emergency, you ask our staff to assist you. At the Summer Director's discretion, certain situations are appropriate for telephone contact. In our experience, it is important for our staff to know why you need to speak with your son so that we can assist him, as needed, once he hangs up the phone. We are happy to have your son's cabin counselor or the Unit Head call you when you have concerns or any questions or even find you need to hear first hand how your son is doing. We find that even a boy who is having a great time can become homesick at the sound of his mother's voice. In general, most parents find it more difficult to send their son away while their sons are too busy and enjoying camp too much to notice that they miss their parents.

CAMPER Frequently Asked Questions

Where does the name "O-AT-KA" mean?

Many say that it is a Seneca Indian word for "a clearing in the woods." We also refer to it to mean:

O – Our

A – Aim

T- To

K- Keep

A- Achieving.

Why can't I bring my game boy, Nintendo, cell phone, computer, electronic devices in general to camp?

You will be too busy to find the time to use any of your video games. Camp is an opportunity to interact with other campers and enjoy camp life both indoors and outdoors. You will not have the opportunity to use a telephone or cell phone while you are at camp. Everyone who is at camp has been away from home and knows that speaking on the telephone makes you feel homesick even if you are having a great time.

May I receive care packages?

YES! As long as they do not contain FOOD! A cabin in the Maine woods, in the hot summer, with squirrels and insects around is not a good place to store food. Receiving new books or small toys is always fun. We have amazing chefs and everyone loves the food! Plus there is a candy line twice a week.

How do I earn Chevrons (And what is a Chevron anyway?)

A Chevron is an award you receive for completing specific requirements with in different craft activities. The requirements are based on age level and help to structure the curriculum that corresponds with learning each different craft activity that we offer here at Camp O-AT-KA.

If I come to Camp with a friend, can we be in the same cabin?

We encourage you to make new friends when you come to camp and to have the opportunity to meet many new people from different places. For that reason, we will accept cabin request of one friend only, and the request must be mutual in order for you and your friend to potentially be placed in the same cabin. Keep in mind that you will also see your friends frequently in some of your activities and all of the activities you do with your Unit.