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FIRST-TIME FAMILIES GUIDE

YMCA CAMP IMMOKALEE



WELCOME TO OUR FAMILY

Greetings from the shores of Lake Brooklyn!

Thank you for taking the time to read our First Time Families Guide for YMCA Camp Immokalee. Please know that our team has carefully crafted this guide to ensure we are giving you and your camper the most vital information to have a successful first summer with us.

When my family first stepped on to property just over a year ago, my goals for the summer were simple: Listen, watch, learn, and wait. My focus was to feel the pulse of camp and understand what heart of this place really is. This summer you will be able to feel it when you drive through the gates of camp. You'll see it when your camper has the longest goodbyes on closing day. You'll hear it when your campers get home and talk so passionately about planning for the following year.

The heart of this place is the community. From top to bottom, YMCA Camp Immokalee creates opportunities for our campers to be together. In a world where the vast majority of people are seeking a community through a screen, this is a place where people learn that being outdoors with people who care is what really matters. We trade the reel life of social media for a real life of friendships, fellowship, and fun.

I am thrilled that my family and I were led to be in Florida just over a year ago. We have felt so welcomed, wanted, and loved here by every person we encounter. More than anything, we are excited to have every person who comes through our gates know for sure: Here, you are home.

Thank you for choosing YMCA Camp Immokalee. Thank you for being a part of our community.

CHECK-IN & CHECK-OUT

CHECK-IN

This summer we are back to our standard check-in process that will allow you the opportunity to meet your camper's counselors and help your camper get settled into their cabin. The check-in process will begin when your pull into camp and park in our Airnasium parking lot. From there, our staff will guide you to the Dining Hall, where stations will be set up for parents and campers to go through.

Parent Stations

- Check-in table
 - ◇ This is where you will get your camper's cabin assignment and ensure all required paperwork has been submitted and your balance is paid in full.
- Medication Table
 - ◇ This is where you will turn in any medications your camper will take during their time at camp.
 - ◇ It is important to remember that all medication must be turned in, in the original pill bottle, as medications will be dispensed according to the label on the pill bottle.
- Mail Drop
 - ◇ This is where you can drop off any care packages for your camper to receive during camp.
 - ◇ Any packages that do not have a date will be delivered on Monday.
- Add-ons Table
 - ◇ This is where you can verify your camper's add-ons (like Ranch Camp, Trail Ride, or Water Sports). You can make any necessary adjustments or see if there have been any last minute cancellations.
- Camp Store Balance
 - ◇ This is where you can ensure your camper has funds in their Camp Store Balance.

Camper Stations

- Health Check
 - ◇ This is where your camper will be checked for Lice, Athletes Foot, and Temperature.
- Water Bottles
- Backpacks
- Treats

CHECK-OUT

Check-out is easy! You'll pull through our drive-through, where you'll show your photo ID and pick up any medication you dropped off on opening day. You'll then pull forward into our parking area, and we'll have your camper and their things delivered to your car!

The most important thing to remember when it comes to Check-Out is that anyone picking up your camper must be on their authorized pickup list (available on CampBrain) and have a valid photo ID.

Exact times and instructions for Check-In and Check-Out will be sent prior to the start of your session!

ABOUT OUR CABINS

YMCA Camp Immokalee has 15 cabins – 8 on our West Side (typically used for girls) that have bathrooms inside the cabin and 7 on our East Side (typically used for boys) that share a common bathhouse (KYBO as we call it). Some fast facts about our cabins:

- All cabins have AC and heat (heat is important during Winter Camp!).
- Generally, cabins have between 8-11 campers, one counselor-in-training (CIT), and two counselors each.
 - ◊ This does vary a little, Owls, our largest cabin, sleeps 20 campers. Older cabins typically do not have a CIT. Rarely, we will have only one counselor per cabin.
- All cabins have bunk beds with twin mattresses.
- Generally, we keep campers in the cabin within two grades of each other. Like anything, there are rare exceptions.

CABIN LIFE STORAGE SPACE & PACKING

Most cabins don't have a ton of room for personal belongings, but there are creative ways to make it work! Here are a few packing tips:

- Most campers find it best to pack in plastic drawers [like these](#), flat storage containers [like these](#) that can easily slide under beds, trunks [like these](#) that can sit at the edge of the bed (we love when they're painted or decorated for camp!), or duffel bags that can sit at the edge of the bed.
- Many campers use over the door hooks [like these](#) to organize towels, rain jackets, etc.
- Shower caddies are especially important for boys who travel back and forth to the bathhouse (KYBO) daily and are asked not to leave things in the KYBO. [Here is a great example](#).
- Label EVERYTHING! You can purchase labels from Oliver's Labels during registration or by logging back into your CampBrain account.
 - ◊ We'd recommend labels no matter what, but we specifically recommend Oliver's because some of the profits go back to YMCA Camp Immokalee. Camp doesn't get the deal if you buy directly from Oliver's Labels, so please try to order through the CampBrain link!
- Younger campers (generally 10 and younger) often do well with pre-planned outfits. Families can do this by putting all the clothes for one day in a large ziploc bag and labelling the day.
- Make sure note to pack medication or anything you'll need at Check-In in your camper's bag. This can really slow you down while going through Check-In! Put anything you'll need during Check-In in a purse or separate Check-In bag – especially if your camper is riding with a friend.
 - ◊ No medicine (including prescription meds, OTC meds, birth control pills, etc.) other than inhalers and EpiPens can be kept in the cabin.
- Girl campers love to pack things to help decorate their space. We've seen posters, fairy lights, streamers, and more.
- Make a point to pack only things you're okay with your camper not coming home with. While we do our best to mitigate lost and found, campers sometimes get things mixed up, get things stained, etc. Play clothes (and not new play clothes) are best for camp.
- Ask your camper where their phone is before they get out of the car. We know many campers want to bring their phones to camp (sometimes with their family's support), but we are strictly tech-free. With 1,500+ campers a summer, we know the hiding tricks and we're on the lookout! We are not responsible for phones brought to camp.

STORAGE SPACE & PACKING CONT'D

- Pack laundry bag, laundry hamper, or trash bag for your camper's dirty clothes, and make sure they know exactly where it is. Trust us, if you don't tell them, they won't pull it out, and the rest of their clothes will suffer throughout the week.
 - ◇ PRO-TIP: Veteran camp moms pick campers up and go straight from camp to the laundromat. By the end of the week, the dirty clothes are often full and wet, and it can be worth it to save your washer and dryer.
 - ◇ TWO-WEEK TIP: Some of our campers register for our stayover sessions to connect two one-week sessions and make it a two-week stay. We DO their laundry during this time - you do not need to send detergent, money, etc. We've got it taken care of.
 - ◇ If your camper runs out of clothes, has an accident, etc., we have laundry facilities on site to help take care of it. Make sure they know beforehand that their counselor is there to help if it happens!

A full packing list is provided in the Family Handbook!

CABIN TIME

Just how often are campers in their cabin? Not much! Campers have about 45 minutes to an hour every morning to get ready. During this time, we ask them to pack for breakfast - lunch, so if your camper struggles with transitions or planning, a conversation ahead of camp could be great. Other than that, campers are in the cabin for an hour of rest every day and for showers and sleep at night. They'll occasionally be in the cabin longer if we have severe weather.

SHOWERS

All campers are required to shower daily at camp! Most campers shower at night, but occasionally girl campers (because they have bathrooms in their cabins) will shower in the morning. Because there are 8-11 campers in a cabin, shower time is quick and to the point!

OTHER BATHROOM ISSUES

Often, campers will have trouble going to the bathroom at camp and get a little backed up. This isn't because there isn't time to go - it's because some campers feel uncomfortable going with other people around, and at camp, there are always other people around. This is something else you can talk to your camper about before camp! Make sure they know that going to the bathroom is a normal part of human life and that if they do struggle to go, they can talk to the nurse.

Wetting the bed is also a fairly common occurrence at camp. Even campers who haven't had accidents in years can be thrown off by being in a new place and being around new people. Not to worry! Make sure your camper knows to discreetly tell a counselor what happened, and they'll get it taken care of.

MENSTRUAL CYCLES/PERIODS

If your female camper is at an age where other girls her age may have started their menstrual cycle, we encourage you to have a conversation about menstruation with her before arriving at camp. Many campers start at camp for the first time, and even those who don't may see period supplies in the cabin restroom or hear other campers talking about it and have questions. We're happy to help camper navigate their first time, but knowing what it is beforehand really helps them to feel at ease!

CABIN REQUESTS

If you have a friend coming to camp and want to share a cabin with them, we'd love to make it happen! We do require that cabin requests be mutual (you request each other) and that requests be no more than two grades apart. We also know that sometimes larger groups of kids all want to be together, and while we can make that happen to an extent, we do break up groups bigger than half the cabin as long as they'll be in the same age group. When groups are larger than half the cabin, it often makes the other people in the cabin feel left out.

If you get to camp and see that your cabin request wasn't met and it follows all guidelines, please tell the person checking you in! Humans make the cabin assignments, and humans can make mistakes. But, they can always fix mistakes, so please speak up! We will do our best to correct any mistakes if we are able to do so. Because we often need staff and CITs (counselors-in-training) in specific cabins for specific reasons, we do keep CIT and counselor requests in mind, but they cannot be guaranteed.

MEALS LINING UP

Before each meal, we have what we call flagpole - a time for campers to get together to sing songs, cheer, and compete in some friendly competition. The loudest cabins will go in first, then the remaining cabins will compete to see who goes in next. Some of the flagpole competitions include Song Wars (cabins have to come up with unused songs that feature a certain word), impersonations, and more.

After being selected to go in, all campers must wash their hands at our outdoor canoe sinks. They then head inside, where they'll get in line for food.

SERVING

Campers go through a cafeteria-style line to get their food.

FOOD

Our breakfasts are typically things like pancakes, sausage, and fruit; waffles and sausage; biscuits with eggs, cheese, and bacon; bagels and cream cheese, etc. Our lunches are typically things like chicken tenders, hamburgers, chicken sandwiches, tacos, etc. Our dinners are typically things like spaghetti, chicken alfredo, meatball subs, etc.

If your camper is picky, we're happy to offer a few other options (normally salad, grilled cheese, quesadillas, noodles with sauce or butter, etc.). If your camper is picky beyond those foods, we ask that you consider packing things they like. If you'd like to discuss the camp menu or if you have questions about food service, reach out to one of our directors, Jessica Bombach at jbombach@fcymca.org.

FOOD ALLERGIES AND SPECIAL DIETS

We serve many campers each year with tree nut allergies, peanut allergies, egg allergies - you name it! We also accommodate campers and staff who have vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free diets (along with others). These are things we're happy to work with! We do have to have these requests at least two weeks prior to a camper attending camp. If the request isn't made by this time, we'll ask the family to send some supplementary food with their camper.

This year, allergies and special diets can be found in our Medical Form. This is different than years past and may not make sense for your camper (we recognize some diets aren't always medical related), but this is the place CampBrain, our registration system, prompts those questions. Pulling reports of who needs what is MUCH easier when we follow their guide!

ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY SELECTION

Sunday evening, campers will have the opportunity to select their own activities for the week. We'll go over each activity and what it is, then we'll give each camper a card with Monday/Wednesday on the front and Tuesday/Thursday on the back. Each side will have four blanks. Once we get started, campers can pick which activity they want to participate in at which time. Some important notes:

- All activities have capacities, and some (especially Tubing) do fill. If your camper REALLY wants something, they need to sign up for that ASAP.
- Not all activities are offered at all times. We announce this out loud before activity selection starts, so it's important that campers listen to what activity is offered for them when.
- Some add-ons take up time from other activities. Ranch Camp will take up two periods each day, and Water Sports will take up one period a day. Trail Rides will not conflict with activity selection.
 - ◇ Because not all activities are offered at all times, Ranch Camp may interfere with your camper's ability to select some activities. We try our best to avoid this, but with so many campers and so many different schedules, it does happen. If your camper's Ranch Camp conflicts with something else they'd rather do, we are happy to cancel Ranch Camp with your permission.

ACTIVITIES OFFERED

Our activities offered actually vary week-to-week, so it's best for your camper to listen with an open mind during activity selection. Some we have every week include:

- Tubing - Tubing behind our jetski on Lake Brooklyn
- Canoes & Kayaks
- Land Sports - Games like basketball, handball, gaga/octoball, soccer, etc.
- Arts & Crafts - Making bracelets, doing crafts, painting, and more
- Challenge Course - A mix of team building activities and our zip line
- BBs - Learning about gun safety and shooting BBs at our targets
- Archery - Learn to shoot a bow and arrow
- Slingshots - Using a slingshot to fire away at our targets
- Rifles - Learning about gun safety and shooting our .22 rifles (12+ only)
- Survival - Starting fires, building forts, etc.
- Newspaper - Working together to create a camp newspaper with inside jokes polls, stories, and more
- Dance & Games - Learn some traditional camp dances and play fun inside games

ADD-ONS

All the activities above are included in the cost of camp, but add-ons have additional fees and require signing up through CampBrain. Your camper will have an awesome time at camp whether they have add-ons or not - add-ons just help give campers a little something different. The 2023 add-ons, descriptions, and prices can be found [here](#).

Campers can only sign up for one add-on per session.

EVENING ACTIVITIES

Each evening, we get together for a big all-camp activity. These include games like Capture the Flag, Counselor Hunt, and some Camp Immokalee-specific games like 7-Way Capture the Flag, Domination, Chaos, and more. We go over all the rules at the start of the game, so there's no need for your camper to worry!

TYPICAL DAY

Our campers wake up around 7:00 am each morning. This is a great time for them to get up and moving for the morning, getting dressed for the morning, and cleaning up their area before heading to breakfast. During some point of the day, everyone:

- Eats breakfast, lunch, and dinner
- Goes to four selected activities (Monday-Thursday)
- Comes together for an evening activity
- Visits the Camp Store
- Enjoys a rest period out of the heat

Our youngest campers will go to bed between 9:30-10:00 pm each night, our oldest campers will be in bed between 10:00-11:00 pm each night.

CAMP STORE

Campers will have the opportunity to visit the camp store each day! During camp store time, campers have the ability to purchase snacks (like ice cream, candy, chips, popcorn, and more), drinks (Powerade, tea, etc.), and merchandise (shirts, stuffed animals, hats, and more). Our rule here at YMCA Camp Immokalee is that each camper, each day, can get 1 salty, 1 sweet, 1 drink, and 1 ice cream. This prevents campers from choosing to buy lots of candy bars in one day. These purchases are made through a pre-paid camp store account. Before camp, parents choose a pre-determined amount to add to their camper's account. Families are contacted if a camper runs low on funds, and families can see their campers' camp store balance in real time through CampBrain. Any funds left at the end of the week are rolled over to any following camp sessions (in the season only). We do our best to have campers spend their entire camp store balance on their last day of the summer. We are unable to issue camp store refunds.

Generally, we recommend \$25-30 per week for camp store.

BACKPACKS & WATER BOTTLES

We provide backpacks and water bottles to all campers, free of charge. This is a one-time per summer camp gift - if campers return for multiple sessions, they should bring their backpack and water bottle from earlier in the summer.

If campers lose their water bottle, they can buy a new one at the camp store.

PHONES & CONTACTING YOUR CAMPER

In order to promote connection with camp and nature, YMCA Camp Immokalee does not allow campers to bring cell phones. We know this can be never-wracking for families, but we are here to partner with you to make sure your camper is safe and comfortable. Here's some additional information about phones:

- If a phone is confiscated, it comes and lives in the office for the rest of the week and a parent/guardian can pick it up at Check-Out
- If you're worried about not being able to talk to your camper all week, consider your options! You can always send your camper an email at cimmokalee@fcymca.org, or you can send regular mail to 6765 Immokalee Rd. Keystone Heights, FL 32656
- We understand that some families want their campers to keep their phone just in case something happens, but we promise we're here for the just-in-cases. We provide families our Executive Director's personal cell phone number in case of emergency, and if campers have above average homesickness or an injury, we always call families to clue them in.

MEDICINE

Our camp health officer is here to make sure your camper gets the medicine they need! Prescription medicine/vitamins should be sent in the original packaging with only the amount needed for their time at camp. If your camper takes multiple medications, we appreciate these being brought in a labeled ziploc bag. You'll drop these off at Check-In. EpiPens and inhalers can be kept with the camper in the cabin.

We stock all the OTC medications authorized on the Medical Form (you fill this out online), so there's no need to send OTC medication for your camper unless it's something they take daily.

HOMESICKNESS

Homesickness isn't a bad word. It's a normal part of life. In fact, according to the American Psychological Association, about 90 percent of young people reported feeling some sad feelings when spending time away from home. Homesickness can occur in varying levels, and many times, a little homesickness can be good for campers — by the end of the week, they'll know it's just one more thing they're capable of getting through. Our staff are trained to work through homesickness with our campers. In the event your camper experiences severe homesickness, one of our leadership team members will give you a call. We believe that you know your camper better than we do, so we'll let you decide if talking to your camper will make the situation better or worse. From there, we'll work together to make a plan for your camper's success.

We ask that you have conversations about camp with your campers beforehand to help ease the homesickness they may feel. We recommend you stay away from phrases like, "I'm going to miss you so much!" or "I promise I'll come get you if you don't like it," because they may influence the camper to focus on that rather than new things. Instead, we suggest you say things like "I'm excited for you to try so many things!" or "I've heard such great things about your counselors!"

MAIL & CARE PACKAGES

Campers love to get mail! You can drop mail off at check in, mail it to us (6765 Immokalee Rd. Keystone Heights, FL 32656), or email your camper at cimmokalee@fcymca.org.

We do accept care packages as long as they follow all camp rules! Please don't send electronics (yes, we've seen families try to sneak phones in this way!), weapons, money, or any other contraband. **NO FOOD ALLOWED.** If you're looking to send something for the entire cabin, girls typically have up to 12 in their cabins while boys have up to 14.

HEALTH AT CAMP

We have a fully-stocked infirmary and health officer on-site 24/7. They will administer daily medication left by families and provide health care to any camper or staff member who may need it.

We will contact you if your camper develops an illness (fever overnight, unexplained Vomiting, etc.), is seriously injured, or needs immediate medical attention.

All campers will undergo a health check upon arriving at camp. Because camp takes place in such close quarters, we screen all campers for lice, fever, and athlete's foot. If a camper is found with any of these ailments, we cannot admit them to camp at that time. However, we're happy to welcome them back once our health officer has confirmed the issue has been taken care of. That could be the same week, or, if an ailment requires more time to be resolved, we're happy to work with you to move to any other session that still has availability.

OUR STAFF

Our full-time year-round staff consists of Richard (our Executive Director), Cole (our Camp Director), and Jessica (our Group Retreat and Events Director)

YMCA Camp Immokalee campers live in the cabin with two qualified counselors. All counselors and leadership team members are 18+ or have graduated high school and trained in First Aid/CPR/O2. Additionally, our counselors and leadership team complete online training and undergo a week-long in-person training covering a variety of topics such as homesickness, creating unity, talking to campers, and more.

Our amazing kitchen team prepares three hot meals a day for our campers!

All staff and volunteers undergo Level II background checks and are checked against the National Sex Offender Registry. Staff members must pass a drug test prior to employment.

Our rule at camp is that campers must be supervised 100% of the time, so your camper will always be within line of sight of a staff member!

OFFICE HOURS

Our office is generally open Monday-Friday 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. We may not be fully open during these times, but we'll respond to messages and voicemails periodically throughout the day.

Even during summer, our office is not open on weekends.

REQUIRED FORMS

Two of our required forms, the Camper Information Form and the Overnight Waivers and Policies form, are complete at the time of registration. The Medical Form (found on CampBrain) is also required and must be completed at least two weeks prior to the start of your camper's first session.

Additionally, each camper must upload a physical examination completed by a medical professional in the last 24 months. This is not the same as an immunization form. Any generic physical form will do, but [you can use ours here if you want!](#)

OTHER QUESTIONS

In addition to this First Time Families Guide, you'll also receive a Family Handbook, and additional communication from camp prior to your camper's session. If you have other questions, please let us know! We're here to help!