

Teaching Parents How to Ask Open-Ended Questions

by Gary Forster

SAMPLE LETTER given out on check-out day, or mailed the day before:

Dear Parent,

Thank you for the trust you've shown in our camp!

Could you and your camper take a couple of minutes to fill out the enclosed evaluation together? Those things your camper liked best need to be repeated. We know that there are areas where we could improve, too, and want your advice on where to put our energies. (Please don't assume we already know something that you've noticed!) Your advice and feedback, both good and bad, will have an impact on how we finish this year and prepare for the next.

Summer camps have been providing "Memories to Last a Lifetime" for almost 150 years. To help keep your child's memories alive, I hope you can make time to talk about what they did and how they feel about it. To avoid getting one-word answers (like "Yeah" and "Nope") I'd suggest you use open-ended questions that require them to think about the answer and put it into their own words. Depending on age, you could try . . .

"I heard you started each day at the Chapel with a "thought for the day". Could you tell me about one of them?"

"Did your cabin get to sleep out and cook your own dinner one night? What jobs did you have at the campsite? How did you cook dinner? What did you do after dark?"

"Which Skill Clinics did you like best? What did you get to do? What did you get better at? (Clinics are the morning five-day classes the campers take each week).

"Can you teach me some of the songs you sang at camp?"

"What kinds of chores did you have to do to keep your cabin clean each day? Did your cabin ever win a "cabin clean-up award"?"

"Who was your best friend at camp? What did you do together? Would you like to write a letter?"

"Who was your favorite counselor? What did you like about her/him?"

Your interest in the positive things that happened to your child will help insure lifelong memories. If you've got any questions, please don't hesitate to call or write. We'll continue to keep in touch through the year with our newsletter. We hope to see your family up at camp again soon.

Warm regards,

Camp Director