

# From parent to parent, get ready for a journey for a lifetime!

Hi Rabbi,

This time of year I think a lot about first time campers and new camper orientation, as I am sure you do too! I would like to share with you some of the insights that I have shared with other parents who have appreciated me telling them the “truth” about managing expectations.

Not in any order or priority:

- It's important to manage the expectations of both you (the parents) and the new camper. Don't tell your child that “you are going to have the best time of your life and meet the best friends”. This only sets your child up for confusion and possible disappointment. Not every day at home is perfect and not every day at camp is perfect. Ramah is terrific, Ramah will ultimately end up being a 2<sup>nd</sup> home for most of the campers, and Ramah is often the source of lifelong friendships. But, Ramah, like home life, may have its ups and downs, especially for the first time camper. It's important for your first time camper to know that most days will be filled with a lot of excitement, fun, friends and more...but there will be those moments or hours where they are not happy or are maybe even a little homesick. Let your child know that they are not a failure, and nothing is wrong if they have a moment of fear, frustration, anger. And, just like the occasional sad or confusing moments pass when they are at home, so too will these moments pass when they are at camp.
- If a child is having a really, really good time then you will probably hear little to nothing from your child. Take this lack of communication from your child as a point of celebration...you have raised your child to feel independent and comfortable in the Jewish community of Ramah.
- Your child is in a place of secure freedom. We have guards and counselors that provide a visual/intellectual wall and we have fences that provide a physical wall. But inside those walls is the world of Ramah where our children have the ability to run with abandon, explore, test their self-reliance, mature, and have fun. The more fun your child is having the less likely they are to pay attention to the need for clean clothes. YES...our counselors remind the children to brush their teeth, change their clothes and take showers....which is balanced with engaging your children and creating memories... The counselors play a very big role in each campers' experience, especially first time campers. Our counselors are taught to help each camper look after their hygiene and help them out at meal time but the most important role the counselor has is helping each child to find their inner strength, help the campers develop friendships with each other, fill up your child with memories that will last a life time. So, if your camper comes back smelly with half their bags packed in the same way you sent them off to camp know that your child filled their camp experience with far more important things than clean clothes and daily showers.
- You know your child best and should pack accordingly. Without sharing TMI, I learned that my daughter would put all of her clothes into her laundry basket when changing into her swim suit for pool time. Then, when she came out of the pool she would put on all new clothes...hence she needed at least two pairs of underwear per day. On that note, thank goodness for Target, where you can cheaply buy 6 packs of underwear, socks and inexpensive t-shirts.
- Let your child that the first couple of nights might be a bit different for them. They will be sleeping in the bunks with several other children. Some of those children may snore, some may roll over and cause the bunks to squeak, some may need to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, the smells in the

evening and morning will be different because Ramah has a lot more fresh air. Let your child know to expect “new” smells and sounds so that your child can manage his/her own expectations.

- If your child is the type of kid who tends to lose/misplace items then you may want to put a very small flashlight at the bottom of the sleeping bag so they are sure to have a flashlight for the overnight trip.
- The food at Ramah is surprisingly good. We work all the time to change up the main courses and improve on ourselves. That being said, when you are cooking for 600 campers and 300 staff it's hard to make everything taste as homemade as what you serve at home. We serve fresh squeezed OJ, we have a first class bakery that puts out amazing baked goods and we try to have kid friendly foods like pastas, chicken and more. As parents, if you really want to prepare your first time campers for Ramah encourage your children to taste one new food each week before they get to Ramah. And for those parents who still feel the need to cut your children's chicken, cut their apples, open their yogurts or peel their hard boiled eggs....stop right now. Your child needs to know how to put food on their own plates, cut their own food and **ask for options and help if they feel stuck**. Remember...we are raising Jewish adults, not babies, so let's all help our children learn to be self-reliant in age appropriate ways.
- Ramah is a nut free facility. We do have soy-butter and jam, hard boiled eggs and tuna available at most meals.
- For anyone that has ever done laundry we all know that somehow one sock gets occasionally lost. The best scientists in the world haven't ever figured out how it is that one sock, that we all know went into the washer/dryer, never came out. It's like the big black hole of the laundry universe...but it's happened to all of us. So, if you can lose a sock at home I think it's fair to assume that your child may lose one or two items at camp. **Label everything...** either with a sharpie or the labels you can get from Label Daddy. For sure your child will lose one or more items, and for sure that will not affect their experience at camp. We do our level best to gather up all items left around camp on a daily basis and we do have a lost and found. Anything not retrieved while at camp will find its way back to our Ramah offices in Encino.
- No food in your child's luggage or in packages sent via mail. If you want your child to be in bunks that are free of insects, bugs and other then please do your part by not sending any food.
- Other than a camera, wifi enabled technology are simply not allowed. If your child brings electronics they will be confiscated and sent back to the parents via FedEx at the parents' expense.
- Medicine/getting sick. At camp we have a building called the Marp, which is our medical building. It is staffed all summer long with a doctor that volunteers their time at Ramah. In addition to the doctors we also have nurses on staff full time. If your child takes any kind of medicines on a daily basis he/she will be taught where the Marp is (very close to the dining hall) and they will go there to get their medication. Many children at camp take medications so your child will not feel like they are the “only one” going to the Marp. If your child gets sick the Marp has several beds so that we can have your child rest up before going back to the bunks. We, Ramah, is part of the greater Los Angeles community so we treat your child as if he/she is one of our own.

-Current Ramah Parent

