

Tips and Helpful Hints

Preparing for Success

This section will provide information and tips on finding suitable recreation programs that will ensure successful participation for your child.

Tip #1: Start Planning Early

Options for 1:1 support, financial assistance, and program availability are often limited and available on a first-come, first-serve basis. It is best to start making arrangements for your recreation programs as early as possible to ensure that the necessary support is available. For general recreation programs that run on a seasonal calendar (Fall/Winter/Spring/Summer), program registrations generally begin up to two months before the program start date. (For example, a swimming program that begins in January will normally have registration open mid-November).

Summer Camp registration may be open until camp begins; however, many camps fill up quickly with returning campers. Registrations for specialized and private camps may begin in January and be filled by April!!

****Think and plan ahead, and begin contacting programs as early as possible to inquire about registration openings.****

Tip #2: Choosing the right program

When considering a recreation program every family should think about their own personal needs and preferences. Just like a child, every program has its own set of characteristics that should be factored into your decision of creating a successful experience.

- **Type of Activity:** Does your child have any specific hobbies or interests? Options can include sports, martial arts, swimming, music, dance, art, nature, computers... Recreation is the reward and entertainment of life and should be focused on an enjoyable activity for your child. An enforced hobby can lead to more distress for your child and yourself if they do not enjoy attending the program
- **Routine:** Does the program provide the right level of structure and routine for your child? A drop-in afterschool program may not have the structure of activities that is suitable for your child. As well, an outdoor program, such as golf or skiing, may not accommodate for a predictable routine should one week's class be cancelled for weather.

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- **Environment:** Consider your child's needs and the situations they have the most success

- ❖ Group Size –small/ large
 - ❖ Time – half day/full day/overnight
 - ❖ Space – indoor/outdoor/open spaces/small rooms
 - ❖ Sensory needs that may make gyms, pools or arenas difficult?
 - ❖ Physical accessibility – beaches/rough terrain/indoors/swimming
- Swimming: Swimming is a great activity that can be offered in a structured or recreational setting.
 - Swimming Lessons are offered to individuals of all ages and abilities, in group and private lessons.
 - Group lessons include individuals of similar swimming ability who learn new techniques together.
 - Private lessons allow for an individual to work one on one with a swimming instructor to learn new techniques
 - Leisure swim is an open swim offered for individuals of all ages. This is a time for you to practice your swimming and have fun. Often waterslides and diving boards are available for you to use.

Tip #3: Assess the attitude towards inclusion

- Does the program mention inclusion or supports for children with special needs in its literature?
- ❖ Some recreation guides include a “special needs”, “integration” or “adapted” sections that are separate from their general programs

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- ➤ Just because there is not “with special needs” in a program description, does not mean the program is not open to providing support
- ➤ If you call the program, are they open and interested in discussing your child’s individual needs? Sometimes all it takes is a request and the program is happy to accommodate.

Tip #4: Consider Support Needs:

Many recreation programs are recognizing the need to provide additional support to successfully integrate children with special needs into general recreation programs. Consider the type of support your child needs to be most successful in a recreation setting:

- ➤ Does your child receive support at school? What kind? (EA, Special Needs Class, regular classroom?)
- ➤ Does your child need support with toileting/feeding/changing?
- ➤ Does your child need support with redirection, staying on task, focusing?
- ➤ Does your child need program adaptations?

There are various support options that may be available with community recreation programs:

Adapted Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ➤ Programs are often provided at a lower staff to participant ratio (for example 1 staff for every 3 or 4 participants, instead of 1 staff for every 8 to 10 participants). • ➤ Programs and activities are often modified and adapted to meet the needs of your child with special needs and can be a great opportunity for your special needs child to meet and interact with other children who may be working to overcome similar barriers.
One to One Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ➤ Some programs offer one to one support through additional staffing. These support workers may come at an additional cost (typically an hourly wage) and are assigned to your child for the duration of the program. • ➤ A one-to one support worker is encouraged if your child needs assistance with toileting/feeding/changing, has high behavioural needs or safety concerns. These workers are typically provided additional training around disabilities, personal care, and program adaptations so they can provide a fully inclusive opportunity for your child.
Volunteer Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ➤ Some programs may also offer volunteers to provide additional support in a program. • ➤ Volunteers may be 15 or 16 years and older and are a great option if your child is high functioning and requires an extra hand with redirection, staying on task, focusing, etc. • ➤ Volunteers typically will not provide support around toileting/feeding or high behavior concerns.
Your Own Support Worker:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Most programs are happy to accommodate a support worker the family provides, whether it is a family member, family friend or respite worker, they should be allowed to attend the program at no charge, providing they follow volunteer policies and produce a criminal reference check.

- ➤ Most municipal recreation departments will provide one to one workers and/or volunteers for children with special needs if requested in advance*
- ➤ Some Camp programs may offer the second week of 1:1 support for no cost if you are registering for 2 weeks of camp*
- ➤ Some Camps include an initiation fee for their 1:1 support in addition to the hourly wages. This is to ensure adequate time is spent meeting your child, preparing the

environment, and adapting the activities in advance to ensure full and successful participation in the program*

- ➤ **Be sure to contact your Program Coordinator for additional support options PRIOR to submitting registration forms. Some programs only have a limited amount of spaces for additional support and may not be able to provide this support if registration is already completed. If your child will need support in a program and it is not available, they may not be set up for success in the program and it may end in disappointment**

** (For current York Region Municipality Program Coordinator contact information see the reference section at the end of this guide.)

Tip #5: Provide the Right Information:

It is important to provide the recreation staff information about your child's skills, strengths and challenges to put strategies into place to ensure a successful and stress free experience for everyone involved.

The right program for your child will work with you to create a successful experience

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BEFORE the beginning of the program, be sure to provide information about:

- ➤ What your child may find challenging - transitions, fine motor activities, unstructured time, sitting still, toileting, feeding, large groups, loud noises, etc.)
- ➤ What strategies will help them to manage including tools and techniques you may use at home, what strategies are used at school, what they respond well to, etc.
- ➤ Your child's favourite things and interests – this can help the instructors establish a positive relationship with your child
- ➤ Safety concerns you may have – wandering or running from over-stimulating environments, balance or mobility challenges? Easily fatigued? Reminders to eat/drink/washroom?

Communication is Key! Inclusion is a team effort!!

If you don't explain your child's needs to the instructor, they will not have the information or the supports in place to help your child be fully included and participate in the program. Without the proper information, the support may not be available to ensure safety and security for not only your child, but also the staff, and the other children in the program.

Tip #6: Get off to a Good Start:

- ➤ Visit the program prior to the start – this allows you and your child the opportunity to view the environment, and ideally meet their instructor
- ➤ Consider the individual needs of your child – some children may need to arrive early to a program in order to adjust to the new environment, whereas other children may have difficulty waiting or managing unstructured time before the program begins

- ➤ Prepare your child for the start of the program - Calendar Countdown, getting them used to the environment or schedule
- ➤ Include your child in the preparation – allow them to pick out their swimsuit, lunch, snack, etc...

Tip #7: Communication:

- ➤ Check in with the instructor - as often as possible to be aware of accomplishments and challenges
- ➤ Pick the right time to speak with the instructor – if drop-off/pick-up times are busy, see if you can call the instructor at another time, or arrive early the next day
- ➤ Encourage the instructor to talk with you about effective strategies for working with your child

Top 10 Items Your Child May Need*

Water Bottle Hat Sunscreen Snacks Bathing Suit Towel Change of Clothes Indoor Shoes Backpack SMILE

Questions to Consider / Ask When Choosing A Recreation Program

Questions to ask your child

Questions to ask yourself

Questions to ask the Recreation/Program Coordinator

✓ What are you interested in?

(Arts and Crafts, Theater, Sports, Music, Outdoors, etc.)

- ✓ Do you want to participate in a small or large group?
- ✓ Do you want an indoor or

outdoor program?

✓ How close do I want the

program to my home or work?

- ✓ How long do I want my child in the program for?

- ✓ Do I want my child to attend a day camp or an overnight (Residential) camp?
- ✓ How many weeks do I want my child in this program?
- ✓ What kind of supports will my child need to be successful?
- ✓ What are the special needs that I need to inform the program staff of? (ie. Diet, Allergies, medications, behavior, challenges, etc.)
- ✓ What are some strategies I can give the program to help support my child?

✓ What does a typical program

session look like?

- ✓ What qualifications and training does your staff receive?
- ✓ What are the staff to child ratios?
- ✓ How does the program ensure the safety and security of its participants?
- ✓ What type of support does the program offer?
- ✓ What types of activities are planned and what skills do they require to participate?
- ✓ Is the site accessible? Are there

any safety issues?

- ✓ What is the program philosophy?

Are they open to inclusive

programming? Is it in their policy?

- ✓ Is the program accredited by any organization?

- ✓ Does the program have guidelines for private workers?

- ✓ Are all the staff CPR/First Aid Certified?

- ✓ Can my child and I meet the instructor/view the program before the start of the program?

- ✓ How does the program handle participant information?

- ✓ Are there other families I can talk to about the program?

- ✓ If my child does not like the program what is your refund policy?

For more family resources on preparing your child for Recreation Programs:

http://participation-environment.canchild.ca/en/families_tip_sheets.asp http://participation-environment.canchild.ca/en/want_to_participate_tip_sheets.asp