



# Overnight Camp Family Info Guide

YMCA Camp Ernst  
2025



## WELCOME TO CAMP!

We are so glad you have chosen to send your child to YMCA Camp Ernst! Since 1928 the YMCA has been building into kids here at camp, and we are looking forward to helping your child make new friends, try new things, and let their light shine here this summer. Please call us if you have any questions!

### Contact Information

Website: [www.myycamp.org](http://www.myycamp.org)  
Phone: (859)586-6181 – Camp Office  
Call/Text (859)912-3457 – Executive Director Eli Cochran’s Personal Cell Phone  
(emergencies)

Email: [ce@myycamp.org](mailto:ce@myycamp.org)

Camp Address: 7615 Camp Ernst Rd  
Burlington, KY 41005

Instagram: @campernst  
(\*Updates during each camp day, including weather situations!)

Photos: <https://campernst.zenfolio.com>

### YMCA of Greater Cincinnati Mission Statement

The mission of the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all. The Y is about...

**Youth Development:** Children need caring adults to provide support, guidance, and encouragement as they grow. All kids deserve the opportunity to discover who they are and what they can achieve.

**Healthy Living:** Wellness in spirit, mind, and body strengthens our very being and enhances our interactions with others.

**Social Responsibility:** We truly are in this together and together we can harness our individual strengths and bring about positive change around us. The Y is dedicated to building healthy, confident, secure and connected children, families and communities.

### A Mission For All

The Y is made up of people of all ages and from every walk of life working side by side to strengthen communities. Together, we work to ensure that everyone—of all abilities, ages, cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, faiths, gender identities, ideologies, incomes, nationalities, origins, races, or sexual orientations—are treated equitably.

We do this by building inclusive and joyful environments where all people can reach goals, make friends, and connect to a cause greater than themselves.

### Program Philosophy

Since 1928, YMCA Camp Ernst has been providing youth unique experiences that broaden their horizons and shape them into more confident, conscientious, responsible and independent

individuals. Camp uses a variety of engaging activities to instill core values and life lessons in tomorrow's leaders. Through all of these activities, youth are exposed to the Y's Core Character Values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Camp also enables significant growth in self-esteem, confidence and relationship skills. Leadership development is also a core component of camp-designed to prepare teens for future counselor positions and leadership later in life.

### History and facilities

In 1928 Willard L. Wade was looking for a way to provide a positive summer experience for the young people of Greater Cincinnati. He shared his vision with United States Senator Richard P. Ernst, who donated the funds for the first 100 acres.

Since that time Camp Ernst has grown to 365 acres of rolling hills, a 26-acre lake, ponds, and creeks. The camp property is home to 2 swimming pools, a 28 horse ranch, and 40 cabins and out buildings which accommodate more than 400 children each week.

### Strengthening Communities

Our advisory board and staff work hard to raise more than \$300,000 each year to help fund campers who couldn't otherwise afford a week of camp. If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to this cause, please visit: [www.myYcamp.org/donors](http://www.myYcamp.org/donors) or call 859-586-6181.

### The YMCA Camp Ernst Staff

Many of our staff were campers at Camp Ernst. The summer staff is recruited: from past campers and staff, staff contacts, from area and national colleges and high schools, and international counselor programs. Prospective staff must complete an application, provide references and be interviewed. They are chosen for their interest, experience, and qualifications for working with children, and applicants 18 and older must pass a criminal record check. YMCA Camp Ernst staff members receive CPR, First Aid, and Child Protection training as part of their employment. They also attend a week-long staff training with emphasis on safety, risk-management, social and skill development, and community building. Typical staff to camper ratio is 1:6 .

Administrative Staff include:

Elizabeth "Eli" Cochran – Executive Director [ECochran@myY.org](mailto:ECochran@myY.org)

Megan Gierhart – Senior Program Director [MGierhart@myY.org](mailto:MGierhart@myY.org)

Kristi Horton – Ranch Program Director [KHorton@myY.org](mailto:KHorton@myY.org)

### ACA Accredited

ACA Accreditation means we follow the health, safety, and program standards set by the American Camp Association. ACA collaborated with experts from the American Academy of Pediatrics, The American Red Cross and other youth service agencies to assure that camp practices reflect up-to-date research based standards in camp operation. For more information, please visit [www.acacamps.org](http://www.acacamps.org)



### Camper Paperwork

The following must be completed and submitted before your child's arrival at camp. These forms can be completed online: Registration Form, Online Health Form (does NOT require a physical or doctor's signature), Any final payments (due June 1).

### Cabinmate Requests

We think it's great to come to camp with the objective of making new friends. About 50% of our campers register without a cabinmate preference. However, if your camper has a friend or group of campers they would like to bunk with, please make the request during the registration or by giving us a call at the office. We can accommodate most cabinmate requests if the campers are within 18 months of age of each other. For any pair or group, please pick one camper's name as "cabinmate" to use on all registrations (so even that camper will have her own name as "cabinmate."). We can honor cabinmate requests for groups of up to 4/5 campers. Any request groups of more than 5 campers will be asked to be split into two groups. Cabin assignments are emailed out approximately one week prior to your camper's stay. If there are any issues with assignments, give us a call so we can work with your request.

### Especially For First Time Campers

Being away from home overnight can be a challenge for first time, or even experienced, campers. One or two days of mild homesickness is common at overnight camp. Only a few will experience prolonged, more intense feelings of missing home. The most common time for homesickness is right before bed or during some of the rest periods throughout the day. Each camper's homesickness is unique and the counselors are trained to help each camper make an independent plan for a successful and fun week. Counselors will get in touch with you if the homesickness is severe and they need some additional support. We rarely have campers call home or talk to their parents on the phone because it typically makes the homesickness worse and disrupts the child's ability to achieve independence.

If you are anticipating homesickness, prior to your camp week, please call and speak to one of the directors. We will help you with some resources and ideas to help set your child up for a great week. If your child has not been here to see what camp is like, many times a site visit/tour, watching some camp videos, or simply a phone conversation with a friendly camp counselor can help alleviate fears.

Another important element of your camper being away from home is the fact that you will miss them as much as (if not more than!) they miss you! It is important that you do not pass your own anxieties on to your child. For example, instead of saying, "I'm really going to miss you," say, "I'm looking forward to you telling me all about the fun you've had when you get home!" Please do not make "Pick Up Deals," which include saying, "Just try it until Tuesday and then I will come to get you." These "deals" make it harder for children to really lean in to a sense of belonging with the group. We have found that families have success when they express a positive sense of belief in the great fun and experience of camp.

Book Recommendations:

Homesick and Happy: How Time Away from Parents Can Help a Child Grow (by Michael Thompson, PHD)

Notes from the Camp Bunk: A Guide for First Time Campers from a Camper (by Eden Martin)

### Changes and Cancellations

Changes to camp sessions will be accommodated as availability allows. A deposit of \$50 per session is required with registration and is non-refundable after March 15. The final balance is due June 1st. At the four-week mark, all camp fees are non-refundable.

All cancellations must be made in writing, by filling out the form online <https://myycamp.org/session-switch-and-cancellation-form/>

### Absences

We are concerned when your child is registered and does not show up for check-in. Please call or text the Camp Office at (859)586-6181 and leave a message if your child will be late or not able to attend the session. Please be specific, stating your child's full name and the reason they will not be attending. If necessary, our office staff will return your call to confirm the details.

### Photos and Video

YMCA Camp Ernst staff may take photos or video of your child for promotional purposes. You can view daily photos of all the fun at camp at [www.campernst.zenfolio.com](http://www.campernst.zenfolio.com).

### Visiting Camp

We encourage letter-writing and happy reunions at the *end* of the session! If you would like a camp tour before your camper's session, please let us know.

### Care Packages & Letters (Overnight Camp)

Camp care packages are welcome and a good way to make a camper feel comfortable at overnight camp. There are many ways to send a care package to your camper. You can mail your own throughout the week to the camp address (please make sure you include your camper's week and cabin on the package). You can also order one of our In Camp Care Packages. Instructions are available on our website beginning in June. Orders must be made by your session's opening Sunday at midnight.

You can also letters to your overnight camper. If you prefer email, please see the "message your camper" form on our website. <https://myycamp.org/message-your-camper/> These will be printed on a slip of paper and distributed with the mail. Your camper will not have direct access to the internet, and so will not be able to email you back.

You can drop mail off on Sunday; just include the day you want it delivered on each package or letter. There will be mail collection stations during Sunday check-in. If you have something to drop off during the week, please bring it to the camp office in the Welcome Center or drop it in the drop box outside the gate.

Camper Address: Camper Name/ Week # /Cabin # /7615 Camp Ernst Rd/ Burlington, KY 41005

Campers are kept busy all week and most are not in the habit of letter-writing. However, during the week we do encourage writing home. We offer our own camp postcard for a brief, midweek message and counselors may review it to address any concerns. We recommend sending paper

and stamped/addressed envelopes for the best chance at getting a complete letter home from your camper!

### Telephone

Campers may not bring cell phones to camp\* Campers do not have phone access during their week of camp. A YMCA Camp Ernst staff member will contact you in the event of an emergency or other situation. If there is an emergency at home or if you have a particular concern, please do not hesitate to contact us in the office while your camper is at camp.

\*Please respect our camp "no cell phone" policy and help your children understand the value of unplugging in order to be fully engaged with their time at camp! \*

### Lost & Found

Did your camper lose something at camp? Please fill out the form online at <https://myycamp.org/lost-and-found/> If the items are found we will do our best to get these items back to you based on your selections. \*Please note that storage and sorting capacity is limited and items are kept for two weeks and then donated.

### Packing for camp

We recommend that you pack your camper's belongings in a large Rubbermaid-type tote bin. This makes it easy for campers to keep their things together and easy for parents to clean out when they come home! Please label everything with camper's last name. For your convenience: check out [www.packforcamp.com/ernst](http://www.packforcamp.com/ernst) to purchase items from our packing list!

#### Packing Essentials (represents the bare minimum)

- T-Shirts and shorts
- Sleepwear
- Underwear and Socks
- Raincoat/Poncho
- Sweatshirt/Jacket
- Long Pants – For cooler times of day and any horseback riding
- Shower Articles –2 bath towels, wash cloth or sponge, soap, shampoo/conditioner, lotion, toothbrush/toothpaste, and shower shoes.
- Shoes – 2 pairs of gym shoes, 1 pair old enough to wade in a creek. Ropes Course and Ranch require closed-toe shoes.
- Bathing Suit – 1 or 2 suits and 2 beach towels
- Laundry Bag
- Bedding – Sleeping bag/comforter, sheets and pillow
- Water Bottle
- Sunscreen – taking care of camper's skin/protecting it from sunburn is a top priority for us, but we need everyone's help. When you send sunscreen with your camper please encourage them to be responsible about reapplying it throughout each day of their week at camp.
- Medication – In the original labeled container, to be given to the nurse during check-in. Special blister packs will be provided at check-in if

necessary. Epi-pens and inhalers can be carried by campers or staff but must be logged with the nurse.

Recommended Items (not required)

- Stationery, pre-stamped/addressed envelopes
- Writing utensil
- Bug repellent
- Flashlight
- Small BATTERY OPERATED fan (or chargeable cordless)
- Backpack
- Snacks to share

PROHIBITED ITEMS

- Ø CELLPHONES
- Ø HAND-HELD VIDEO GAMES
- Ø SMART WATCHES
- Ø EREADERS
- Ø FITNESS TRACKERS
- Ø CASH
- Ø POCKET KNIVES
- Ø MATCHES/LIGHTERS
- Ø VAPES
- Ø FIREWORKS
- Ø DRUGS/ALCOHOL
- Ø PETS
- Ø FIREARMS
- Ø EXPENSIVE ITEMS  
(clothes, shoes, jewelry, etc)

### Overnight Camp Check-in Day

Check-in times: Sundays from 3:00pm to 4:30pm. You can expect to be directed down the driveway to the parking area for your camper's cabin. Check-in will occur at the car. You will say your good-byes there and the staff will help your campers get their belongings to the cabin and set up their bunk.

Any special arrangements for check-in should be made in advance by calling the camp office.

1. Sign-in: A parent, guardian, or other authorized adult over age 18 must sign your camper in with camp staff, who will ask you some basic questions and if you have any notes for them. You should remind the counselor of any special situations/needs, early pick ups, etc. that apply.
2. Health Care and Medications: All medications must be turned into the camp nurse. This includes vitamins and herbal remedies. We have most common over-the-counter medicines in stock so no need for you to bring those. All campers will participate in a health check.
3. Merchandise and Mail: If you would like to purchase merchandise, there will be an opportunity to do so online: <https://ymcacampernst.square.site> . You will also be able to drop off any mail you have for your camper.

After your camper is checked in on Sunday, the cabin as a whole will attend some orientation sessions. Your camper will receive an orientation on our bullying policy and behavior expectations, and they will take a swim challenge to determine which areas of the pool they can swim in.

### Mid-week appointments

Any special arrangements for check-out should be made in advance by calling the camp office. To limit disruption to the program, special pick up or drop off must occur at the Welcome Center at one of the designated times Monday-Friday: 9am, 2pm, 6pm, or 10:30pm.

### Check-out Day

Check-out times: Saturday from 9:00 - 9:30am

Early final departure from the week must be pre-arranged for 9am, 2pm, 6pm or 10:30pm Friday (after closing camp fire)

1. Sign-out: An authorized adult must sign your child out of camp.
2. Medications: Please make sure to collect any medications from your camper's counselors.
3. Lost and Found: Please make sure to check the lost and found station at the dining hall before leaving camp. If you get home and realize something is lost, please complete the lost + found form online <https://myycamp.org/lost-and-found/>. A limited number of lost and found items are kept for two (2) weeks and then donated to charity. We can mail items for a postage and handling fee.

### Important!

Pertinent information regarding any special medical issues, special needs, and allergies must be clearly noted on your camper's health form. Please also call our office two weeks before your camper attends camp if they have any special needs. This may include diabetes, food allergies, sleep issues, recent trauma or anything requiring extra staff attention.

### Medications

Administration of all medications (over the counter or prescription) will be performed by a healthcare assistant or one of the on-site medical staff. You are required to note any medications on your camper's health form and bring their medication in the original containers.

You will place it into special blister packs provided by the camp nurses for easy distribution.

Medication will not be administered on Saturday mornings. For a list of common Over the Counter meds we stock, see <https://myycamp.org/parents/before-camp/>

### Accidents, Illness, and Emergencies

YMCA Camp Ernst staff members are trained in First Aid and risk management, but the nurse or health care assistant will handle all medications (prescription & non-prescription), minor illnesses and injuries. Parents will be notified at the discretion of the nurse: Basically, if there is a significant health problem, a continuing fever of 100.4+, or if a camper needs treatment beyond our health center.

### Lice Policy

It is our policy that if a camper is found with lice or nits/eggs, the camper may not attend camp. If we find nits/lice while performing our health check on Sunday evening, you will be contacted and your child will need to be picked up immediately. Campers will not be able to return until they have been checked and cleared by the nurse. As an alternative, we have established a partnership with a company called Simplicity. They will come to camp to provide lice removal and treatment for you for an additional fee. Simplicity: (859) 414-6487. [www.simplicity.com](http://www.simplicity.com)

### Camp Hygiene Standards

Cleanliness is a key component to keeping campers healthy. Campers will wash their hands prior to every meal. Bathrooms are inspected and sanitized each day by housekeeping staff. Camp clean-up takes place each morning at overnight camp when campers assume responsibility of cleaning their cabin areas. Unit leaders will inspect cabins for neatness daily. Overnight campers go to the bathhouse each morning and evening to get cleaned up and brush their teeth. Showers are scheduled at least two times per week and are available the rest of the week.

### Special Needs

Campers with specific emotional or physical needs, including, but not limited to: mobility challenges, special diets, food allergies, diabetes, sleep walking, bedwetting, challenges in social interaction, etc. should be called to the attention of the Program Director or Executive Director prior to their arrival in camp. If your camper requires special medical attention, we ask that you please include it on their health form, in addition to calling the camp office 2 weeks before their arrival. We welcome campers with special needs that we are able to accommodate. It is helpful to

give us as much information about your camper so that we can help your child enjoy their summer camp experience.

### Camp Food

Our two kitchens and dining halls manage meals for more than 700 people each day. We follow a weekly menu but also offer many alternatives, including a fresh, well-stocked salad bar, vegetarian and vegan options, baked potato bar, and the classic PB&J for picky eaters. Our detailed menu and meal plan is published on our web site [www.myYcamp.org](http://www.myYcamp.org) under overnight camp/ meals.

### Special Diets

While we cannot guarantee an allergen-free environment, our kitchen staff does offer several special diet menu options, including gluten-free and dairy free. Please complete the special diet form <https://myycamp.org/dietary-needs/> and connect with a camp administrator at least two weeks before your session to discuss your camper's special diet needs.

### Bed Bugs

The reality of life is that bed bugs are where people are. We take extreme measures to reduce the risk of bed bug exposure, including inspections of cabins, staff education, and treatment if necessary. Even so, our health care and facility teams recommend that each camper's belongings be treated with care when returning home. Experts recommend high heat wash and dry for all clothing and bedding, and for anything else, they recommend tying it up in a black trash bag to heat up in the sun or trunk of the car.

### Abuse Prevention

The YMCA of Greater Cincinnati and Camp Ernst take abuse prevention seriously. Each employee and volunteer is required to participate in multiple trainings on the topic and are considered mandated reporters according to the law. Background checks, screenings, and supervision is done with intentional care toward keeping each child safe. Our safe environment and child protection policies include ensuring that no two people are to be alone, away from the group. As mandated reporters, any YMCA employee is required by law to report any suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities. We encourage our camp parents to make sure your children understand physical, emotional, and behavioral boundaries, and that anyone who violates those boundaries should be reported to camp administration.

### Camp Emergencies

In severe weather emergencies, campers and counselors will utilize one of our storm shelters, located in each area of camp. In case of medical emergencies, we have two medical staff on the property each week, and EMS can be here within five minutes. While our first priority is obviously the safety of the campers, we will also communicate as appropriate via our Instagram story (@campernst) and via phone or email when necessary.

### Evacuation Procedures

In the unlikely event that we would need to evacuate Camp Ernst, in consultation with the Boone County Emergency Planning Department, we will attempt to contact the family starting with the primary contact, then the emergency contact, in that order. At that time, the person we make contact with will be given further instructions as to how the evacuation will proceed. For this

reason, it is truly important that we have accurate contact information for parents and emergency contacts during your child's camp session. Based on type of emergency, we will make a decision on the most prudent way to return campers safely to their homes, this may require parents or authorized emergency contacts to pick their child up at an alternate time and/or location.

### Immunizations

Based on our Camp Doctor's recommendation we strongly encourage all campers to have up to date vaccinations.

### Behavior, Discipline, and Dismissal Policy

Our discipline policy is designed to help children develop self-control and assume responsibility for their actions. We are guided by our core values of honesty, caring, responsibility, and respect. Clear, age-appropriate rules and limits are established at camp. As in any group activity, inappropriate behavior by one or two children can challenge the experience for the entire group. Staff will deal with normal day-to-day behavior issues using acceptable techniques and approaches, such as: redirecting campers, rewarding positive behavior, encouraging campers to use "I" statements and talk about their feelings, role modeling on how to speak and interact with campers in a positive manner, and implementing logical consequences when appropriate.

Campers will partake in an anti-bullying seminar on their first evening at camp and sign a pledge stating that they understand the importance of creating a positive community at camp. It is emphasized repeatedly to all in the camp community that "If something or someone is keeping you from having a good time, tell your counselor. If your counselor doesn't do enough about it, tell another counselor." There are also anonymous reporting boxes in both nurse offices. In addition, the "Tuesday check in" by the unit leaders gives campers a designated, individual, programmed procedure for reporting any problems or concerns.

We recognize that many behaviors exhibited by children are a result of an often-unidentified external stressor or social dynamic. Our staff take great measures to identify underlying causes of conflict and help campers restore or rebuild relationships.

## **CAMP ERNST PROGRAM BASICS:**

### Lakeview Unit (entering 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grades)

During our week-long overnight camp, campers going into grades 1-4 stay in Lakeview Lodge where all of the amenities are under one roof (air-conditioned cabins, bathrooms, and dining hall).

### Valley Unit (entering 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grades)

During our week-long overnight camp, campers going into grades 4-7, broken down into the Red and Yellow Unit, stay in the original part of camp. Cabins are open air with screen windows and doors. Bathrooms and showers and the dining hall are located in separate buildings. Several newer cabins have single stall bathroom/showers inside.

### Leaders in Training (L.I.T.) Unit (entering 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grades)

During our week-long overnight camp, campers going into grades 8-10 stay in the Loft or Longhouse in the Leadership Village near the lake. Cabins are open air with screen windows and doors. In the Loft, bathrooms and showers are located in the same building. For the Longhouse, they are housed in a separate building. L.I.T.s use the dining hall located in Lakeview Lodge.

### Crew (entering 10<sup>th</sup> grade or age 15)

Crew is a weeklong leadership experience housed in the Yurt Village. Crew participants form a tight-knit group through service learning, completing tasks like serving food, washing dishes and other behind the scenes jobs. Crew members are guided through the experience by camp counselors who also schedule traditional activities such as ropes, lake and capture the flag. See the "Crew 101" info ([Crew 101 \(mycamp.org\)](http://mycamp.org)) packet for more details.

### Intro (Ages 5-9)

Campers ages five to nine can try this exciting 24-hour long Intro to Overnight camp on select dates during the summer. This program is a great introduction to see if a week-long Camp Ernst experience is right for them. Campers will stay in a cabin with counselors, eat yummy camp meals, and experience a small sampling of awesome Camp Ernst activities.

### Mini Camp (Age 6-11)

Campers ages six to ten who are looking for more than a one-night stay but not quite ready for a full week of summer camp can try out this three-day, two-night mini camp during select dates during the summer. Campers will stay in a cabin with counselors, eat yummy camp meals, and experience a sampling of awesome Camp Ernst activities.

### Equine Adventure

This program is perfect for your camper that wants to spend the majority of their time at the Ranch! This program includes riding lessons, trail rides and daily chores. In the evenings, your young equestrians will head back to the main camp for evening programming with the rest of their age group. Mini Equestrian camp sessions are also available!

### Daily Schedule

Below is an example of a daily schedule for your camper. Times and activities will vary depending on the unit your camper is in.

7:30A.M	Polar Bear Swim(optional)
8:00A.M.	Wake-up and cabin clean-up
8:15A.M.	Breakfast
9:15A.M.–12:15P.M	Camp activities with the cabin group like Ropes, Lake, or Valley activities
12:30P.M.	Lunch
1:30P.M.–4:30P.M.	Camp activities
5:00P.M.	Dinner
5:30P.M.	Mail call and cabin time
6:00P.M.	Choice Activities (for example: creek hike, soccer, bracelet making)
8:00P.M.	Evening program (for example: Capture the Flag)
9:30P.M.	Cabin time and devotion
10:30P.M.	Lights out!

### Activity List

Ropes Course - The high discovery ropes course challenges campers to grow in personal confidence and team building. The Ropes Course is inspected by a state-licensed professional and all campers and staff utilize helmets, harnesses, professional climbing ropes, and carabineers.

Lakefront - Camp Ernst lake is a 26-acre, spring-fed, lake with hours of fun docked and waiting for you! The lake includes canoes, kayaks, aqua cycles, 100-foot waterslide, the rockit, corcls and more!

Western Ranch - Our Rockin' E Ranch with The Stables at YMCA Camp Ernst, funded by the Jacob G. Schmidlapp Foundation, includes two riding arenas, a 30+ horse herd, and miles of trails! Every summer we offer a variety of programs for campers of all riding levels. Whether it's a trail ride or a full week program, you are sure to find a program that will fit your needs.

Traditional Activities – Beyond horses, ropes, and the lake activities; your camper will enjoy a wide variety of traditional camp activities. These include hiking, swimming, slingshot, sports, crafts, nature, and archery.

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