



Day Camp Family Info Guide

YMCA Camp Ernst
2026



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
Phone/Text: (859)586-6181 – Camp Office
Emergency (859)912-3457 – Executive Director Eli Cochran’s Personal Cell Phone
Call/Text: (emergencies)

Email: 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 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 .

Director Staff include:

Lesley Sammons – Day Camp Director LSammons@myy.org

Elizabeth "Eli" Cochran – Executive Director ECochran@myY.org

Megan Gierhart – Senior Program Director MGierhart@myY.org

Kristi Horton – Ranch Program Director KHorton@myY.org

Brynn Owen – Teen Program Director bowen@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



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).

Day camp Group Requests

We think it's great to come to camp with the objective of making new friends. However, if your camper has a friend or group of campers they would like to be grouped with, please make the request during the registration or by giving us a call at the office. We can accommodate most group 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 the request to use on all registrations (so even that camper will have her own name). Group ("Huddle") assignments are emailed out approximately one week prior to your camper's stay. If there are any issues with assignments, email Lesley, day camp director lsammons@myy.org.

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. After June 1, 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.

Visiting Camp

If you would like a camp tour before your camper's session, please let us know.

Telephone

Campers may not bring cell phones to camp. Campers do not have phone access. 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.

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 backpack to keep things together. Please label everything with camper's last name. Each day, campers should arrive wearing weather-appropriate clothing and closed-toe shoes.

Packing Essentials

- Extra underwear and socks
- Plastic bag (for wet items)
- Bathingsuit/towel
- Long Pants – for ranch camp
- Packed lunch (refrigeration/microwaves not available)
- Snacks
- Refillable 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. Epi-pens and inhalers can be carried by campers or staff but must be logged with the nurse.
- Optional: Flip flops/sandals for water activities

Camp Store

We have lots of merchandise for sale ranging from camp shirts, sweatshirts, plush toys, key chains to camp bags, and water bottles. There are lots of goodies to be found. We have some items to browse behind our front desk but all orders must be placed online. You may select home delivered or to be picked up in the camp office/welcome center. Use the parents tab on our website and choose Online Camp store.

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)

Day Camp Check-in/ Check-out

The day camp program hours are 9:00am – 4:00pm each day. We ask that all campers are present for these hours. Day camp Drop off is from 8:45am – 9:00am, and pick up is from 3:45pm – 4:00pm.

Children must be accompanied by an adult when they arrive and leave the day camp program. You must sign your child in and out daily. For the safety of your child, only you or the other adults you designate in writing on the release form may pick up your child. Please be prepared daily with photo identification.

When you arrive, go through the gate and straight at the stop sign to circle around the parking lot for check in. Please wait until the check-in leader indicates it is safe for you to pull forward and let your camper out. Check out is done the same way.

Due to camp logistics and supervision, we can only offer these alternate times: 10am or 2pm. To arrange check-in or check-out at these alternate times, please email Lesley, day camp director, to make arrangements before the session begins.

OFFICE HOURS
Our office is open Monday–Friday from 8:30am–5:00pm.
859.586.6181.
For an afterhours or weekend
Emergency, call/text Eli’s cell phone,
859.912.3457

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.

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.

Special Needs

Campers with specific emotional or physical needs, including, but not limited to: mobility challenges, special diets, food allergies, diabetes, sleep walking, 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.

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.

Swim Tests

First and foremost, we take water safety very seriously! We utilize a system called "Test, mark and protect." Swim tests are administered by the lifeguard and/or the unit staff on the first day to determine who can swim in which areas of the pools. The first test determines if the swimmer can swim across the shallow end with their head out of the water and feet off the bottom of the pool. The second test is a float test. The swimmer must be able to float on their back for 10 seconds in the water. The next test is for the swimmer to swim the full length of the pool and the final test is for the swimmer to tread water while singing 2 sets of ABCs. Based upon how the swimmer performs, they will receive a colored wrist band indicating their swim level. Red band will stay in the shallow, always with a lifejacket. Yellow band will stay in the shallow but are not required to wear a life jacket. Green band will be permitted to swim in the deep end. There are opportunities to re-test and move up to the next color band as the week goes on.

Everyone, regardless of age or ability, wears a life jacket in the lake.

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 the first day of the session 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.

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.

Daily Schedule

Below is an example of a daily schedule for your camper. Activities will vary by the day.

9:00am Camper Arrival

9:15am Opening assembly at the "Q" with plan for the day, songs, etc.

Morning activity block (Activities like archery, fishing, and crafts)

12:30 pm lunch at the Day Camp pavilion

Afternoon activity block (Activities like pool, boating, and nature)

3:30 pm Closing assembly with games, announcements, awards, etc

4:00 pm Camper pick up

Activity List

*please note: time presents some limits so not all activities at Camp Ernst are offered for day camp programs

Ropes Course - The high ropes discovery 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.

Tier Camp Pricing

We understand families have differing abilities to pay for camp. For **Family Camp** and **Regular Day Camp** sessions, offer a voluntary three-tiered pricing model based on the needs of the family. This program is completely confidential and in no way affects the quality of the camp experience. Price selection is done strictly on an honor system. You choose the tier that fits your budget. If you can afford to pay the full fee (Option 3), please do so. If you cannot, simply select the price which is right for your family's circumstances. You'll be given the option to choose your rate during the registration process. The three Tiers are listed below:

- **Option Tier 1** is a subsidized rate, funded by donations to the greatest extent possible, and provided for families whose children would not otherwise be able to attend camp.
- **Option Tier 2** reflects the basic cost of attending camp including staff, program supplies and limited maintenance expenses.
- **Option Tier 3** represents the actual cost of camp operations, including long-term wear, tear and depreciation. If you are able to pay this rate, please do so.

Financial Assistance

Financial assistance is available! We offer income-based sliding scale camp fees where fee assistance is based on household income. Funds are limited. Fee Assistance/Scholarships may only be granted for one session of overnight and/or day camp per person. Fee assistance is awarded by completing the fee assistance application during the registration process. You will have to create an account in Camp Brain, select Summer and then select Fee Assistance from the menu.