



# YMCA CAMP BENSON

## PARENT/GUARDIAN HANDBOOK

### OVERNIGHT SUMMER CAMP (2020)

## WELCOME TO CAMP!

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Thank you for registering your child for summer camp at YMCA Camp Benson! Our goal is to provide every camper with the best possible camping experience. At YMCA Camp Benson we strive to create opportunities for personal growth and relationship building while always keeping physical and emotional safety a priority. We are excited to partner with you in the effort to raise a strong child with a solid values structure and a positive self-image.

We look forward to our week with your child and to a summer filled with memories and happiness. Please review the following information to help prepare yourself and your camper for their week. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at any time. Thank you for entrusting your child to us!

Sincerely,  
Gwyn Bemis, Camp Director



### CHECK-IN/CHECK-OUT INFORMATION

#### CHECK-IN

Adventure Campers:  
Sunday from 3:00-4:00 p.m.

Mini and Explorer Campers:  
Wednesday from 5:00-6:00 p.m.

#### CHECK-OUT

All Campers:  
Saturday at 9 a.m.

For more details, see page  
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### INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Please pay special attention to the following pages in this guide to help you and your camper prepare for camp.

- Forms: Pg. 4
- Packing List: Pg. 6
- Communication Info Pg. 7-8
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### STAY CONNECTED ALL WEEK LONG

Follow what is happening at camp through your Camp-In-Touch Account. Pictures are uploaded daily. The blog is posted every Tuesday and Thursday. You can even send one-way emails to your camper!

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram as well @ymcacampbenison



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## ABOUT CAMP BENSON

### MISSION & VALUES

YMCA Camp Benson aims to provide a safe, fun, educational and transformational experience for all campers through the demonstration of our six core values; caring, honesty, respect, responsibility, inclusiveness and dedication and by practicing a camper first philosophy. **Our goal is to build stronger campers and help them become the best version of themselves.**

YMCA Camp Benson is committed to instilling values in today's youth. Through the efforts of our staff, as well as our programs, we strive to teach the following six core values to all of our campers:

- ➔ Respect
- ➔ Responsibility
- ➔ Caring
- ➔ Honesty
- ➔ Inclusiveness
- ➔ Dedication

## STAFF & SAFETY

Safety is always our top priority here at camp. All of our staff members are CPR and First Aid certified by the American Red Cross. Our Camp Nurse lives on-site to provide ongoing care for campers. YMCA Camp Benson also has a registered nurse on call 24/7 who lives at the front of camp. The Morrison Community Hospital is located 20 minutes from camp. YMCA Camp Benson will make every attempt to notify you before making a doctor's appointment or an emergency room visit for your child while they are in our care. All phone numbers given to us will be attempted in an effort to reach you. Minor medical needs will be cared for by the on-site Camp Nurse without notification to parents.

An amazing camp experience doesn't just happen by accident. It is created by our amazing counselors and activity staff, most of whom were campers themselves. Our dedicated and well-trained staff aim to make the summer camp experience safe, memorable and transformative for every camper. With the understanding that counselors and activity managers greatly influence each young person's character development, staff members truly embrace their responsibility for being positive role models. All staff members undergo a rigorous application process that includes reference, background, and sex offender list checks.

We are accredited by the American Camp Association—meaning that we meet or exceed more than 300 standards for health, safety, and program quality.



## CAMP CONTACT INFORMATION

### Physical Address

16355 Scenic Palisades Rd.  
Mount Carroll, IL 61053

### Phone Number

815-244-8722

### Fax Number

815-244-8723

### YMCA Camp Benson Professional Staff Team

Gwyn "Mama G" Bemis | Camp Director | [gwyn@ymcacampbenson.org](mailto:gwyn@ymcacampbenson.org)

Madison "Pawz" Vandersee | Assistant Camp Director | [madison@ymcacampbenson.org](mailto:madison@ymcacampbenson.org)

Jess "Alto" Rahn | Operations Manager | [jrahn@ymcacampbenson.org](mailto:jrahn@ymcacampbenson.org)

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Every child deserves a summer camp experience. Just one summer at camp can positively influence a child's life forever. Our confidential Financial Assistance Program allows numerous children, who would otherwise not be able to attend, to experience all that YMCA Camp Benson has to offer.

Applications for assistance will be made available on our website at <https://www.ymcacampbenson.org/financial-assistance> account beginning April 13, 2020, with submissions being accepted after that.

Please contact Jess "Alto" Rahn as [jrahn@ymcacampbenson.org](mailto:jrahn@ymcacampbenson.org) if you have any question about our Financial Assistance Program.

# BEFORE CAMP BEGINS

## POLICIES / PROCEDURES

### Payments

Payment for the full balance of camp is due two weeks before the start of your child's camp session.

If you anticipate having difficulty paying your entire balance by then, please contact the Gwyn "Mama G" Bemis at [gwyn@ymcacampbenson.org](mailto:gwyn@ymcacampbenson.org) for assistance.

### Refund/Cancellation Policy:

- The \$50 deposit is non-refundable.
- Cancellations within 7 days of session or no shows will result in a loss of all fees paid, and charges will still apply.
- **All session changes and cancellations must be made in writing.** You may email changes to [gwyn@ymcacampbenson.org](mailto:gwyn@ymcacampbenson.org).

## CAMP FORMS: DUE 14 DAYS BEFORE CAMP

BELOW IS A CHECKLIST OF FORMS THAT NEED TO BE COMPLETED ONLINE BEFORE THE START OF YOUR CAMPER'S SESSION. THESE FORMS HELP US PREPARE OUR STAFF FOR YOUR CAMPER'S ARRIVAL.

### FORM CHECKLIST

- ☐ Health History Form
- ☐ Camper Profile Form
- ☐ Care Package and Camp Store Funds Form (optional)
- ☐ Cabin Mate Request Form (optional)

Forms can be found by logging into your Camp-In-Touch Account at

<https://ymcacampbenson.campintouch.com/v2/login.aspx>

and clicking on Forms and Documents.

If you have any questions about these forms, please give us a call at 815-244-8722.

### Medications and Health Needs

- All medications should be sent in their original containers with the original pharmacy label.
- Please send enough medication to last the week.
- It is recommended that you do not take your child off of their prescribed medication for their week at camp.
- Send only necessary vitamins.
- Inhalers can be kept with the camper. EpiPens are allowed to be carried by campers in certain situations.

All camper medications must be checked in to the Camp Nurse at check in.

The Camp Nurse will dispense all medications as needed. Medication can be picked up at check out in the pavilion.

[www.ymcacampbenson.org](http://www.ymcacampbenson.org) • 815-244-8722 • unplug, connect, and grow

## PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

YMCA Camp Benson will do everything we can to help your child have a wonderful camp experience. Parents can help by letting us know in advance about any specific behavioral, health-related, emotional, or other issues that affect your child. You can do this by calling the Camp Director at 815-244-8722 or by including this information on the Camper Profile form. With sufficient notice, we can contact you in advance of your arrival at camp to discuss strategies to ensure your child succeeds at camp.

### Helping Campers Succeed

The following can act as a guide to communicating with your child about different aspects of camp. The number one characteristic of a successful camper at YMCA Camp Benson is that the camper wants to be at camp. Campers who understand what to expect at camp and want to get the most out of their stay will create a successful experience for themselves and others.

**Camper's Commitment:** "I want to become a camper at YMCA Camp Benson. I understand I may not possess or use tobacco products, alcoholic beverages, or non-prescription/illegal drugs while at camp. I will do my best to follow instructions, remain in designated areas, and keep others and myself safe. I will do my best to make this a good experience for my fellow campers and myself. I understand that failure to live up to this promise might result in my dismissal from camp without a refund."

**Happy Campers are:** Emotionally stable and independent enough to enjoy the camp experience. They are able to care for themselves at an age-appropriate level, maintain basic hygiene (brushing teeth, showering, table manners, etc.), and be emotionally appropriate with peers and staff, while being physically safe with self and others.

**YMCA Camp Benson's summer camp program is an adventure-based program.** Participating fully in activities is important and expected. The camp experience does not include cell phones, TV, computers, video games or soda pop. Campers sleep on bunk beds in a new cabin, usually with 10-12 peers, 2 staff and a CIT (counselor in training). Camp is physically active, with long days (7 am - 10 pm). Sharing and group-bonding activities are a regular part of cabin life. There is a rest period of one hour on most days.

**Teamwork is a big part of the camp experience.** Many of our activities are designed to give campers the opportunity to step outside of their comfort zone (i.e. climbing wall, team building activities, overnight campout, etc.). As part of group living, campers will participate in cabin and camp clean up, eat meals together family-style and travel around camp as a group of 3 or more at all times.

**Camper Behavior Management** is implemented with care and respect by all of our staff. Camp Benson's goal is for all children to experience the values of caring, honesty, respect, responsibility, inclusiveness and dedication within our program. We expect our campers to exhibit behavior at camp that is consistent with our values.

There are some times when a camper's behavior detracts from the overall experience of the cabin group by requiring excessive one-on-one attention from the staff. As a commitment to the success and enjoyment of camp by each camper, we want you to know our usual steps for redirecting challenging behavior.



## Behavior Management Steps

1. Cabin Counselors will talk about the specific undesirable behavior with the camper and together make a verbal corrective plan for success. The Cabin Counselor will let the Counselor Manager know what has happened.
2. If the behavior continues, the Camp Director will have a conversation with the camper and create a plan for change. After a conversation with the Camp Director, the Director will call the camper's home, explain what has happened, let a parent/guardian know the approaches that we have tried, and ask for advice with the situation ("What do you do at home when \_\_\_\_\_ occurs?" "Is there something that might be causing this behavior?" "Do you have any suggestions?"). We have been incredibly successful partnering with parents in the past.
3. However, if the behavior continues, the Camp Director will involve the parent in a phone conversation with the camper. This call would be initiated and supervised by the Camp Director.
4. Unfortunately, there are situations when campers are removed from camp activities and parents are asked to pick up their child from camp without a refund. This, of course, is not our preference, but for the well-being and safety of the whole group, or as a logical consequence for continued inappropriate behavior, dismissal from camp may be required by the Camp Director.

**There are also some behaviors that will result in immediate dismissal from the camp program.** YMCA Camp Benson reserves the right to dismiss any camper due to violence, bullying, possession of an illegal substance, inappropriate conduct or any other destructive behavior. Camp fees will not be returned in these instances.

## PACKING LIST

Please send old clothes that can get dirty. It is recommended that all personal items be marked. Camp Benson is not responsible for damaged or lost personal items.

### Clothing

Shorts (2-3 pairs)	Pants (2-3 pairs)
T-shirts (5-6)	White T-Shirt (1) for special color wars celebration
Sweatshirt (1)	Swimsuit (camp appropriate-no tie straps, please)
Light Jacket (1)	Raincoat/Poncho (1)
Socks (7-8 pairs)	Daily change of underwear
Shoes (2 pair: one comfortable, sturdy pair of tennis shoes and one old pair that can get wet and dirty)	
Pajamas	

### Bedding and Toiletries

Sleeping Bag	Pillow and pillow case
Extra sheet or lightweight covering	Towels and washcloths (2)
Toothbrush and toothpaste	Personal toiletry items
Laundry bag	Sunscreen

### Other

Water Bottle	Flashlight and Batteries
Stationery/Envelopes or Postcards/Stamps	Insect repellent
Disposable Camera (not a camera phone)	Book/Magazine for quiet times



**Core Value Colors:** Red, Green, Blue, Yellow, Black and White. Here at YMCA Camp Benson we play a lot of games and activities in teams. The teams are typically separated into the core-value colors. Bring solid color (Red, Blue, Green, Yellow, Black and White) shirts, bandanas, or other items along.

**For your child's security and safety of other campers, please DO NOT pack these items to bring to Camp Benson:**

Junk food or soda pop	Electronic games	Cell Phones	Firearms
Tobacco products	Radios/CDs/MP3s/I-Pods	Expensive jewelry	Squirt Guns
Fireworks	Knives	Animals	Alcohol
Expensive clothes	Inappropriate clothes	Non-prescription drugs	

YMCA Camp Benson is not responsible for any damaged or lost items.

Campers wearing inappropriate clothing will be asked to change. Due to the activity level at camp, spaghetti strap tees are only allowed to be worn over swimsuits or sports bras. Girls, please do not bring swimsuits with ties because of our high activity level.

Any camper discovered with tobacco products, alcohol, non-prescription/illegal drugs, firearms, or knives is subject to immediate dismissal from camp.

**We DO NOT allow CELL PHONES at camp.** If your camper is found to have a cell phone it will be taken to the lodge and stored in the Camp Director's office. All phones will be returned at check-out.

## COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CAMPER

### Communicating through your Camp-In-Touch Account

When you register campers for summer camp you will create a Camp-In-Touch account. Through this account you can submit forms, make payments and now communicate with your campers.

One-way emails can be sent to your camper from your Camp-In-Touch account. Emails are printed daily and delivered to campers around dinner time. The best way to access your Camp-In-Touch account is to log onto our website [www.ymcacampbenison.org](http://www.ymcacampbenison.org) and click on the Parent Log-In tab. You can even create a guest account for Grandma, Grandpa, Aunt, etc. so they can send emails to your camper too.

Photos of the day's activities will be uploaded nightly after 9 pm. Log into your Camp-In-Touch account and click on the photos tab. These photos are also available for purchase.

Please contact us with questions at [gwyn@ymcacampbenison.org](mailto:gwyn@ymcacampbenison.org). We do not accept camper emails at this address.

### YMCA Camp Benson Care Packages

Parents now have the option to order a Care Package for their campers! Camp Care Packages include all kinds of great camp gear, including a bag, water bottle, sunglasses, flashlight and much more. The cost for the Camp Care Package is \$20. Campers will receive their Care Package after breakfast on the second day of camp. Care Packages can be ordered during the initial online registration process, any time through the Forms tab on your Camp-In-Touch Account or during check-in.

## Mail and Packages

To help your child make a smooth transition to camp, try to write or email them at least once. You can write and send a letter before your camper arrives, so the letter will be waiting for them on their first full day of camp. Mail from pets, siblings, relatives and friends are great ways to show your love and support for your child. Funny cards and picture postcards are great too. Ask questions about camp and try to avoid telling your child how much you miss them. Short declarations of love, such as "We're so proud of you," or "We love you" or "See you soon" are just what children want to hear. Please address mail to your child as follows:

Child's name, Cabin Name (if known)  
YMCA Camp Benson  
16355 Scenic Palisades Road  
Mount Carroll, IL 61053

If you don't hear from your child, don't worry! He or she is probably having fun and letter writing can sometimes feel like a chore.

## Care Package Policy

Receiving a package while at camp is a fun experience. We encourage parents to send magazines, coloring or activity books, playing cards, etc. These items are cool to use during afternoon rest period. We ask that you do not pack these full of food. If you send a snack, please make sure it can be consumed in one setting. Also please be conscious of food allergies, we ask that you do not send any food items that contain peanuts. While we know receiving food from home can be a creature comfort we want to limit the amount being sent for a few reasons: food attracts critters and we try our best not to invite them into cabin areas, sometimes campers over indulge on snacks and do not eat the healthy items served during meal times, and it helps us cut down on garbage at camp. Thank you for following this policy. If you have questions please contact our Camp Director, Gwyn "Mama G" Bemis.

Please remember to allow time for shipping. Placing letters and packages in the mail the Thursday or Friday before the session starts is recommended to ensure it arrives during their session. Also feel free to bring the care packages with you on Sunday and save the postage. If your child has forgotten an item that they will need (shoes, etc.), please mail it to camp with a note identifying who it is for. Our staff will then deliver it to your camper.

## Birthdays

If your child is having a birthday while at camp, please let us know so we can make it extra special. We will make sure the entire dining hall sings them Happy Birthday and that they get a piece of birthday cake! Please contact the camp office to make arrangements if you would like to send something special.

## Phone Use: 815-244-8722

In case of a medical or family emergency at home, contact the YMCA Camp Benson office at the number above.

Our policy on phone calls has been made in the best interest of our campers. All phone communication by campers is under the guidance of our professional staff. It has been our experience that phone calls to or from home make camper adjustment more difficult and actually creates homesickness. Professional staff are happy to discuss camper concerns or give a camper update at any time.

Campers are not allowed to have cell phones while at camp. Cell phones will be taken and stored in the Camp Director's office. They will be given back at check-out. Remember, we all want the best experience for your child. We will work with you to help your child in any way possible.



## CABIN GROUP PLACEMENT

### Building New Friendships and Skills

Each camper lives in a cabin with ten to twelve other campers of similar age, two staff members and a CIT (Counselor in Training). Cabin life is designed to foster personal growth, just like our programs. Campers do many activities together as a cabin group which facilitates strong friendships, but they also enjoy the opportunity to interact with other campers throughout the day during activity periods. The relationship between the staff and campers is a key factor in your child's growth. Staff go to great lengths to make cabin life a positive and memorable experience.

### Cabin Mate Requests

Meeting new people while on your own at camp is an invaluable experience, but we understand some children feel more comfortable with a friend.

- ➔ Children are placed into cabins with campers in which there are generally no more than 18 months difference in age.
- ➔ In order to facilitate unity, we strive to limit the number of campers from one city or school in each cabin. This way your child can have the opportunity to meet children from all over the state and the Midwest.
- ➔ We allow campers to make **TWO** cabin mate requests. Campers who mutually request each other will have a better chance of being placed in a cabin together. We do not guarantee cabin mate requests, but we will make every effort to honor them. Campers who request each other must stay within the age range indicated above. We recommend that siblings are not placed in the same cabin.
- ➔ Cabin mate requests of groups over three may be split up in order to decrease the impact of cliques. If you know this may be a concern, it is helpful to talk to the other parents and to include a note on suggested pairings weeks prior to their camp session.
- ➔ We will make our best effort to contact you prior to your campers session to discuss any cabin placement issues we run into.

We really do want your child to see their friends at camp and share this great experience, but we find it is best if they do not all live together. Requested cabin mate groups of 4 or more may be split up. **Refunds** will not be given if cabin mate requests are not honored.

The Cabin Mate Request form can be found under the Forms and Documents section in your Camp-In-Touch account.

## WHILE YOUR CHILD IS AT CAMP

The YMCA Camp Benson experience focuses on self-discovery, self-confidence, and self-esteem – all learned through positive reinforcement, encouragement, and acceptance. For more than 90 years, boys and girls have been given the opportunity to create a very special community focused on friendship, inclusiveness and independence at YMCA Camp Benson. Camp's programs will challenge each camper at an age-appropriate level while giving them something to look forward to next year.

At home, each child has their own routine depending on family traditions and their own individual likes and dislikes. At camp, we have our own traditions and daily routines that are designed to make each camper's experience as enjoyable as possible, while still giving them the freedom to choose the activities they like to do best.

# CAMP DAILY SCHEDULE

## Every day is an ADVENTURE at YMCA Camp Benson!

### Camper Daily Schedule

8:00-8:20	Morning Club (Optional)
8:20-8:30	Flag Raising
8:30-9:15	Breakfast
9:15-9:45	Cabin Cleanup
9:45-10:00	Chapel
10:00-12:00	CCAT (Camper Choice Activity Time)
12:15-12:30	Flagpole
12:30-1:30	Lunch
1:30-2:30	Siesta
2:30-3:45	FCAT 1 (Free Choice Activity Time)
4:00-5:15	FCAT 2
5:30-5:45	Flag Lowering
5:45-6:30	Dinner
6:30-7:00	Quest
7:00-8:15	Evening Program
8:15-8:30	Slow Songs
8:30	Showers and Prepare for Bed
10:30	Lights Out



## Swimming Assessment

Each camper's swimming ability will be evaluated during our first trip to the Mount Carroll pool by the lifeguards. Everyone who swims during their stay at camp must have a swimming assessment.

## Homesickness

Homesickness is normal for a campers first time away from home. A recent study shows 83% of children experience some sort of homesickness while at camp. The staff make every effort to help campers overcome homesickness by helping them learn to accept the natural feeling of missing family and friends. We keep our campers busy and try to interest them in new and fun activities and friends. Taking a youngster away from camp too soon may make it difficult for your child to overcome homesickness. **Encouraging your camper to contact you on a cell phone or promising to come get them at any time can actually increases homesickness and makes it more difficult for the child to adjust.** The Camp Director will contact you if we need assistance in dealing with the most difficult cases.

## Severe Weather

Changes in weather are a normal occurrence during the summer and YMCA Camp Benson has specific policies that are practiced and followed when the threat of and/or severe weather does occur. Storm shelters are located on both sides of camp. Please watch our Facebook account for updates on weather and any program changes.

## Lost & Found

Please label all clothing and items with the first and last name of your child in permanent marker. We will make every attempt to identify and return all items at the end of each week. If you discover that your camper has left an item behind, please inform us and we will do our best to locate it. If found, items will be mailed back. All items left behind are stored at camp for one week and then donated to Goodwill.

*YMCA Camp Benson is not responsible for any lost or damaged personal items. Campers are encouraged not to bring valuable items or clothing to camp.*

## Search & Seizure

For the safety of all campers, if there is cause to suspect a camper has illegal, stolen or prohibited items at camp, we reserve the right to search and seize any items of cause. If this happens, we will make every effort possible to contact parents.

## A Note on Bullying

Bullying is one of the greatest challenges facing children today. As a bully-free zone, YMCA Camp Benson is committed to the physical and emotional safety of every camper. Through our staff training and program design, we will make every effort to prevent and manage incidences of bullying in fair, reasonable, and consistent ways. In addition to the camp policies and procedures, you can also take steps now to prepare your child for camp:

1. Help your child understand bullying. Talk about bullying and how to stand up to bullies safely. Emphasize that bullying is unacceptable.
2. Help them be more than a bystander. Talk to them about what to do if they see someone else being bullied.
3. Check in with your child about their camp experience at pick-up. Listen to them. Learn about their friends, ask about camp, and listen to concerns.
4. Model and teach your child how to treat others with kindness and respect.

## CAMP STORE

The Camp Store is open every afternoon during Free Camper Activity Time. Campers are allowed to purchase a snack and/or camp merchandise at this time. A free snack will be offered to all of camp during this time as well.

**Parents are strongly encouraged to add money to their camper's Camp Store account prior to arriving at camp.**

Camp Store funds can be added through your Camp-In-Touch account under the Additional Options form in the forms section of your account. We recommend placing \$25-\$40 in your camper's account. A balance system is kept daily and campers are aided by staff in budgeting their money.

# CHECK-IN/CHECK-OUT

## Check-in time is Sunday between 3-4:00 pm

- Upon arrival at Camp Benson, please proceed to the check-in station at the Merrill Benson Pavilion. If you have any medication to turn in, please bring it with you. If arriving early we strongly encourage you to explore downtown Mount Carroll or visit nearby Mississippi Palisades State Park. **We will not start check-in until 3 pm sharp.**
- Check-in will go smoother and faster if you complete all the forms ahead of time online and have paid all camper fees.

## Check-out time for all Campers is Saturday at 9:00am

- Written permission is needed for campers to leave with anyone other than family members. Campers will be checked out at their cabins by their counselors. Leadership staff will greet you at the Pavilion and will direct you to the correct cabin.

## Check-in time for Mini/Explorer Campers on Wednesday

- Mini/Explorer Campers can be checked in from 5-6pm on Wednesday.

# DIRECTIONS TO CAMP

YMCA Camp Benson  
16355 Scenic Palisades Rd.  
Mount Carroll, IL 61053

Local Directions: YMCA Camp Benson is located 1 mile west of Mount Carroll on Scenic Palisades Rd.

From Sterling, IL: Follow IL-40 North to Mount Carroll. Turn west onto US-52 and follow for .5 miles. Turn right onto South Mill Rd. and follow for 1 mile. Then turn left onto W. Benton Street, which turns into Scenic Palisades Rd. The entrance to camp located 1 mile down the road on the right hand side.

From Chicago: Take I-88 West until you reach the exit for I-39 N/US-51 N to Rockford. Follow I-39 N/US-51 N for 7 miles and take Exit 104 toward I-64 W. Follow I-64 W for 36 miles through the towns of Oregon and Mt. Morris. Then you will turn onto US-52 W which will lead you into Mount Carroll. Turn right onto South Mill Rd. and follow for 1 mile. Then turn left onto W. Benton Street, which turns into Scenic Palisades Rd. The entrance to camp located 1 mile down the road on the right hand side.

