

I Know What You Did This Summer

**Anxious Parents Log In to Camp
Using Web Video, E-Mail;
Is That a Sling On Your Arm?**

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Catherine Marion hates it when her 11-year-old daughter leaves her towel on the floor. Jennifer is now at sleep away camp in New York's Adirondack Mountains, but her Short Hills, N.J., mom is keeping an eye on her tidiness, her mood and the local temperature via a Web site that posts daily photos and updates on life at Camp Raquette Lake. "The kids don't hang up their towels. And where did she get that top?" asks Ms. Marion. She e-mails Jennifer daily, she says, and the next note will read: "Try to hang up your towel."

VISITING DAY, EVERY DAY

To find out what's happening to their kids at camp, parents are logging onto Web sites that offer photos, weather forecasts, and more. [See activities](#) this week at camps across the country.
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Forget the days when summer camp was a place where parents and kids could get away from each other. Dozens of the nation's camps have added daily digital photos, streaming video, live Web cams and online postings about everything from what's on the lunch menu to who won "Color War." But while many

camps say their intention was to ease separation anxiety, the technology has served to enable parents who just won't separate. These days, if little Zachary's face doesn't appear on the Web site -- or if he just looks cold or cranky -- Mom and Dad figure it's time to take action.

Dawn Gale, a stay-at-home mom in Evanston, Ill., sent her 12-year-old son Brian to camp two weeks ago but has seen him online everyday since -- except one. "There was a day when I didn't see a new picture," she says. "I e-mailed him: 'Get your butt in front of that camera, please. Your mommy needs this.'" The next day, she says, "There were three or four pictures of him, posing in front of the camera, like 'Ta-da!'"

Bunk1.com, a New York company that offers e-mail and video-clip technology to camps, says it's posting video clips on 25 camp Web sites this summer, up from just one a year ago. Ecamp, a Lakeville, Conn., company that began offering e-mail services for camps in 1999, now offers customized camp Web sites that feature password-protected photos, a newsletter, interviews with the counselors and such information as who went on the girls llama hike at Camp Lenox (Lee, Mass.) or who got all wet at the dunking booth at Blue Star Camps (Hendersonville, N.C.). Business has climbed 50% in the past year, says Seth

Hirschel, chief executive officer of the company. "Some parents log on 10 times a day," he says.



Hello, Muddah: Blue Star Camps in Hendersonville, N.C., lets parents view pictures and video of their kids on the Web.

Linda Shapiro, a human-resources consultant in Bethesda, Md., will be glued to the Web site for Pennsylvania's Camp Pocono Ridge. Her son Eric headed there for a month long session earlier this week, and the camp has installed video cameras at its swimming pool, dining hall and by the flagpole. "CampCast," the camp says, will broadcast Eric's escapades from morning until night, starting Monday. (The service is free to parents who agree to purchase two photographs off the Web site at \$8.95.) Eric, reached before he left for camp, said he won't mind the attention. "I don't have to write as much," he said.

Competing With Summer School

In part, the camp-cam phenomenon is a response to declining summer-camp enrollment and revenue. Camp enrollment fell about 6% in 2003 from a year earlier, to a total of 9.5 million campers nationwide, says the American Camping Association. Camps attribute this to competition with specialized school or sports programs and increased parental anxiety, particularly in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001. Ms. Marion, whose daughter Jennifer went to the Adirondacks camp for the first time last year, says it was tough to let go. "Last summer was the longest summer of my life," she says. Keeping in touch electronically, she adds, "kept my sanity."

Camps say they increasingly have to manage parental fears. At Camp Echo, in Burlingham, N.Y., co-owner Marla Coleman says she spends the bulk of the day corresponding with parents by mail and phone, counseling them on dealing with "their children's mastery of independence and homesickness." And at New York-based National Ramah Commission, which has 11 camps in the U.S., parental calls are up about 20% during the past five years, says international director Rabbi Mitch Cohen. To encourage parents to let their kids be more independent, Rabbi Cohen says the camp now gives parents a "beefed-up



Cheley Colorado Camps, Estes Park, Colo.

information guide" with a section on independence and separation -- "bolded and underlined," he notes.

At Skylake Yosemite Camp in Wishon, Calif., Web photos are updated daily but telephone calls to parents are limited to medical emergencies and birthdays. And the children aren't allowed to have cellphones, says assistant director Jay Levine. Nonetheless, "more kids are showing up with cellphones and parents are encouraging it," Mr. Levine says. One camper's dad called Mr. Levine and said, "I just spoke to my child," and when Mr. Levine asked how, the father said the child "borrowed someone else's cellphone."



Filming the memories: Mom and Dad might as well be at **Banner Day Camp**, Lake Forest, Ill.

Many camps are trying not to overload on high-tech gadgets. Parents should be encouraged to be involved, but "part of the idea of camp is to bond with the group, bond with the outdoors, bond with the counselors," says Gary Forster, national camping consultant for the YMCA. "With the cameras there, a mom can write and say, 'Hey, I saw you in the skit last night and you didn't have your jacket on.' "

No Bunk Fights

Camps say they generally try to record bucolic scenes and noncontroversial activities such as lanyard making. (Skits often don't make the cut, because camps worry parents will complain if their kid isn't the star.) At Camp Vega in Fayette, Maine, the two staff videographers have been given laundry lists of footage to get. But no video of "kids picking on each other," no bunk fights -- and no bad weather, says Linda Courtiss, Camp Vega's co-owner and co-director. "We want to stay away from, 'She doesn't have her raincoat on. I'd better call up.' "

Web sites and photos sometimes tell parents more than they want to know. Denise Wildes, a New York attorney, logged on to the Web site for her daughter's camp in Pennsylvania last summer and saw a photo of her daughter with her arm in a sling. "I'm a laid-back parent," says Ms. Wildes, but she ended up calling the camp at her mother's urging. "I said, 'I don't mean to be neurotic, but I saw the picture. What happened?' " Ms. Wildes, who declines to name the camp, says she was told her daughter injured her arm and camp officials had planned to call her later that day, after her child had seen a doctor. Mom's response: "Nice of you to let me know."

Some camp staffers say when a cameraman arrives at an activity it can lose steam, or kids can act up for the camera. Twelve-year-old Gus Wood of Atlanta concurs: "If you're in canoeing class you'll capsize your canoe to get attention" -- not, he adds, that he's ever done it.

Once parents are hooked on the daily dose of junior, there's no going back. Camp Timberlake in Black Mountain, N.C., has started to post streaming video clips on its Web site. But a recent video of "sock war" malfunctioned, says camp director Clark Mackey, and only one-third of the parents who tried to play the file got through at first. "They called saying, 'Make it work,' " he says. "The parents are addicted to this."