CAMP PONACKA



Parent Handbook 2027

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Ponacka Philosophy

Since its inception in 1947 by Bruno and Gwen Morawetz, Ponacka's philosophy has remained the same.

"There are certain things a boy can learn best at camp: fitting into a group, living away from home, caring for himself and his belongings, depending on himself, developing initiative, making decisions and generally "growing up". For many boys, being at camp is their first time facing the world at large.

At Ponacka, we fully appreciate the significance of the camp experience and so our entire staff is dedicated to meeting each camper's individual needs and ensuring that he has a happy and successful stay.

The camp program is designed so that every boy- whatever his interests and strengths- can become proficient in various activities, thus fostering a sense of accomplishment and building self-confidence. Parents tell us that with the maturity gained at camp, their sons will often embrace new challenges back home they had formerly avoided."

The Ponacka Spirit

The Ponacka experience also involves the "intangibles" that are less easy to describe or prescribe: nurturing a sense of wonder and beauty, a sense of deep gratitude, respect for the natural world, and a spirit of forgiveness and humility. While these values are imparted through inspirational morning talks and non-denominational Sunday chapel services, we aim to ensure that they permeate camp life and are "caught" as well as taught.

The warmth and camaraderie evident whenever former Ponackians get together is clear proof of the impact of the "Ponacka Spirit".

Preparing your son for Camp

Homesickness

Both you and your son should expect some homesickness. It would be unnatural for your son not to miss you, his home, pets, his room…. His initial letters may reflect some unhappiness. Please do not be alarmed since boys generally write only when they are feeling lonely. He may not convey to you the other times when he is busy and happy. Please notify us immediately if you receive a sad letter home. In your letters, please do not mention how much you miss him or how much fun he is missing at home.

The Role of the Directors (Laura, Graham, Anne, and Don)

We may be the only adults your son knows at camp. Encourage him to come and see us anytime if he has worries. We are never too busy for him! Let him know that it is always best to speak up so that we can solve any problems that may arise.

There is no problem too small to "hold inside". We want to know if your son is feeling sad or uncomfortable or worried about something. Please encourage him to find one of us to let us know, so we can help.

Statements to avoid!

"If you don't like camp, we will come and get you". Please never offer to bring your son home early. Some parents will promise that after two weeks of a four week stay, the boy can return home. This kind of promise has a detrimental effect on your son's attitude towards camp. If your son truly does not wish to be at camp, we would like to discuss with you the wisdom of sending him.

"You will probably be homesick". Explain to your son that he can master his feelings and this achievement is one of the reasons for going to camp. We will look after him during any spells of homesickness, (more effectively if he tells someone!)

"We are going to miss you and don't know what we are going to do without you" "You can call us anytime you wish". We do not allow boys to call home. A phone call can elicit feelings of homesickness and does not, in our experience, make a homesick boy feel better.

Daily Routine

7:30 Sports leagues (Basketball or soccer) games

8:00 Wake up / morning dip

8:25 Flag raising

8:30 Breakfast

9:30 Morning talk /sing song

10:00 Cabin clean up

10:15 1st activity period

11:15 2nd activity period

12:15 Free time (free swim, hockey game, play sphairee….)

1:00 Lunch

2:00 Rest hour

3:00 3rd period

4:00 4th period

5:00 5th period

6:00 Free time (same as morning free time)

6:30 Dinner

7:30 Evening program

Activity Sign Up

All campers except for one-week campers sign up for their own activities each day. Sign up is done at breakfast for morning periods and at lunch for afternoon periods. It rotates each day to allow equal opportunity for choosing activities. The open activities for each day are posted on the activity board in the Dining Hall.

One-week campers do a pre-set rotation of activities each day together with their group and one of their counsellors. Towards the end of the week the group may decide to switch to individual activity sign-ups for the last few days, provided the boys are comfortable doing so.

Some activities have age or group-requirements, as follows:

8 and up: Climbing Wall

Hillside and up: Kayaking

12 and up: Mountain Biking, Windsurfing

All ages: Swimming, Canoeing, Sailing, Horseback Riding, Waterskiing, Crafts, Pottery, Woodworking, Lapidary, Archery, Basketball, Bushcraft, Sports (ball hockey, soccer, baseball); Ultimate Frisbee, Bushcraft, Nature, Bouldering

Swimming

Swimming Lessons

Campers enrolled in two- and four-week sessions each do swimming lessons one activity period each day (one hour). We teach all the Lifesaving Society programs, including Swimmer levels 1 through 6 and Bronze Star, Medallion and Cross. For the oldest boys, we offer the Lifesaving Society Swim and

Lifesaving Instructor courses, which certifies them to teach swimming lessons at camp and in the city.

Swimming lessons are not mandatory for one-week campers.

Swim Tests

There are two swim tests every camper must pass once in their Ponacka career. The Boom Test; required before swimming in the deep end and the Raft Test which is required before going in a boat (canoe, sailboat, kayak, waterski boat). Both tests are done in our swimming area and closely supervised by a lifeguard:

1. Boom Test (required to swim in deep end) - swim 40m on your front, 20m on your back and tread water or float for 3 minutes
2. Raft Test (required to boat or waterski) - 100m on your front, 50m on your back and tread water or float for 5 minutes

These are tests of endurance, a boy can use any stroke he prefers (no points for style or technique), and he can take as long as he needs to complete the test. One of our staff will swim along with him the whole way.

It often takes more than one try for a younger boy to complete the test and some of the youngest boys do not pass their raft test in their first summer at camp.

If you are concerned about your son's ability to pass the Boom or Raft tests, we strongly encourage you to enrol him in swimming lessons prior to camp.

Morning Dip

The boys participate in a quick morning dip after the wake-up bell at 8am. They go to different docks with their cabin groups, according to their section.

For swimming safety, campers pair up with a buddy and are supervised by their cabin counsellors. After dip, the boys return to their cabin/tent to get changed for breakfast and flag raising.

One-week campers typically do not participate in morning dip unless they wish to and may take a dip in the shallow end of the swim area.

Lake Swims

Any boy who has earned Swimmer 6 may try a Ponacka Lake Swim, swimming across the lake (a Ponacka Half-Mile Swim) or across and back (a Ponacka Mile Swim), in the company of a staff member and spotter in a boat.

At the end of each month the boys with the fastest Lake Swim times win an award and their name goes on a plaque in the Dining Hall.

Swimming Gear

Many boys enjoy using goggles, a mask, snorkel, or fins during free swims, your son is welcome to bring any equipment he owns (but please label it).

Canoe Trips

Canoe tripping is an important part of the Ponacka experience, and for many boys, the highlight of their summer. Each four-week camper cabin group does an overnight or longer trip led by their experienced counsellors and trip leaders.

Our tripping program begins for our youngest four-week campers with an overnight on the lake, building to a seven-day guided trip in Algonquin Park or Temagami for our fifteen-year-olds.

The trip begins at camp with detailed preparation and planning. All Ponacka campers are taught basic tripping skills before their first canoe trip, including proficient paddling, camping, and portaging skills. They learn the basics of how to steer and land a canoe, how to pick a good site and set up a tent, and how to organize an efficient portage.

Before they depart, the trip leaders help every boy pack what he needs for the trip, and review as a group important things like the route they will take and the daily menu so the boys can start to visualize the adventure.

Bringing a **compact** sleeping bag to camp is essential for trip!

Communication from Camp

For boys in our two- and four-week sessions, approximately one week into camp, parents will receive a handwritten/scanned letter from their son's cabin counsellors letting them know how he is settling into camp life.

We do not provide regular updates by phone, email, or social media to parents. However, we will be in touch with you right away if your son becomes ill or anything else significantly impacts his wellbeing.

Mail/Letters Home

While your son is at Camp, write postcards or short letters. It is more important to “get mail” than to receive lengthy letters. We would recommend 3 pieces of mail per week maximum! If you are traveling and unable to write letters, please let us know and then an email message to your son would be appropriate. Please write nothing unsettling in your letter. Your son can do nothing but worry. If there is an illness or death, including pets, please call us.

It will be close to a week before you receive your first letter. Please assume that no news is good news! Otherwise, we would contact you immediately. The counsellors encourage the boys to write home once a week, but if you have received no letter, please call/email us. If there is something unsettling in your son’s letter, we would like to know as soon as possible. Your son’s counsellor will write a letter to you within the first week of camp, giving you a report on his progress.

When you read your son’s letter, please allow for the temporary nature of his complaints. Rather than worry, give us a call so that we can address any concerns. Please provide your son with a few self-addressed envelopes to you and the other family members you would like him to write to.

We ask that you not send e-mails to your son unless you live too far away to access Canada Post delivery service.

Parcels/Care Packages

Food/candy are not to be sent or brought to camp. Please advise your relatives not to send food. We confiscate candy and other food items which is upsetting for the boys. Racoons and chipmunks make unwelcome nocturnal visits to tents and cabins with food!

We are inundated with parcels resulting in more delivery trucks on our road and greater expectations on the part of the boys that they “need” packages from home. If your son needs an item of clothing or equipment, we are happy to expedite your package to him. Otherwise, we discourage sending parcels on a regular basis. A letter from home/extended family is a real treat in itself!

Camp Clothing /Equipment

There is a detailed packing list for each session length available on our website, please consult it when packing your son for camp. Expensive, brand name clothing is best left at home!

Labelling Belongings

Many articles of value are left at camp –most unlabelled! Labelled items are returned; however, we are still left with piles of unlabelled clothes, shoes, pillows, towels. Chances of items going missing are greatly reduced if well labelled. Please label shoes, paddles and lifejackets.

Many of our camp families order labels from Mabel's Labels.

Please mail to us anything that erroneously goes home in the wrong luggage, and we will forward the item.

Boys coming to camp from far away will be provided with a paddle, lifejacket, sleeping bag, pillow and single fitted sheet. Anything else he needs can be provided as well!

Footwear

Due to the high incidence of stubbed toes, rolled ankles and heel blisters caused by open toed "slides", we are asking that you send your son with closed toed footwear like" Keen" sandals or running shoes. The combination of rugged terrain and the proclivity of boys to run everywhere makes appropriate footwear important to prevent injuries. Crocs are fine for trips to the waterfront, but stable, comfortable shoes should be worn the rest of the day.

Equipment

- Rain gear and sleeping bag are essential!
- Aqua socks are excellent for water-based activities.
- Helmets are provided to boys who mountain bike, climb and ride horses
- Ponacka baseball caps may be purchased at the tuck shop.

What not to pack

Please do not bring any of the below items to camp.

Please also note that any electronics brought to camp will be confiscated and not returned. The only exception is for campers who are traveling to camp via air, in which case any electronics, passports, and valuables will be collected, stored by the camp and returned to the camper on departure day.

Do not pack:

- Electronics of any kind, including digital watches
- Lighters, matches, or any form of fire starter

- Aerosol cans (e.g., bug spray, sunscreen, etc.)
- Food or snacks
- Money

Ordering Camp Clothing

You are welcome to order Ponacka branded clothing for your son via our online site here. Ponacka clothing is entirely optional, but many parents choose to order items for their son. The most popular are t-shirts and hooded sweatshirts.

You may order clothing to be shipped directly to camp – the deadline to do so is June 1st.

Bus Transportation from/to Toronto

We provide a bus from Toronto on arrival days, June 30th and Aug 1st and on departure days July 27th and August 28th. Boys attending shorter sessions will have at least one car trip to or from camp.

On arrival days the bus leaves Toronto at 1:30 pm sharp from Leaside Memorial Arena, 1073 Millwood Rd. On departure days, the bus leaves Ponacka at 10am and arrives back at Leaside Memorial Arena between 1:15-1:30 pm.

Travel by Car

Families who bring their son to camp should plan to arrive between 3 - 4:30pm. We appreciate your adherence to these times. If you require a different arrival time, please reach out to us and let us know.

Bunk Lottery

Upon arrival at camp, all boys in tents will draw their top or bottom bunk from our “bunk lottery” to make it fair, regardless of how and when a boy arrives at camp.

Food at Camp

Our camp kitchen makes meals that are delicious, nutritious and appealing to our boys and staff. There is plenty of food at each meal and lots of choice.

The menu changes daily with a few weekly regulars… pizza, Caesar salad, chocolate milk and ice cream cones on Friday evening. At an outdoor BBQ in the picnic area, we enjoy a variety of hot dogs, hamburgers, sausages, chicken burgers, fresh vegetables, chips, popsicles on Saturday evening. Sunday mornings, we awake to the smell of freshly baked cinnamon buns.

Breakfast starts with juice, water, fruit and an assortment of cold cereal on each table, as well as hot chocolate. The boys may take their cereal bowl into the servery if they wish hot oatmeal porridge, home-made granola and yogurt. A hot "second course" follows, which may be BLTs, pancakes and sausages, French toast, scrambled eggs, egg McMuffins, hardboiled eggs, or muffins, among other options.

Lunch is a hearty meal, with plenty of variety: pulled pork, make your own subs, grilled cheese and tomato soup, sloppy joes, tacos, fish and chips. There is a vegetarian option at both lunch and dinner and always fresh cut vegetables or salad.

Dinner is also substantial and varied with meals such as roast beef or pork, chicken souvlaki, chili, spaghetti, lasagna.

Dessert at lunch and supper consists of fresh fruit and a cookie, square, or occasionally mud pie! On the visitors' weekend, a long-standing tradition is to serve make your own sundaes with homemade chocolate and butterscotch sauce!

Throughout the day, a fruit bowl in the servery is available to anyone who needs a snack between meals.

Allergies/Dietary Restrictions

Our kitchen can handle a range of dietary restrictions including vegetarian, gluten-free, celiac, and lactose-free. However, we ask parents to assist the kitchen by providing some food alternatives for boys who are gluten free/celiac and vegan. Our kitchen has protocols in place to manage food allergies.

Please note we do **not** have a nut-free kitchen or camp. We do allow peanut butter although the kitchen does not cook with peanut products.

Picky Eaters

We have lots of experience dealing with picky eaters. We encourage boys to explore new food at camp but have alternatives available. Please talk to us ahead of time if your son requires special consideration at mealtimes.

Often in a group setting, boys are willing to try new foods. Camp can be a great place for boys to expand their culinary horizons!

Tuck Shop

We run a small shop in the office where the boys can select a piece of candy or bag of chips three times per week, according to a posted schedule. Various items that a boy may need at camp are available for purchase (toothpaste, toothbrushes, sunscreen, bug repellent, batteries, soap (rarely asked for!), postage stamps, lip balm etc. Camp Ponacka hats and Camp Ponacka songbooks are also available for purchase. Our intent is not to make a profit but provide the boys with items they need.

Tech-Free Policy

Camp is a social place to enjoy the sounds of the natural world and create music with guitars, piano and instruments that staff and campers bring. Connecting with others is what camp is all about.

No cell phones, digital watches, iPods, computers, laser pointers, or e-readers are allowed at camp. No technology with access to the internet is permitted.

If found after the first day of camp, these items will be confiscated and not returned to the camper or parent. **There are no exceptions.** Please understand that this severe consequence is the only way to keep phones belonging to campers out of camp. Please share this policy with your son if you think it necessary!

Family Visiting Weekend

Visiting weekends are July 17 or 18 and August 14 or 15. Families are welcome to visit on either day (not both). Some families are content with having their boys enjoy a four week stay without a mid-camp visit. We plan a special party for boys who have no parental visits during their stay.

We do not have visits for boys staying one or two weeks.

Plan to arrive at noon for your visit (total visit should be no longer than 3 hours). We have Breakfast 8:30 -9:30am, Lunch 1-2 pm and Supper 6:30 - 7:30pm. We hope that you will meet your son's counsellors and cabin mates.

Most parents bring a picnic lunch to enjoy with their son at one of our picnic tables around camp. Others take their son into Bancroft for lunch. We encourage you to bring bathing suits and enjoy a swim at our beach. During such a swim, your family's safety is your responsibility.

For Sunday visits, plan to arrive by 10:30 am and join us for chapel. We encourage all boys to join in the Sunday afternoon program at 3 pm. Dogs on leashes are welcome!

As you depart, please leave your son at an activity, at his cabin (if during rest period), or with his counsellor. Do not leave him in the parking lot, alone. Try to speak with Laura, Don, Anne or Graham during your visit - if you have any concerns, let them know. We strongly request that you leave NO food or drink behind.

Spending Money

Pocket money needed for a trip away from camp is given to the camper from his tuck account. We ask boys not to bring money to camp. It is easily lost, upsetting for everyone, and creates an unfair situation for boys who did not bring money.

Health and Medical Information

Our camp physicians/NP/RN are in residence full time. They review the health information you have provided to us. The more information you give us, the better we can manage any health concerns. We will notify you in the case of illness and take all necessary steps to engage proper medical care. If your son has an illness or accident prior to his arrival, please contact us. **A health screening will be completed on arrival day.**

Medication brought in a labelled pill dispenser box makes administration easier for our health care staff (label with name of boy and name/details of medication)

Allergies

Our kitchen staff will receive a list of boys with food allergies or sensitivities. If your son requires a special diet, we will reach out to you for further information

to best support him during his stay. Boys who require an EpiPen for either food or environmental allergies will be expected to provide them.

Sun Safety

Your son should come to camp with an adequate supply of sunscreen for his stay, but please do not send aerosol bottles. The younger boys apply sunscreen with the assistance of their counsellors before they head out for their morning and afternoon activities. Sunscreen is kept at the waterfront activity areas for further application as needed. Boys out on the water (sailing, canoeing, windsurfing, kayaking) are asked to wear hats and shirts to avoid sunburns.

Mosquitos/Ticks

If your boy is sensitive to mosquito bites, a tube of Benadryl cream will come in handy, along with liquid bug repellent. We prefer to avoid aerosol spray bottles! Mosquitoes are prevalent mostly in July. We ask the boys to wear long pants for evening activities and if playing in long grass out at Storey's field, we apply bug spray to prevent both mosquito and tick bites. The boys and counsellors are reminded to check during morning and evening dip for ticks or any sores, rashes or skin abrasions that may require medical attention.

Head Lice

Occasionally, a boy will come to camp after a recent exposure to head lice. Please notify us ahead of time and treat your son prior to his arrival. We will continue to check during his stay and notify you if his head lice has not resolved. We suggest a short hair cut to prevent recurrence and allow ease of checking!

Bathroom Facilities and Showers

At Ponacka, we use outhouses (kybos). This system does not require gallons of water nor the clearing of acres of forest for a larger septic system. The outhouses are cleaned daily, yet an odour is almost unavoidable. We think your son will understand if you discuss this with him. We compost and recycle and encourage the boys to use our blue boxes to reduce the amount of waste that goes to the local dump.

There is a shower house in both the Junior and Senior section. The boys may have a shower at any time except before breakfast, when they go for a morning dip. The counsellors of the youngest boys set up a shower schedule.

Philanthropy at Ponacka

Since Ponacka's inception, campers and staff have been asked if they wish to donate a small amount from their tuck account for charity.

Over the years, we have supported the Bancroft Hospital, Pueblo, Kinark Kids in Camp, Friends of Honduran Children, and Ponacka Ghana, Our Children Africa. You may notice a charge on your son's tuck account if he would like to donate. If you have any questions, please let us know.

Ponacka Campership Fund

Increasingly in today's environment, families whose boys attend Ponacka find themselves struggling to afford the camp fees. We have many generous alumni who donate every year to provide bursaries to those families.

If you wish to donate, please send an e-transfer to *info@ponacka.com* and mention that it is a donation to the Campership Fund. One of the boys who receives your support will send you a thank you note! And we will too, with great appreciation.

If you are a family in need of some financial support, please reach out to us.