



## **Can my camper attend with three friends (a group of four)?**

An important factor in the significance of a camp experience for children is found in the relationships they encounter during the week – two relationships in particular: their sense of connection with their counselor, and their sense of acceptance and belonging in the community that forms in the cabin. As we consider the community of the cabin, we have consistently found the experience is optimized when children only know one or two others in their cabin group.

- **It levels the field.** In the context of eight or ten in a cabin, if four already know one another, they become a dominant subgroup in the cabin (even though they are not a majority, their numbers overwhelm the other pairs). The small group influences activity choices and behavior patterns. It may be a very positive group of children, but even while unintentional, it removes the opportunity for the developing community as a whole to shape its identity with influence from all.
- **It encourages relationship building.** Children coming alone or with only one friend are much more likely to engage in making new friends – an important skill we promote at camp, and a significant component in developing that cabin community that we desire them to experience. When children come knowing several others, they withdraw into that small group as a security measure, which ultimately detracts from their experience and the community's development. Part of the success of camp is pressing our comfort zone in this safe environment.

- **It frees the child.** Social pressures are ever present, but camp can be an escape from this. We all tend to live into certain expectations depending upon the group we are with. The prior relationships that are carried into camp tend to restrict children from pressing their comfort zones and trying new things. Rather, they continue in the expected attitudes and behaviors placed upon them by the network they've brought with them from home. Again, these may be positive relationships, but they are still inhibiting and make the camp week less than it could be.