



Hello Parents!

You may or may not know who I am, so let me introduce myself. My name is Kate Gross, and I've been serving in AWANA for 19 years (2013). All four of my kids have attended Inland Northwest Camp (INWC) multiple years. (If you want to ask THEM questions, they would LOVE to answer!) But more importantly, I've been on staff at Inland Northwest Camp for six years. Let me walk you through what your Camper will experience their first year at camp.

First of all, congratulations on earning the privilege to attend Camp! Every single person attending (Campers, Counselors, and support staff) have earned the privilege to attend. Campers have completed a book, and sent in an application. Counselors and support staff have also sent in an extensive application, as well as having a thorough background check, two referrals, and a full day of training. This process for counselors and support staff happens EVERY YEAR, even if that person has attended Camp for 20 years.

Jim & Bev Van Mersbergen (our AWANA missionaries) and their Ministry Team work tirelessly for months leading up to camp, praying over campers and counselors, putting together the right mix of Campers and Counselors, ordering food for 400 people for 8 days, preparing age appropriate Bible Study material for Bible Study leaders for those 8 days, and a million more details, many having to do with the safety of your kiddos. When your child arrives at Camp, each one has been prayed over by multiple people. Each counselor enthusiastically engages with the clubbers in their cabin, and has been trained and informed of any special needs or concerns.

As a first time parent, I'm sure you have concerns and questions. So did I, and was able to watch, first-hand how my kids handled this new, exciting experience.

**#1 – Eight days is a long time.** Won't my kids be lonely? Can I call them? Can they call me? Do they have to attend the whole camp, or can I decide for them to attend only part?

A – Eight days is much longer to the parent than to the camper. By day #3, your camper will have settled into their fabulous routine with new friends that all think Awana is the best thing since sliced bread. Each cabin is made up of one grade. Depending on how many campers attend, two grades may be combined. Will your child be lonely? For the first day or two, but not past that. My first child was "friendless" for a day and a half, and that was heartbreaking to watch. By that night, she found several friends, with whom she is still keeps in contact, seven years later! Can you call them – no. Can they call you – no. You will receive an emergency ONLY number. Your child's counselor has been trained in dealing with homesickness. And kitchen staff prays daily for any reports of homesick kids. (Counselors have two required daily meetings – one at 6 am and one at 4 pm. Kitchen meets for Devotions at 9:30, as well as praying). Do they have to attend the whole camp – yes. Only under extreme circumstances, prearranged with Jim & Bev, will exceptions be made. Really, believe me... harder on you than on your kids. However, you can WRITE your child, and send packages!!! Please DO!!! We have mail call every day, and receiving your own letter is a highlight!

## **#2 – How safe will my child be?**

Your child will never be safer than when they are at INWC. Each person...every person...is REQUIRED to wear a button ALL DAY LONG that shows their name, what color they are on, and their position. I forgot mine on my apron once, and went to devotions (not coming into contact with any camper along the way) and was reprimanded for not having it on. If someone is on camp grounds without a button, you know that person is NOT with our camp and all staff have a protocol on what to do...contact the nurse with a radio, they radio Jim, and Jim takes care of it. Visiting unannounced isn't allowed. Waterfront activities are strictly monitored, camp boundaries are clearly marked and reviewed with kids. Girls aren't allowed near boys cabins and vice versa. Kids have to hang out in groups of five or more when mixed gender...absolutely no pairing off...ever. If your child has to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, they MUST wake their counselor who walks them to the bathroom, waits, and returns with them. (More on safety – no counselor is allowed to contact your child with anything other than a postcard. No cards, they can't give their address to kids, can't be Facebook friends – all to protect both kids and adults.)

## **#3 – What do they do all day?**

LOTS! Every minute of every day is carefully planned and scheduled. By day #8, your kid will be trained to get up at Reville, crawl in bed at taps, stand quietly by the meal table twice a day, and line up by height order without thinking ☺ The day starts with trumpet call at 7:30, when kids get up, get dressed, and get to the flag pole. Breakfast happens at 8. Then morning clean up and personal Bible time. Bible Study groups are next, followed by morning activity. Then flag pole again, and lunch. Then mail call and rest time. Free time 1-4. Flag pole again, and Dinner at 5:30. Chapel for middle school/activity for high school. Then swap. Taps is 10:00. At lights out, no one talks till the next morning. Sounds unbelievable, but it works.

## **#4 - My child has xyz special need.**

Special food needs – contact Bev. The kitchen works hard to provide healthy meals. Bev can send you the meals for the week, and you can work with her on any dietary needs. Medical needs – we have two trained nurses at the camp all week. Nurses cabin is the most centrally located building on the campground (with an awesome deck!) They administer daily meds as necessary. We've had broken bones, and even a stroke – all of which they have dealt with professionally and discreetly. When you fill out your application, they have included space for special concerns. Those are also dealt with discreetly, and only the people who must know, do know.

You will return, eight days later, to retrieve a stinky, happy kid with 27 new friends, who are all stoked to return the next year! For the next week, you will hear stories and antics, and from then on, all younger siblings will dream of the day THEY get to go to camp too. Finishing next year's Awana book just got easier, too...just mention "camp" ☺

Because Kids Matter to Christ,

~ Kate Gross