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What's Needed to Prepare Your Child for the Future? The Answer May Surprise You...

Posted: 08/20/2013 Huffington post

Since Junior's birth, you've been socking away savings from every paycheck to ensure he has money for college. After all, that's what responsible parents do, right? Making sure he has the education to prepare him for the workforce, to care for himself and his family...?

When he leaves for college, your heart swells with pride, hope... and a little trepidation. Will he do well? Is he ready for all that freedom? Will he make the most of your investment?

Two semesters later, he comes home whipped, defeated, demoralized. While he had the grades to get into that Ivy League college, he didn't have the life skills to succeed.

There's more to preparing for adulthood than academic education. I believe if kids spent their summers in camp, they'd be better prepared for later decisions like whether to go to college, and how to make the best life for who they are.

Kids, especially teens, need mentors they trust, separate from their parents. These role models provide guidance and help them prepare for their adult lives by helping them lay the foundation now.

I started camp as a 10-year-old, and didn't stop till I was in my 20s. Though many may view this as parents getting rid of kids for the summer, my parents told me it was an investment to set me up to be a more independent, confident person. They were so right.

Camp taught me how to grow up. It taught me to take responsibility, and the importance of meaningful relationships in life. Before I started attending camp I had friends, but no significant relationships that I

viewed as important. In fact, I had no idea what that even meant.

I didn't need to be "cool" at camp. It was the first place I could truly be myself, and was accepted for who I was. In fact, I felt pretty damn cool for the first time. My self-esteem was boosted, my confidence increased, and I learned about investing myself in things that matter.

An interesting thing happens at camp when kids are taken out of their usual environment. The rules change. Everything changes. Authenticity is rewarded. Responsibility is cool. Maturity adds clout. If it weren't for camp, I would never have been ready for college, which led to graduate school, and the mentoring career I enjoy now. It was a natural progression that began in camp.

As a camp counselor, I learned the importance of putting attention on others. The older I grew, the more I learned to be at camp for the campers, rather than for myself. As I grew as a camp counselor and worked with the kids, my personal development transformed as I spent time with them to give them a meaningful, significant experience that wouldn't go away. It changed me... and it changed them. As my focus turned away from myself and I became focused on others, well, that was a huge piece of the growing up process.

Without this type of experience, kids often flounder through their teens and early twenties, unsure how to:

- Choose valuable friends
- Make decisions for their lives and
- Have the confidence to pursue their dreams.

For me, camp was a big group of mentors I looked up to, who gave me amazing advice, guided me on my journey, taught me lessons about growing up, showed me the importance of meaningful relationships, and, most important, how to find them.

Through my development in the camp experience, I learned how to leave camp and go back to school and find valuable friends. By the

time I was in high school I had learned how to surround myself with people who would bring the most value to my life. I wasn't born with this important skill.. .I learned it at camp.

Kids need to learn how to develop this skill at a young age. To choose the people they put around them who will help them in their own development, push them to be successful, take chances, and show them how to be a good friend.

A moment stands out most in my memory as to the impact it had on my life. In fact, it plays a big part in how I work with teens in my practice today.

I was 16 and learning to be a camp counselor. This meant I needed to grow up and take responsibility, but I didn't know how. At one point, the assistant director sat with me and asked me how my summer was going. I told him I was having a great time. He then proceeded to ask me several questions that would change the course of my life.

"How is the summer for your campers?" he asked. "Who's struggling? Are you able to pay enough attention to notice where you need to focus? Why do you think you continue coming to camp?"

Then the last question, which changed me forever:

"What is it you want your campers to have at the end of the summer that they don't have now?"

I'd never thought this way before. From that moment, I set out to work with campers in a completely different way. I was determined to help them have the experience they were looking for. I would ask them all, "What is it you want to have at the end of the summer?"

One kid told me he always wanted to make it to the top of the climbing wall. So, we worked on it little by little, inch by inch, and the last day of camp he made it and was on top of the world. I have no doubt to this day, when he struggles with something difficult, he looks back on that summer, the work he invested, his determination... and his success.

Whether your child has the funds to go to college or not, his future growth and management of life depend on how he's living today. Sometimes I think we as parents forget what's important now. We're so focused on what is necessary later, we don't realize we need to set our kids up now to have the skills to live later.

So, saving funds for college is important, but saving for camp each year can really change a life. Let's let our kids decide if college is important to them when the time comes. Let's give them the tools necessary for them to make the decisions that will catapult them forward.

Give them the gift of camp.

If you wonder why I'm posting this at the end of summer rather than the beginning, here's why:

The new school year is beginning. You have nine months to save for next year's camp. Make it happen for your child's future success.