Is Camp Cooinda the right camp for you?

A guide for families, guardians, youth workers and social workers

Young people and camps differ greatly. Getting the right match is sometimes difficult. We hope these notes will help you make the best choice for the young people in your care.

Camp Cooinda Inc. is an independent non-profit organisation. It has been operating camps on the Gippsland Lakes since 1960. Our camps are for 12 to 18-year-olds and emphasise boating, outdoor activities and personal development in small groups.

The aims for the young people who participate in our programs are:

- enjoyment of outdoor activities
- learning how to canoe, kayak and sail
- making friends
- building self-esteem.

Groups

Young people are allocated to small groups called patrols and all activities are done with these groups. On the mainsite campers sleep in tent groups with 3 to 5 young people; a group leader sleeps in a single tent directly alongside the camper tent. When patrols leave the mainsite, the group including leaders and campers sleep together in large tents or other shelters. Activity groups usually combine a girls tent group with a boys tent group to make an activity group of 8 - 10 campers and two adult leaders. Gender-diverse young people are encouraged to choose the tent on mainsite which they are most comfortable to sleep in.

The groups are decided in the days before young people arrive at camp, using the information provided on the camper application form. We aim to put campers of approximately the same age together, so that older groups aged 16-18 years can tackle more challenging canoe expeditions than younger campers aged 12 – 14 years. If a camper comes with a friend of similar age, we put them in the same group.

Each patrol has a large say in planning their program and we encourage campers to work together to create options. It is a group process. There is no individual choice of program, so how young people function in groups can affect how they feel about the program.

Program Activities

The main activities are canoeing, kayaking, and sailing. Other activities include archery, fishing, initiative games, group games, hiking, outdoor cooking, and camping out overnight. The program does not include high ropes, surfing or water skiing.

Most groups do 2 overnight expeditions of 1 to 2 nights in canoes or kayaks away from the mainsite. The weather (particularly the wind strength) greatly influences where and how far they can go. Short canoe expeditions are 6 - 8 km each way. Long canoe or kayak expeditions for 16 to 18-year-olds can be 20 or more km each way. Even short expeditions involve a lot of effort and energy! So how young people feel about energetic activity can affect how they feel about the program.

Safety Requirements

This sort of camping involves risks that can be managed only by thorough safety planning. Over the years Camp Cooinda Inc. has developed procedures which we consider are essential for safety. The main requirements that might affect your decision about whether this is the right camp for one of your young people are:

- A parent or guardian of every camper must make a declaration that the camper can swim at least 100 metres. The safety of other people and the camper's safety are affected by this. There are also implications for the level of responsibility carried by volunteer leaders. There will be no exceptions.
- A camper must be willing to observe safety requirements such as always wearing a life-jacket in a boat and staying close to other members of the group on the water.
- We don't swim on the ocean beach where there are no lifeguards. For some young people resentful of authority, these could be felt to be too restrictive. For safety in our program they are essential. There are no exemptions from safety requirements.
- Our campsite is smoke/vape free and smoking/vaping is banned for all campers. Smoking/vaping paraphernalia will be confiscated and only returned to parents/guardians on request.
- Campers must not consume alcohol or any illegal drugs during the camp. Any substance which distorts awareness and reduces physical co-ordination and control, and therefore increases safety problems in a boating program, may not be taken to camp.
- Most campers do come to camp with a mobile phone. Campers are asked to sign their phone into the Camp Office on their first afternoon. They can access the phone and check messages at times during the camp, but the phone cannot be taken out into the camp or indeed on any expeditions.

Deciding if Camp Cooinda will be appropriate for a young person

As detailed above, campers must be able to participate in an energetic outdoor program, work constructively in small groups and follow the directions of leaders on safety issues. There is one volunteer leader for each group of 4-5 campers.

For most of the young people who come to the camp it is a great time for making friends, being part of a group, and enjoying energetic outdoor activities. The chance to be outdoors, under the stars, and cooking over a campfire is something they look forward to. Many come back for 3 to 5 years. Some become leaders in the program.

For some young people the Camp Cooinda program will not be attractive or appropriate. Health issues that limit physical activity, interfere with effective group participation or require increased leader supervision may mean that Cooinda is not the right camp program. If your young person has never stayed away from home for several nights and/or is in grade 6 at the time of applying, we strongly suggest you speak with our Camper Applications Coordinator prior to completing an application to discuss if this is the right time for Cooinda. In some circumstances, Camp Cooinda may need to contact the young person’s school to help with this decision.

Find out more

If you need further assistance considering whether Cooinda is appropriate, please contact our Camper Applications Coordinator

Explore campcooinda.au for more information about Camp Cooinda activities, dates and costs of camps, our location in Gippsland, and photos from our camps.

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