



# BACKYARD KIDS CAMP GUIDE

*the* Church

Bring on the giggles and wiggles! This guide gives you a jump-start on planning an engaging Backyard Kids Camp for neighborhood children.

A Backyard Kids Camp is more than just an opportunity to give kids something constructive to do for a few hours. It also can help fill in some necessary gaps for parents in your neighborhood. It gives parents a chance to meet and develop friendships, or just to talk to another adult for a while. It can also be a much-needed respite for tired parents while you entertain their kids for a bit.

Grab that notebook and get your Pinterest app ready. We have all the steps and ideas needed to make your Backyard Kids Camp a success!

What you will find in this guide:

- Tips and tricks that will help your event be smooth and successful.

- A step-by-step list for planning your Backyard Kids Camp.

- Sample schedules.

- Sample themes with activity suggestions.

We would love to know how your event goes, as well as all of the creative ideas you come up with! Share your stories and photos with us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) or email us at [info@livelifetogether.com](mailto:info@livelifetogether.com). Find out more about *the Church*, as well as other ways you can make an impact in your community, at [www.livelifetogether.com](http://www.livelifetogether.com).



## Top 10 Tips and Tricks:

- **Simple is better!** Kids don't have huge expectations. They just want to play and have fun. If decorating your yard and finding Pinterest-worthy snacks is fun for you, go for it! If not, don't add more to your plate than you want to. Raisins and goldfish are just as good as rainbow jello and themed cookies.
- **Less is more.** Activities take a lot longer when done in a group of children than with just 1 or 2. Depending on the length of your camp, pick just 2 or 3 main activities, games or crafts.
- **Have a loosely held schedule.** It's helpful to have a general idea on what you will do with the children and when. Be ready to adapt that schedule as needed.
- **Have a bucket of "filler" activities.** This is to pull out if an activity runs short, someone finishes early, or everyone starts fighting over the swingset. Items you may want to include: Sidewalk chalk, coloring books and crayons, nail polish, temporary tattoos, card games, bubbles, some printed scavenger hunts and a timer for impromptu obstacle courses.
- **Rally the troops!** Ask friends and neighbors to lend a hand. They will appreciate being asked, and you won't have to do it alone.
- **Begin with expectations and end with appreciations.** Before starting the fun, make sure everyone knows your clear, simple expectations. Before you send the children home, build them up with some specific appreciations and let them know how much you enjoyed having them over.
- **Enjoy it!** If sports aren't your thing, don't plan them into the day. If you don't love the idea of paint and glue in your backyard, just plan crafts that use markers. Plan only the activities that you can enjoy alongside the children.
- **Snacks are key.** Planning a snack time can give everyone a chance to rest and recover. It can allow you a few minutes to transition, and it will distract anyone who is having a hard time. It doesn't have to be huge (or even healthy). Toss everyone a popsicle or a bag of crackers and take a minute to breathe.
- **Be prepared.** Have materials close at hand and pre-sorted. Serve individually packaged snacks. The more organized you are, the more you will be able to be fully present during the experience.
- **Laugh.** Not everything will work out as planned. There will be kids who fight or not like the activities. When all else fails, find a way to laugh. Throw out the planned activity and play a game of charades. Have a joke-telling contest or play some Freeze-tag. In the end, the kids won't remember the crafts or themed games. They will remember that you care.



## The Planning Checklist:

- ◇ **Decide on the time, date and frequency of your camp.** Will it be a one-time event for three hours? A couple mornings over the course of a week? Two hours every Monday night for a month? What dates? What time frame works best for your family?
- ◇ **Decide on a theme** (if you want to have a theme). See the end of this guide for ideas.
- ◇ **Round up help.** Ask some neighbors or friends to assist with planning, chaperoning, prep work, etc.
- ◇ **Determine whether or not you would like RSVP's.** If so, Google Forms has free and simple forms that you can use to create a sign-up. If you know your neighborhood well, this may not be necessary. If you are still getting to know people and want to know about ages, allergies, etc, then a sign-up may be useful. If you do use a sign-up, you may be able to plan a bit more material heavy projects, as you will be able to gather exactly what is needed. If you would rather not do a sign-up, keep that in mind when planning activities. You will want to plan activities where materials can be more easily shared or that require fewer materials.
- ◇ **Spread the word.** Use whatever method works best for you and your community to spread the word. Pass out fliers, put up a sign, use social media or a neighborhood website. You certainly can do this a few weeks in advance. However, it will be just as effective a few days or a week ahead of time.
- ◇ **Lay out a general schedule.** Will you have crafts? Games? Mostly playtime? A storytime? Snacktime? Decide which activities you will offer and then choose a schedule that works for you. Suggestions can be found in this guide.
- ◇ **Plan the activities.** This is where you can go crazy with your Pinterest app! Keep in mind the general age of kids that you are anticipating will come. Pick simple-yet-engaging activities that can be done with a variety of ages. A mix of both calm activities (crafts and stories) as well as movement activities (games, challenges, playtime) will keep the kids from getting bored.
- ◇ **Gather your supplies.** This is a great time to enlist your team of helpers.
- ◇ The day before/day of: **Prepare the environment.** This could be as simple as picking up scattered toys or mowing the lawn. Plan a little extra time if you are decorating or setting up tables. Create "spaces" for the camp. Lay down blankets where you will have stories and crafts. Ideally, place items for play and other toys on the opposite side of the yard.
- ◇ The day before/day of: **Prepare the snack** and put materials in an easy-to-retrieve location.
- ◇ After the event: **Follow-up.** Send an email thanking those who came and helped. If you took pictures, pass them out to the kids who came.
- ◇ After the event: **Spend time reflecting** on how the experience went and the impact you were able to make in your neighborhood. Make a list of everything to celebrate - even the things that seem small.

## Sample Schedules:

These schedules are written for a group of about 10 children. If you have more children than that, divide them into groups. They can take turns rotating in the stations that are marked with an asterisk "\*".

### 2-hour event:

10 minutes: Welcome kids, hand out nametags, free play

15 minutes: Expectations and story time

20 minutes: Craft/Experiment/Game\*

20 minutes: Craft/Experiment/Game\*

15 minutes: Snack time

30 minutes: Free play (or additional group activity)

10 minutes: Wrap up and project collection

### 3-hour event:

10 minutes: Welcome kids, hand out nametags, free play

15 minutes: Expectations and story time

30 minutes: Craft/Experiment/Game\*

30 minutes: Craft/Experiment/Game\*

15 minutes: Snack time

30 minutes: Craft/Experiment/Game\*

20 minutes: Movement Activity (tag, obstacle course, Simon Says, etc.)

20 minutes: Free play

10 minutes: Wrap up and project collection

### Drop-In Event:

For this type of event, have a variety of stations located around your yard. During this "Open-House" style of event, you will need a few extra hands to help explain directions at different stations and to help keep track of kids who are coming/going. This type of event lends itself well to activities that are more open ended in nature. For example: a building station, a water play station, simple art projects at a station, etc.



## Themes and Activities:

### Let's go camping!

In this camp, you can help children explore the wonders of nature. Set up a tent to use for storytime and use the natural materials in your neighborhood for art projects. This theme is perfect for nature scavenger hunts and fort building.

- Crafts: Leaf rubbings, rock painting, make a camping scene using model magic
- Craft: Lanterns. *Cut out a construction paper lantern. Cut out the area that would be the glass or lighted area of the lantern. Lay the lantern on the contact paper. Press yellow/orange/red tissue paper into the cut out area. Cover the top with contact paper and cut off the excess.*
- Games: Marshmallow toss, scavenger hunt
- Activity: Build a tent with toothpicks, marshmallows and small scraps of fabric. If you live in a wooded area, use sticks and natural materials to build an animal shelter or fort.
- Activity: Pinecone Bird Feeders. *Gather up a bunch of pinecones (all sizes are ok). Tie a string into a loop at the top of the pinecone (to give you a way to hang it on a tree). Use spoons to cover the pinecone in peanut butter. Sprinkle birdseed over the pinecone.*
- Snacks: S'mores mix (Golden Grahams, chocolate chips, mini marshmallows), Firepit (pretzels for wood, grapes for rocks around the firepit, red licorice or cheese cut in pieces for the fire), Tent (Put three graham crackers together in a tent shape, using frosting to hold the edges together. Set the tent on a bed of shredded coconut dyed green, Use fruit by the foot for sleeping bags and marshmallows for pillows.)

### Hunts and Mazes

In this camp you will engage the creativity and engineering side of the little thinkers who come to your event.

- Hunts: How many scavenger hunts can you come up with? Nature scavenger hunt, rainbow colors hunt, shapes hunt, photo scavenger hunt.....
- Games: Obstacle courses, Treasure hunt *(Draw a map of your backyard with a variety of "stops" the children must make. At each stop they complete a little activity in exchange for a piece of a final puzzle they must solve. At the end they put together the puzzle pieces to find out the prize.)*
- Activities: Design a maze using Dominos or Legos.
- Crafts: Use toilet paper tubes to make cardboard binoculars, Draw a map of your backyard.



## Tinker Time

This camp is all about creativity and creating! Turn the contents of your recycling bin into kid-created treasures.

- Crafts: Make a robot! *Set out an assortment of cardboard, plastic, craft supplies, tape and glue and see what your little guests can create!*
- Activity: Egg Drop Challenge. *Let your guests choose from a variety of materials to design a way to drop an egg from a ladder without it breaking.*
- Activity: Slingshot Cars. *Provide a few materials, such as popsicle sticks, toothpicks rubber bands and buttons and see who can build the car that goes the farthest.*
- Games: Minute to Win It. *Do a quick Google search and you'll have loads of great game ideas.*

## Mythical Wonderland

Let the imagination run wild as you create your own magical wonderland full of unicorns, fairies and dragons in your backyard.

- Craft: Wands *Have everyone go on a hunt for their own personal magic wands ... sticks in your backyard. Provide ribbon, string, feathers, paper, glue and scissors, and let them design their own special wand.*
- Craft: Mythical Snow Globes. *Grab a bunch of plastic unicorns, dragons, fairies and little trees at a dollar store or online. You also will need glass jars (like Mason jars or pickle jars). Help children hot glue their mythical creatures of choice to the inside of the lid of their jar. Fill the jar (not completely full) with water and a few drops of glycerin. Add glitter. Screw the top on the jar. A line of hot glue around the lid will help seal the jar to the lid.*
- Game: Capture the Flag, Dragons vs. Unicorns *(Each team has a royal flag they must defend.)*
- Game: Dragons vs. Unicorns *(This is tag with a fun name.) The Dragon(s) tries to capture the Unicorns. When a unicorn is captured they must freeze in place. You could also send in fairies to release the magic spell and set the unicorns free. But beware! If a fairy is captured, he/she becomes a dragon.*
- Snack: Unicorn Horns. *Dip large pretzel sticks into white chocolate and cover in rainbow sprinkles. Dragon's Fire: Dip large pretzel sticks into red candy melt. Cover with red and yellow sprinkles.*



## Backyard Art

Take the mess to the backyard and spend a few hours creating masterpieces.

- Craft: Paint with natural materials. *Use pinecones, grass, flowers and even rocks to make different textures and designs with paint.*
- Craft: Leaf Silhouettes. *Have children find a few different types of leaves. Place them on white paper. Use paint and sponges to dab around the edges of the leaves. Lift the leaves and you'll see a beautiful leaf silhouette.*
- Craft: Bubble Art. *Add food coloring to a number of different bottles of bubbles. You'll need the bubble solution to be fairly dark. Children can blow bubbles onto white paper, resulting in splatter art.*
- Activity: Nature Journal. *Give children notebooks and challenge them to sketch five different types of living things they find in the backyard.*
- Craft: Marble Paper. *This could become the cover to a nature journal by folding it in half, adding a few blank pages and stapling the fold. Put shaving cream into pans that are at least as big as the paper you are using. Using a variety of colors, add drops of watercolor paint, acrylic paint or food coloring to the shaving cream. Use a toothpick, butter knife or wooden skewer to swirl the colors into the shaving cream. Gently place paper on top of shaving cream. Pat gently so that the paper is fully covered. Lift off paper and use a ruler to scrape off the excess shaving cream. Let dry.*
- Snack: Rainbow fruit skewers, Decorate your own sugar cookies

## Water Play!

Encourage guests to bring a towel for a day of fun in the sun and all things water!

- Activities: Set up various areas of water play in the backyard - sprinkler, wading pool, squirters, etc.
- Activity: Sink or Float? *Have a few deeper buckets of water where children can experiment with what items in the yard will sink or float.*
- Activity: Boat Making. *This is another great opportunity to bring out that recycling bin, some craft sticks, foil and tape and see who can make a boat that floats.*
- Craft: Aquarium. *You will need empty 20-oz plastic bottles and lids, as well as a variety of small foam ocean shapes/animals. Even foam stickers will work. Fill bottle with water and a few drops blue food coloring. Add a few drops of glycerin and foam pieces as desired. Decorate the outside of your aquarium with stickers or permanent markers.*
- Activity: Paint with Water. *This is a lot of fun for the younger children. Give them cups of water and paint brushes. Encourage them to paint designs on the sidewalk or driveway. They will love seeing their paintings show up and then disappear.*
- Snack: Popsicles, Swedish Fish, Goldfish crackers, blue Jell-O.