

all about **Not Back to School Camp**

catalyst and community
for unschoolers, homeschoolers, & kindred spirits ages 13-18.



Oregon
Camp Myrtlewood,

Vermont
Farm & Wilderness Firefly Song Camp

“NBTSC is no less than an amazing opportunity to learn and experience new things and meet and become friends with people you might not otherwise encounter. It is an inspiration to me in the way I approach my education, and my life is better because it exists.” - a camper

Not Back to School Camp aspires to create a sanctuary

- that affirms, inspires, and mentors unschoolers...
- where campers and staff transform spiritually, emotionally, physically, creatively, intellectually...
- where profound friendships begin and grow...
- and where adventure, mystery, music, wild spontaneous fun, and magic prevail.

Hello!

Before the internet was much of a thing (we've been around since 1996), every year we used to publish two "about NBTSC" documents for prospective campers: short brochure and long brochure. Then our website gradually took over as the main source of information. Still, for those who like details beyond the essentials explained on our website, we offer this chatty document, drawn mostly from that former "long brochure." This is **optional reading** for folks who like to have lots to think about before signing up. You won't find 2024-specific details here—for those, see our website, our 2024 Camper and Parent Handbook, and our other annually-updated documents.

Not Back to School Camp is unique.

We come together to savor and support each person's gifts, and to build and celebrate community. Together, campers and staff co-create a smorgasbord of workshops, spontaneous events, and special evening gatherings. Most days, most of the time, campers make their own decisions—whether to attend a workshop or talk with a new friend, whether to go to sleep at 11:00 p.m. or stay up till 1:00 a.m. playing games, whether to linger over lunch or hike up the mountain or have a nap in the sun or start a soccer game. We come to camp to change ourselves and the world, teach each other great things, and sing under the moon....

Who comes to NBTSC? **(Are we the right choice for *you*?)**

NBTSC is not for everyone, not even every teenage homeschooler or unschooler. We seek campers who are excited about life, eager to share in what NBTSC offers, enthusiastic about offering their own workshops and other contributions, able to respect others' boundaries and assert their own, and willing (even if also terrified) to be themselves and to bravely reach out and connect with the rest of us.

All of us together, at every session, must re-create the magic, generosity, safety, and inspiration that is NBTSC - and so our gathering is a good choice for people who want to help *build* a vibrant community. It's not such a good choice for those who are inclined to merely adapt themselves to whatever happens to be going on around them or go with the flow regardless of where the flow is going. That said, NBTSC can also serve as a nurturing and inspiring experience for younger teenagers, shy folks, or people new to unschooling - those who want to spend their first year or two at camp observing, relaxing, testing the waters gradually - as long as they are able to bring with them a generally positive and willing spirit.



We have learned that to best serve everyone, we unfortunately cannot host campers with needs that we are not equipped to support. This is spelled out on our "[fine print](#)" web page which you must read before signing up.

English-speakers ages 13-18 from anywhere on planet earth are invited. We have approximately 60-100 campers at most sessions.

Can people who are younger than 13 come?

This often hasn't worked well, so no, not usually. (But 12s - and younger - are sometimes present when they have a parent on staff.)

How about people older than 18?

We often make exceptions for 19+ folks. We want to know that *you* understand that this a camp geared for teenagers, all campers are expected to live with the same agreements and policies, and we expect older campers to be not only cooperative, but also proactive, positive leaders. If you are over 18, after you begin your online registration, you will be prompted to complete an additional application form.

What about people who go to school?

Sure! We usually have campers who go to community college, go to school part time, or do some kind of online schooling (all of which can certainly be part of a self-directed learning plan). Sometimes folks come who aren't yet un/homeschoolers, but thinking about that possibility - or, conversely, teens who unschooled when they were younger, now go to school, but still like connecting with the unschooling community. And then there are those who think of themselves as having "graduated" from homeschooling - they now attend college or hold a job. We even have occasional campers who have always attended regular public or private school and plan to continue - they come to NBTSC for the great social connections and to expand their perspective on life. All of this has always worked fine. (The only thing that wouldn't work fine is if a schooler came to NBTSC and maligned unschooling/homeschooling - because among other things, NBTSC is a refuge from the confusion and judgment that unschoolers/homeschoolers sometimes experience back home.)

(Non) religious orientation: NBTSC is a non-denominational, non-religious camp. We strive to honor each person's religious beliefs or lack thereof, and ask that all campers do likewise.

Not Back to School Camp loves diversity.

We welcome campers of all races, ethnic backgrounds, genders, gender identities, religions, sexual orientations, economic backgrounds, political affiliations, and physical capabilities.

Staff

NBTSC is staffed by a group of approximately 15-25 adults (depending on session enrollment). Many staff are NBTSC alumni and/or were themselves unschooled as teens.

Our multi-faceted, skilled, caring, funny, altogether delightful staff is one of the best things about NBTSC. They teach outstanding workshops and coach sports, lead group singing, facilitate discussions, wrap twisted ankles, support people who are feeling challenged in any way, cook great food, and

those who aren't exhausted sometimes stay up late and join in the after-midnight revels. For the most part, our experience is that the staff adores the campers and the campers adore the staff.



Our staff comes from a wide variety of backgrounds, and NBTSC does not endorse or affiliate with any of their particular religious, political, lifestyle, or other beliefs or practices.

One staff person is your **advisor**. You'll meet with your advisor and about 10 other campers each morning to check in, raise and discuss concerns, play games, and get to know each other. You are also welcome to talk with any of the rest of us about concerns or questions.

For more about staff roles and the specific individuals who have worked on staff (and are likely to do so again), see the staff bios on our website. (We usually update for the current year in May or so.)

Where is NBTSC? notes on our two sites

Oregon: We meet in Eugene, Oregon. Our buses deliver you to our home in the woods, and back to Eugene when your session is over. (There is a fee for the bus. Some campers travel directly to Camp Myrtlewood.) Camp Myrtlewood is near the tiny town of Bridge, Oregon. It's about 120 miles southwest of Eugene, in the coastal mountain range. You stay in a tent or in a simple cabin with bunkbeds; bathrooms and showers nearby. Camp Myrtlewood features a swimming hole (actually more of a wading hole) in Myrtle Creek, trails through the beautiful forest, a huge field for sports and gatherings, a dining hall/lodge, and other indoor spaces for events and communal sleeping. Weather is typically warm during the days, cold at night. Rain is infrequent but not exactly a rare occurrence during our stay.

Wildfire smoke has usually been a non-issue for us at Camp Myrtlewood. However, in 2017 - a particularly bad year for fires throughout the Northwest - we did experience significant smoke. And going forward, the continuing effects of climate change make future smoke unpredictable. If you have health issues that are exacerbated by poor air quality, please take this information into account.



Vermont: We hold NBTSC at Farm and Wilderness Firefly Song, a Quaker camp approximately 98 miles South of Burlington. For a fee, we offer pickups at the Burlington airport and also (for train/bus connections) in White River Junction. Sometimes, we also offer limited transportation from/to Philadelphia and Albany.

Farm and Wilderness has space for sports and other events, and a gorgeous reservoir we swim in and sometimes canoe on. ***Farm & Wilderness is very rustic*** -- the cabins are 3-walled with many open-air windows. (Many campers appreciate the clean open feeling, and some cabins have a lake view.) Instead of indoor flush toilets we have composting outhouses. Again, many people appreciate the opportunity to live a little closer to the land and give something back to F&W's organic farms, but others find the outhouses a little *too* back-to-nature. Weather is typically warm (sometimes rainy) during the days, and cold - sometimes very cold - at night. It's essential to bring *very* warm bedding--and maybe a hot water bottle too.

*Important: **no tobacco** on site.*

Farm and Wilderness has a strict policy, so smokers need to walk a mile to the edge of the property. However, after dark our NBTSC boundaries do not extend that far and we don't make exceptions for smokers—hence, NBTSC Vermont is not a good choice for someone with an active tobacco addiction, unless you can manage it via a nicotine patch or something along that line. Contact us if you want to discuss your options.

More on lodging and facilities

Cabins, tents, etc. are assigned by gender (as opposed to biological sex, which we do not consider our business except when it comes to medical matters/health history forms). This means that all who identify as girls are welcome to sleep in a girls' cabin, etc. We also offer non-gendered cabins for those who identify as gender non-binary or who simply prefer a non-gendered space. (Additionally, at most sessions we offer an outdoor group sleeping space.) Staff generally stays in separate cabins.

What we do ~ aka the nbtsc “program”

We swim; talk; sing; drum; dance; hike; stare at the sky; play volleyball and softball and soccer; take creative, emotional, and intellectual risks; encourage each other to do amazing things; have talent shows; teach and learn from each other. Each camper is encouraged to contribute both creatively (teach a



workshop, lead a sport or group singing, etc.) and not-quite-so-creatively (wash dishes, cut vegetables, pick up trash, etc.).

Daily schedule: Each day we have two **community meetings** ~ morning and evening. Everyone attends both, during which we enjoy each others' presence, sing together, hear and share important announcements and concerns. Morning meeting is followed by half an hour or so in advisee groups, where you spend time getting to know and sharing with about 10 other campers and a staff advisor. All of these meetings are an essential part of camp and ensure that everyone is connected to the group and up to date on activities, camp issues, policies, etc. (If you think you will resent spending an hour or two, daily, in large and small group meetings, NBTSC is probably not a good choice for you.)

Everyone is encouraged, but not pressured, to participate in evening group activities. And we share mealtimes, of course. Beyond this, there are many scheduled daytime activities, sports, and workshops--led both by staff and by you and your peers. Usually, you can choose among these daytime activities--or nap, talk with a new friend, or create your own fun.



Evening events: are special—talent shows, lots of dancing, music jams, and other good stuff. Several of our most popular events can be emotionally intense - such as bonding night, which consists of lots and lots of hugging and eye contact. Such events are not required but most campers and staff participate (and most say these are among their favorite parts of camp).

Workshops—a sampling: Workshops reflect the talents and interests of all staff and campers. We usually have 50 or more workshops to choose from every session--examples from past years include breakdancing, solar cooking, kung fu, orienteering, yoga, cob-oven building, Zimbabwean singing, college applications, website design, surrealist games, co-counseling, VW engine fixing, drama, poetry, getting published and self-publishing, human digestion, origami, art booklets, swing dancing, youth rights, tree identification, conscious communication, beading, and photography. Most days, most of the time, you can decide what you want to do. We do offer a lot of really good workshops and most campers return home with new skills or ideas they're excited about. But the point is not to be frantically busy, and it's fine if you don't want to participate in lots of these organized activities. The sun and the forest will have plenty of suggestions of their own.

Your workshop or sport: Each camper is encouraged to lead a workshop or organize a game/sport. Most run approximately 1 hour. No need to be an expert; enthusiastic beginners often make excellent teachers. If you need supplies, we can provide some basic art and office supplies, speakers for your music-playing device, and some sports equipment; you provide most other materials.

While there is certainly no pressure to contribute as a teacher or leader, camper-led events are one of the most important aspects of NBTSC. The more you involve yourself in this way, the better camp will be for everyone. And new campers are more than welcome to lead workshops; no need to come as just a "recipient" your first year.

Sports: We often play volleyball, basketball, soccer, ultimate frisbee, and softball--whatever campers and staffers organize. If there's another sport you want to play, start a game.

Unscheduled activities: Most of the time you're free to make your own fun if you don't feel like participating in a group activity. You can hike on trails, talk with new friends, read, nap, swing, practice a new skill... sometimes swimming is a possibility, depending on the site and the weather.

Talent Shows: Talent shows are a great highlight of camp. Play music, balance on a ping pong ball, dance, sing, show your artwork, do stand up comedy, turn cartwheels, juggle forks, tell us the wildest thing that ever happened to your family, swallow a sword, read your poetry or a very short story, or just stand up and tell us what makes you tick. You might consider getting up and performing or sharing something related to your workshop. Your act should be 4 minutes or less.

Food

Three yummy vegetarian meals each day—we usually prepare our own food and use mostly organically grown ingredients. Vegan alternatives are available, and we can usually accommodate wheat-free and other restrictive diets too. When campers or staff notify us (a month or more before camp) that they are allergic to peanuts, we plan a peanut free menu and ask campers not to bring peanut-containing snacks.

Simple snacks are often available--homemade bread, fruit, trail mix, etc. People with numerous allergies or other special diets may need to supply some of their own food, but we can work with most special needs. Our cooking staff is very skilled; some of them have cooked professionally at retreat centers famed for their good food, run catering businesses, or have cooked for several seasons at NBTSC. Moreover, they prepare our food with love and creativity, and over the years they have refined a basic menu plan that seems to please most of the people most of the time. Many campers say that a highlight of NBTSC is the time they spend helping prepare meals in our sweet-smelling, laughter-filled kitchen.

Meat eaters approach our vegetarian offerings in several ways: some experiment with just-vegetarian food for a session. Many bring their own supplemental meat, such as jerky, or smoked or canned fish. (Sorry, we can't provide for refrigeration or cooking, so don't bring fresh meat. Also, if you'll need a can opener remember to bring your own.)

Money notes

You'll find complete details on our website, but here are a few tidbits:



- We encourage you to complete your registration by our **early registration deadline (March 31 most years)**. (A complete registration consists of three things: submitting an online form, paying a deposit, and addressing a set of preliminary “application” questions.) After that deadline, tuition increases \$150 per session.
- A \$250 **non-refundable deposit** is due with your registration. The balance is due June 1. (If it’s late, there’s a \$35 fee.) \$25 charge for NSF checks.
- Coming to two+ sessions? We offer a **\$100 discount for each additional session** (beyond the first).
- **Sibling discount** - if your family is sending more than one child to the same session, each sibling after the first can receive \$50 off. You need to request this discount — and if you don’t need it, we’ll divert those funds where they are needed.
- **Vermont diversity scholarship** - for prospective BIPOC campers who cannot otherwise afford camp. (For now this is a Vermont-only program. We hope to expand to Oregon at some point.) Ask us for details.
- We have a **three-tier tuition scale** based on family income. This allows us to keep NBTSC as widely accessible as possible while also offering more sustainable pay to our longtime session staff.
- Convenient **online payment option** ~ it’s easy to submit tuition through our secure registration portal. Or mail us a **paper check or money order**. Or set up a **payment plan** that deducts monthly from a bank account or credit card. (If a bank account, you receive a discount of approximately 2%.)
- Tuition includes just about everything: hearty meals, lodging, almost all activities. **Not included:**
 - Camp T-shirts, which are optional.
 - Camp hoodies, also optional.
 - occasional (optional) workshops with an additional materials fee (rare, but it’s nice to be prepared)
 - In Oregon, an optional day trip to the Oregon Coast
 - Pickup or dropoff from nearby areas (fees vary depending on location)
 - If staff drives you to town for personal reasons (including some health reasons), there is generally a fee to cover expenses.
- **Please read our refund policy** carefully to prevent frustration and misunderstanding for everyone.

See our page <https://www.nbtsc.org/tuition-details/> for additional information regarding NBTSC tuition.

Worktrades

For campers with great attitudes and lots of energy (skills such as cooking are helpful too), and for families who couldn't otherwise afford NBTSC, we offer a few worktrade opportunities. Details and application on our website. The **deadline** to apply is normally **March 31**.

Lifeguarding ~ most worktraders toil mainly in the kitchen - dishwashing and food prep - but we also have a few positions for certified lifeguards. These positions are not dependent on financial need. Look for information on the worktrade page of our website. We sometimes have more need for lifeguards than campers (or staffers) with lifeguard certification, so let us know if you're available (even after our worktrade application deadline).

Don't give up before you try!

Most people who have applied for a worktrade have received one. *We really want you to know* that if (lack of) money stands in the way of your attending NBTSC, you shouldn't give up without trying!

On the other hand, please don't apply for a worktrade if you don't need one. We take applications very seriously and try to say yes whenever we can, even when there are consequences for other aspects of camp. So, we prefer that you take your end of it seriously also.



Agreements, a.k.a. “rules”

An overwhelming number of past campers have commented that with our policies and attitudes they felt free, trusted, and yet also safe and well cared for. The agreements we do have are important—designed to protect everyone's safety and peace, and to ensure that we can continue to offer NBTSC, yet without limiting freedom unnecessarily. Please be aware that for any serious infractions, we usually contact parents, and we reserve the right to send campers home when that feels to us like the best course of action. (While this happens rarely, we do send campers home for things like using or sharing illegal substances - including alcohol and prescription meds; being abusive or violent; having sex with another person; stealing; lying repeatedly or seriously to staff; etc.) Our past experience has been that for the most part, we get along superbly and people respect each other and the agreements.

We call our rules “agreements.” NBTSC is not something we, the government, your parents, or your friends require you to do - it is something you choose to do. (In fact, our most important agreement is that you come to camp only if it is your own free choice to do so.) In choosing to attend, you also commit to honor our agreements, in order to help create the best possible experience for you and everyone else.

All campers sign a statement during registration that they will keep our agreements. In order to make that contract less abstract and more human, we also take time at the start of each session to make the same promise to each other, in person.

Our agreements are relaxed compared to the rules of most youth camps. We have few required activities, and we don't have a set bedtime or normally require you to sleep in your assigned bed. Instead, we ask you to use your time well according to your own values, and to create a “bedtime policy” that serves your own particular needs and goals, and regardless of where you sleep, we expect you to honor our “no sex at camp” rule.

It occasionally happens that a camper breaks a serious camp agreement and then tells us that they didn't think it was a big deal because they thought “that's just what people do” at camp. We find it important to clarify, therefore, that the agreements are not optional, and that we are interested in hosting campers who are able to see our staff as allies, who share our vision (see mission statement) and are able and willing to help create a camp culture in which “what people do” at camp is cooperative and sustainable - rather than merely adapting themselves to what they might perceive as peer culture.

If you have been so unfortunate as to grow up in a family, a school, or a subculture that has left you unable to conceive of adult leadership as a potential positive contribution to your life, and if you are a person who believes that regardless of the context, “rules are made to be broken,” please do not register for NBTSC.



what parents should know about NBTSC

The vast majority of feedback we get from parents is glowingly positive, and we do our work in the hope that it contributes to the health and happiness not only of our campers, but also of their relationships with the families that they return to. But some of the things we do may not be consistent with what you want for your family, or they may not be right for a particular individual because of their maturity level or background. We have had an occasional parent upset to find out later that their kid participated in certain discussions or activities, so here are a few things to know before registering:

Like other teenagers, many campers are interested in learning about **sexuality**. The majority of campers are not sexually active, but naturally they experience themselves as sexual beings. Some initiate workshops and discussions on various aspects of relationships and sexuality. Most of these are serious in nature; a few are silly. It is not our policy to censor any of these. Sometimes staff attends and participates in discussions, adding an adult leadership dimension. Other times, campers prefer to talk amongst themselves without adults present.

Staff also offers workshops or panel discussions related to sexuality.

- At the start of each session (or prior to the session, via video), a mandatory presentation on consent, understanding and respecting one's own and others' boundaries, and sexual assault.
- A “healthy sexuality” panel at most sessions, where individual staff shares on topics like “what I wish I could go back and tell my 15-year-old self” and addresses questions. (Optional to attend, of course.)
- Occasional workshops (like a workshop on women's sexuality and body image, with an empowering, feminist slant).

We do not, as a camp, endorse any particular expression of sexuality; nor do we encourage campers to seek out sexual experiences with other people. We also have a clear and firm expectation that campers not have sex while at camp, and we stay in dialogue about this issue with the group as a whole and with individual campers who get into intense-looking romances during camp. We promote an overall atmosphere that is group-oriented, affectionate, uplifting, and wholesome.

A 2016 parent suggested that we frontload the information that **at some sessions, there are more openly LGBTQ+ youth** than one might encounter in daily life - especially in more conservative geographical areas. Knowing this ahead of time can allow for any helpful family conversations (including how to be respectful toward people in marginalized groups).



Some of our workshops, projects, and evening activities tend toward the realm of personal growth and even somewhat therapeutic processes. Staff may offer optional workshops or longer multi-day projects on emotional intimacy, meditation, peer counseling, suicide prevention, learning to love and accept oneself, etc. At some sessions, we offer personal growth activities in which people share intimate details about their lives if they choose to. These are not mandatory, but most campers participate.

We trust campers to communicate with their parents as necessary. We assume that (except possibly in extreme or unusual circumstances) when they experience emotional difficulty they can and should decide for themselves whether and how to share with their parents. We do not as a matter of course contact parents to share this type of information.

The majority of the time you'll find most people making music, sitting in relaxed groups talking about traveling or favorite foods or how to make the world a better place, learning to juggle or make zines or write poetry, applauding enthusiastically during talent shows, hugging, laughing, playing Frisbee, laying in the sun, or helping in our fragrant, peaceful kitchen. But we do have intense moments too, and we talk about just about everything at camp. Campers tend to find their own appropriate level; for instance, when male campers initiate a "men's group" to talk about issues related to masculinity, most who attend are older campers. But sometimes younger boys come and listen out of curiosity.

Please also see "an important note for parents and campers on bedtimes and sleeping arrangements," below.

Finally, on a rather different note, we want parents to be prepared for their kids to get **sent home if they break agreements** repeatedly or in any way that the staff deems serious or likely to undermine others' camp experience. Bringing or using illegal drugs, having sex with another person at camp, abusing another person physically or verbally, or lying to staff about their own involvement in such activities are a few possible roads to being asked to leave. The people who do such things at camp are a tiny minority, but their activities erode morale for everyone. We look at each situation individually, and make a great effort not to shame anyone, but it is also important to us to protect the NBTSC environment, as well as our own peace and happiness. (We tend to resent having to spend a lot of our time tracking down 1 or 2 people who are breaking serious agreements, and thus not having time to do the jobs we have prepared for, and looked forward to, all year.) Thanks for reading this paragraph and we're sorry to have to include that sour little note here!

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

An important note on bedtimes & beds

We want to clarify a few things in light of questions and concerns expressed by parents, and (different) questions and concerns expressed by campers. We are always carefully considering and reconsidering our policies, and at least for now, this is where we continue to stand:

We do not normally enforce a bedtime at camp. We require lights out/quiet in cabins from approximately midnight to 8 a.m., and close most public buildings between midnight and 2 a.m., but some people stay up talking at a campfire circle or elsewhere.

We do invite each camper to write a policy that they will use to decide when to go to bed each night, based on what they understand about themselves and what is important to them. Overall this program, while a bit cumbersome, has been effective and received good reviews from campers. We do this because while we don't want to unnecessarily limit freedom, we do want campers to take good care of themselves and get enough sleep. And, we want to encourage participation in daytime workshops and activities. We find that campers who are intentional about setting camp goals (and about getting enough sleep to support those goals) generally feel good at the end of the week about the way they have used their time. We don't breathe down campers' necks about this (or much of anything else) and those who want to can certainly "get away with" writing a halfhearted policy and then proceeding to ignore it anyway, but we recommend that campers take the process seriously and use it to help shape their week the way they truly want to.

Also, we do not generally require campers to sleep in their assigned beds. (We do ask them to stay out of others' cabins.) Most campers sleep in their beds most of the time. Some campers, however, sleep in mixed-gender (sometimes affectionate and cuddly) groups in public spaces or outside. While we firmly expect campers to observe our "no sex at camp" and "no nudity" rules (and initiate plenty of dialogue when that seems called for), we do not police these groups. Our observation (borne out by many candid reports from individual campers) is that while occasionally there is some mildly sexual behavior, by and large these "people piles" are innocent. We feel that while they do make it possible for people to bend the rules, there are other ways to bend the rules if individuals are determined to do so, and that to tighten our policy would be more of a detriment than a benefit to camp and campers.

You might be interested in this comment from a 2005 camper who was in a long-distance relationship with someone she had previously met at camp (as a side note, later they got married). "Thank you for [shared sleeping space]! Being able to sleep with my partner greatly improved my attitude for the week. Having a social, not private, place to sleep as a couple is really cool but also feels respectful of camp agreements. The lack of privacy keeps us well behaved."

Because we know that some campers may not be ready to make their own healthiest choices about sleeping (and other) matters, and because you know your kids better than we do, we suggest that you talk about these subjects as a family, and perhaps clarify your own expectations or agreements independently of camp rules and policies. In other words, we do stand behind the rules that we set, and take reasonable steps to ensure that they are followed, but we cannot be responsible for making sure that your kids behave the way that you think is best for them.

In the past, we sometimes swung to different sides of the pendulum--tightening things up at parents' requests, then seeing (and hearing from campers) that we've caused more harm than good, preventing innocent affection more than anything else, and swinging back to a looser stance. We now try to strike a better balance by asking parents to get involved by having your own family discussions. In our handbook—provided in the spring to all registered campers—we include examples of previous bedtime policies.

Our experience has always been that most campers are extremely mature: cooperative; beyond the need to rebel for rebellion's sake; kind and empathetic to staff as well as to each other. When we update our policies, it is with this kind of maturity in mind. In the event that we ever find ourselves with a different quality of camp community, we will need to shift the way we do things. We are committed to creating the best possible balance of freedom and care-taking, given the particular group of human beings that we find ourselves serving.

Sometimes people get sick at NBTSC. Sometimes a lot of people.

You'll also want to carefully read the [COVID-19 page](#) on our website.

In the olden days, there were a lot of sessions in which quite a few campers and staffers got sick. For years we puzzled about the variables involved—a large group coming together after traveling through public airports, bus stations, etc. Our group being a very physically affectionate one. Not a lot of sleep. People being busy and excited and not stopping to drink enough water. Some people not bringing warm enough bedding or clothing. Each year we did what we could to encourage people to arrive healthy and to take care of themselves once we were together. Each year, we scratched our heads at the end of the season and wondered what piece of the puzzle we were still missing. In our staff meetings we often discussed, and then rejected, the possibility of instituting a camp-wide bedtime. That's not a step we've ever wanted to take, though we don't completely rule it out as a future possibility.

One thing we observed (with some frustration) is that people who did have contagious illnesses at camp—including pinkeye, various coughs and colds, etc.—did not always fully honor our requests to take care of themselves or to avoid sharing with other people. It is easy to understand that in an extremely affectionate community such as ours, it can be difficult to stop hugging others, to go to bed early, etc. But, our commitment to a healthy camp community is real, and so way back in 2009 we redoubled our efforts to create change. It was exciting to see that even while some other camps and institutions were having their most challenging season ever—thanks to the H1N1 virus—we managed to have our own *healthiest* camp season ever. So, here are some of the policies that emerged from that year. These have worked fairly well at most sessions since 2009. (But truth be told, we still experience occasional sessions where a lot



of people get sick. To some extent, alas, we simply find that this is beyond our control.) (Note: in 2022, after a 2-year pandemic-induced break, we collectively took great care with Covid-specific precautions and were thrilled to experience an *extremely* healthy yet richly affectionate gathering. Our 2022 experience continues to influence our plans.)

- All campers are screened for flu-like symptoms upon arrival at camp (or, upon meeting our buses/vans in town). People with these symptoms are generally not admitted to camp. (We reserve the right to make exceptions to this policy where that seems like the best choice, all things considered.)
- If you get sick at camp, staff may require things of you such as:
 - Going to bed by a certain time.
 - Sleeping in your own bed or in an assigned infirmary bed, rather than in a public space.
 - Not participating in bonding night or other activities that are mainly focused on hugging.
 - Not going through meal lines (a friend can get your food).

As always, we consider each situation individually, but do take a proactive stance on health. We want to support people in getting over illnesses quickly, and also in not getting sick in the first place.

(We also continue to look for other ways we can support wellness. In recent years we've cut down—a little bit—on the number of night time activities, and we now schedule some of them to end a little earlier than they did in the past. Also, on several evenings we close public buildings earlier than we used to, so people can go to bed without worrying that they're missing out on all kinds of good stuff.)

How to register (& notes about registration)

Please follow the instructions on our website, <https://www.nbtsc.org/register/>.

Your email addresses are crucial. In the “authorized users” section of your online account, you must provide accurate email addresses—for the camper and a parent or guardian—that will be valid through the start of camp. **(If your emails change, you must log into your account and update them.)** This is how we will confirm your registration, remind you of deadlines, and provide updates. It is really important that *you* make sure that your email spam controls are set up to allow us to communicate with you.



Signing up as a host family:

A “yes” indicates that your family is willing to have, as a houseguest, pretty much anyone from any session of camp—not just your personal friends. (Only during times that are convenient for you, of course.) Many campers travel to visit others, and this can be a great opportunity for both hosts and travelers.

Online travel directory: If you say yes to this one, we make your name, phone number, email address, and street address available on our password-protected directory so that other campers can connect with you to discuss the possibility of shared travel.

What happens after you register? We’ll review your responses to our application questions, confirm your registration or request more information, and you’ll receive a link to our annual camper handbook (what to bring, how to prepare for camp, etc.), etc. —and you’ll be prompted for information (health history, what workshop you want to teach, dietary restrictions, etc.).

Wait listed? Many years, NBTSC sessions have filled up rapidly. This varies from year to year. If you find yourself on the wait list, you should know that most waitlisters have eventually been offered a spot in the session of their choice. In this regard, keeping a flexible summer schedule often pays off.



Miscellaneous details

Responsibilities: Each person contributes to camp in two major ways:

- 1) fun, possibly creative work drawing on your unique talents. Watch for ways to let your light shine: coach a game or sport, teach a workshop, lead a song.
- 2) You'll get to perform a few grungy, possibly even disgusting menial chores too! We clean up after meals, keep the bathrooms pleasant, and sweep our cabins before we leave. You may scrub a toilet or 9, but you'll have partners and you can whistle while you work. Each camper has up to 5 hours of chores during a 7-day camp week (prorate or double that for a longer session).

Can you come to just part of a session? To work around a soccer tournament or a family vacation, you mean? Possibly, but you must discuss and clear this with us in advance - and we're more likely to say yes to planning-to-leave-early than to arriving-partway-through, since we start every session with important orientation activities that include everyone. No discounts for partial-session attendance.

If you have special needs: All of our sites can accommodate wheelchairs, though like any outdoor setting they can pose challenges to anyone (including people in "normal" physical condition). Educate us about your specific needs, and we'll do our best to help make your week comfortable, safe, and rich.

Health and safety: We occasionally have a camp nurse or other medically trained person on staff. When this is not the case, we have staff present with first aid and CPR training - often higher-level training, such as wilderness first responder or EMT. In case of emergency, you would be taken by ambulance to the nearest hospital. You must basically be responsible for your own health, bring any (regular) necessary medications with you, etc. All campers must have their own medical/accident/health/hospital insurance, even if this is only temporary travelers' insurance.

More details about lots of stuff on our website!

~ The End. Thanks for reading! ~



Parents say

“As a girl who comes from a diehard unschooling family where respect and freedom are the rules, [our daughter] was enthusiastically thrilled to find that Grace was able to uphold these same important values at camp, despite the lack of parental involvement and the diverse needs of teens from across the country. She loved a number of the workshops, was shocked by a few, and chose not to attend many, feeling completely free to decide as she saw fit. She was so impressed with the lack of coercion from the Grace and the other adult leaders.”

“When [my son] appeared on our doorstep [after camp], he was radiant. He had had, in his words, a life changing experience. He had new friends, was exposed to new ways of doing and thinking, and was challenged by some of the accomplishments of the other campers to start making serious decisions of his own. I am so grateful for the existence of Not Back to School Camp, and hope that it continues to play a key role in the lives of other young people as they are figuring out who they are and what they want to do with their lives.”

“My kids really love NBTSC and all of their new friends. It makes homeschooling a lot less lonely for them when they meet a diverse group of open minded

homeschoolers. ...Thank you for your part in helping my children achieve strength, confidence, and independence.”

“I have seen so many of the Vancouver kids come back from camp with subtle (or not so subtle) changes in maturity, confidence etc. I can’t thank you enough for what you do by giving these kids the chance to be together and spread their wings like this.”

“I’d like to tell you how wonderful was our experience with nbtsc. My 13 year old son is something of a recluse, so this was his first experience being all on his own, away from anyone or anything he knew. I was sure he’d be ‘fine’ but, of course, had reservations. He’s not been exposed to much even in the way of media, as we have tended to erode on the side of ‘conservative’ to a certain extent. Anyway, he certainly gained heaps of confidence in himself and a great deal of open-mindedness he didn’t have before. I realize part of this is his age, but I also think his week at camp sort of lit the fire. He didn’t come home with tons of friends to call or write, but he’s better friends with himself and more likely to make friends now than he’s ever been.”

“[My son] has never experienced such openness, such honesty and such love—and he is renewed. He feels accepted, uplifted, empowered and, above all else, valued! ...You are working magic at NBTSC....nurturing wings. I applaud you and thank you.”

“The camp was fabulous for [my daughter] and the kids were too -- very different from her high school friends, in maturity, drive, self-assuredness, openness and vulnerability.”

“Just a quick note of appreciation from a very pleased parent! ...I know [my son] had one of the best weeks of his life and he’s had a lot of excellent weeks in his 17 years... back he comes from camp with a zillion new friends—he promptly hooked us up to email and in the last 3-4 weeks has written well over 100 letters!”

“My son returned from your camp with renewed enthusiasm for life and learning! Thank you so much for having this get-together of, apparently, some of the most gifted and interesting people on earth!”

“[Our daughter] returned to us full of self-assurance, excitement, and positive loving energy. The revelation that there are other teenagers out there with her unschooler ideas was a delightful awakening for her.”

“[My son] had a wonderful time at NBTSC. It’s resulted in some significant changes in how [he] approaches life, and he’s enthusiastic about going back next year.”

Campers say

"I feel genuine kinship and community here. I'm going back to my usual home with feelings of hope and inspiration and a clearer vision for my horizons."

"This camp was by far the best thing that ever happened to me.

"I had never been in such a big group of people that were so open, nonjudgmental, loving, honest, and just wonderful to be around! The energy of it all was so incredibly awesome! It was the best experience I have ever had.

"Overall, I think this was the best week of my life. The energy of vibrant, thinking, life-loving people is the most intensely powerful thing I can imagine."

"Camp is good for me. It's good for my spirit. It totally rejuvenates me, and inspires me. This is partly who I am, camp affects everyone a little differently, of course. Don't send your kid here thinking they'll come home some kind of superkid. Camp isn't for the parent. It's for the kid. It's an experience they won't forget. But everyone processes differently, and every kid may NOT come home totally inspired. The majority will, I suppose...."

"Never before has a camp had such an effect on me as this one. I was so at peace with myself and others, it was incredible. I never wanted to leave."

"This camp gives you the feeling that no matter who you are or wherever you're from, you will always be welcome!"

"Camp has been the best three weeks of the last three years of my life. Some of my very favorite people are the people I've met here in the last three years."

"Every year it continues to amaze me how so many wonderful, accepting people there really are. I've made more lasting friends at camp than in the whole rest of my life put together."

"I'm writing to say again how thrilled I am with camp. You get together such a great group of wonderful, talented people. I'm really amazed at your ability to make it work so well." "I feel like a different and better person! I haven't even fought with my sister who also went to camp. Or my other siblings for that matter."

"Camp is the high point of my unschool year. Each time I make new friends, learn new things, and leave with a beautiful feeling."

"To be at NBTSC is a life changing experience. It sounds like a cliché but it's never been more genuine than in this case."

"This was the funnest camp I've ever been to and everyone was so nice!"

"Not Back to School Camp has consistently and persistently demanded that I try new things and challenge the way I look at the world. I have come across so many amazing people with amazing talents, I think I have a new family of 120 people!"

"I was thrilled by everything: the idea, the staff the campers, the openness, the inspiration that lasts all year. Thank you."

"Like last year, I came home totally inspired. I feel like the days are not long enough for all the things I want to learn/study now. I feel like I can change the world. I know I can change the world. 120 campers and advisors felt the same way that week, I think, and many of them have carried that feeling home. It was worth every bit of money and time, I love camp. I highly recommend it, especially to those who are wondering if they're doing the right thing and to those who feel apathetic and unenthusiastic about learning, life, whatever. There is a joy in life at camp. A warning however: you can't get much out of camp if you don't put much in. The more you participate in things, try talking to new people, and explore, the better time you will have. And personally, I find that by the end of camp, what energy I put into being there has come back, multiplied, a hundredfold."

"This camp totally changed my life. I feel confident and proud to walk the path I chose."