

# TRAILBLAZERS

## Parent Handbook

Trail Blazers Overnight Camp, Summer 2021



**Congratulations!** Your child is about to embark on an exciting outdoor adventure! They will live in the woods, explore nature, learn to live cooperatively in a group setting, and develop a sense of community and responsibility. Your child will have opportunities to push the limits of their comfort in an emotionally and physically safe environment that will foster self-confidence. Moreover, they will have the summer of a lifetime!

The purpose of this handbook is to help you understand and anticipate your child's experience, reassure you of your child's safety, and offer some tips of what you, as the parent/guardian, can do to help your child succeed.

Feel free to call the Brooklyn office during the year or the summer site during the summer if you have any other questions. We can't wait to see your child at camp!

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## Registration Information

All of the forms and documents needed to enroll your child in camp can be accessed by logging into your Active dashboard. Your login email is the one you used to create your camper's application. If you have forgotten your password, you can request to have a new password link sent to you right from the Active home screen, or call the Brooklyn office for assistance.

**Website:** [campself.active.com/TrailBlazers](http://campself.active.com/TrailBlazers)

### Administrative Fee

A 5% administrative fee is charged per child when registering for Trail Blazers programs.

### Deposit

A deposit of 30% must be paid in order to secure your child's place in their program. When possible, we are happy to be flexible with the timing of payment upon request. **Payment in full is due by May 1.**

### Forms and Documents

All of the forms required to admit your child to camp will be made available on your Active dashboard in March. **Forms are due June 1.**

### Tuition and Scholarships

Parents are asked to consider their total household income and select where they fall on our four-tiered scale in order to determine the total cost of their camp program. We are proud to offer all families a level of discount off the full tuition of camp, and have additional funding set aside for families at **all tier levels** to ensure that our camp program is truly affordable for all. Further scholarship reduction is offered on a basis of need. You can discuss options by emailing [registration@trailblazers.org](mailto:registration@trailblazers.org) or calling the Brooklyn office.

### Specialty Program Fees

The Canoeing, Biking, and Farmstead specialty programs require an additional program fee. In some instances, this fee can be adjusted or waived.

### General Cancellations and Refunds

This policy has been updated to reflect the operational and financial realities of operating our program, and aims to strike the right balance between ensuring the

financial stability of the organization, our ability to support and underwrite families who need it most, and prepare for the summer in the most effective way.

Please note: Preparing for camp programs is a year-long endeavor, with substantial full time staff working to prepare safe and exciting camping experiences. Our refund policy reflects the expenses associated with this.

- Programs must be paid in full by May 1, or upon enrollment if registering after that date. All programs require a 30% non-refundable down payment to hold your spot.
- Cancellations before May 1 will receive a full refund of the refundable portion.
- Cancellations after May 1, but at least 2 weeks before the start of your camp session, will receive a 50% refund of the refundable portion.
- There will be no refunds for cancellations within 2 weeks of the start of your camp session.
- We are beholden to CDC and DOH directives for our program operations. So long as we are granted permission to operate, and in our judgment are able to do so with minimized risk, our programs will continue to run. In the event that Trail Blazers programs are cancelled, the 30% non-refundable portion remains; the remaining 70% of the program cost will be prorated based on the number of days operated.
- Refunds may take up to 3 months to process.

### Medical Examination and Coverage

Every camper must be examined by their family physician within one year of their arrival at camp. When a child is treated at camp and there are bills incurred, the parent is responsible for payment to the doctor and hospital. Every effort will be made, whenever possible, to contact the parent or guardian before sending a camper off-site for treatment.

The camp will provide excellent medical care for your child but does not provide insurance. In order for the camp to continue to give all campers adequate medical coverage, we ask that you submit any medical expenses that your child incurs to your insurance company. This includes any prescriptions that need to be filled.

**All campers will be required to submit a negative COVID test result taken within 72 hours of arrival at camp.**

## Immunization Form

Polio, tetanus boosters and other vaccinations which are due, must be given prior to camp. The Health Department has determined that we cannot accept your child without a copy of their current vaccinations. If you have chosen not to vaccinate your child and have previously completed an exemption form for your state or school, please contact the Brooklyn office for a immunization exemption form that will need to be completed and returned.

## Billing

Once your application has been submitted, you will be able to view and pay your balance online through your ACTIVE dashboard. You will receive invoices from our bookkeeper informing you of any outstanding balance.

Payments may be made online by credit card at any time. Payments made by check or money order may be mailed to:

Trail Blazer Camps  
394 Rogers Ave  
Brooklyn, NY 11225

## Please Note!

**Tuition must be paid in full OR payment arrangements must be made by MAY 1<sup>ST</sup>. Payments will not be accepted at the bus.**

## Pre-Camp Open House

There will be one Open House held at camp – Saturday June 12. All parents and new campers are encouraged to attend! Tours, games, refreshments and parents' meetings will help to acquaint parents as well as new campers to Trail Blazers.

## Summer Transportation Information

Trail Blazers provides transportation to and from camp from four drop-off points. Typically we have drop-off points in Brooklyn, Newark/Jersey City, and Elizabeth/Paterson.

In the early spring, a Transportation form will be made available for you to fill out on your online dashboard. You will receive departure information **via email** approximately 2 weeks before your child is scheduled to come to camp. This email will contain details of bus departure or driving information. **If your transportation plans change, or if the information sent to you is incorrect, please let us know immediately!**

While riding in camp vehicles, the following rules are in place:

- Seat belts must be worn at all times

- All passengers must remain seated while the vehicle is in motion
- Noise level must be kept to a minimum
- Campers must follow the directions of the staff on board
- All trash must be taken out of the vehicle upon exit

In the event of a change to our transportation plan or an emergency that will affect your camper's pick-up or drop-off time or location, you will be contacted by email and/or phone. Please make sure that your phone number(s) and email address(es) are up-to-date in our system.

## LIFE AT TRAIL BLAZERS

### Life at Trail Blazers

#### Small Camp Living

Children will live in a small camp group with 8-10 other campers and two group leaders. Other staff (such as additional group leaders, specialty area instructors, or kitchen and support staff) will join their group during the evening and overnight as well. Small camp groups are formed by age. Requests to be with friends are considered but never guaranteed. Small camp living includes sleeping in covered shelters with no electricity, and using a latrine (outhouse). Every day, campers will participate in community jobs around camp and “capers” around their small camp to build a sense of community and responsibility.

#### Meals

Breakfast and dinner are served in and around the central dining hall most days, with most meals being served under cover outdoors. There are also numerous opportunities for groups to plan a cookout at one of our multiple cookout spots. Lunch is always a pack-out, so that groups may take it with them to different areas around camp. All of the food at Trail Blazers is healthy and home cooked. We expect campers (and staff!) to try a little bit of everything offered, even if they are unsure about it or have never tried it before.

#### Activities

Campers will be involved in various camp activities. Hiking, archery, biking, swimming, boating, fishing, low ropes challenge course, gardening, arts and crafts, performances, overnight backpacking trips, nightly campfires, service projects, and cookouts are some of the activities offered at Trail Blazers.

Trail Blazers uses a decentralized program approach, which means that campers will work with their small camp group to decide what their daily schedules look like. As such, no two sessions are ever the same. This program structure gives groups the opportunity to build community, try all the activities Trail Blazers has to offer, focus on activities that are most exciting, and come up with new and creative ways to enjoy their experience in the outdoors.

Swimming lessons are a required daily activity for all campers; free swim is offered regularly as well. We have both a low elements and high elements challenge course of ropes and beams, which will involve the children in team building activities. Both the waterfront and challenge course are supervised by certified and trained staff who are experienced in these areas.

## Vagabond

Vagabond is a 1-4 night trip that provides the perfect chance for campers to use their newly-developed wilderness and survival skills as well as test the bonds they have formed with their group members. Vagabond duration and location varies based on the age, skill level, and program of the group.

### Trail Blazers Vagabonds

Our youngest camper groups typically embark on a 2-night Vagabond excursion to a camping site on Trail Blazers property.

### Appalachian Trail Vagabonds

Most of our small camp groups head to the Appalachian Trail for Vagabonds of 2-4 nights, carrying their personal and group gear along with them, and sleeping in the designated camping areas along the trail.

### Delaware River Vagabonds

Campers in our Canoeing Intensive program take off on 3-4 night excursions down the Delaware, bringing their boats to shore every evening and camping at designated sites along the river.

### Stokes State Forest Vagabonds

Campers in our Biking Intensive program take a 3-4 night tour of Stokes State Forest via mountain bike, breaking each evening at pre-selected camp sites.

## Wildlife

Due to our location in the woods of New Jersey, we are surrounded by a wonderful, diverse population of animals, ranging from chipmunks to deer to black bears as well as deer ticks. While we peacefully share the woods with them, there are strict safety precautions we take. For example, tick checks are performed regularly, and absolutely no food is allowed in living areas. Every staff member is extensively trained on how to deal with wildlife encounters by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Fish and Wildlife.

### Physical/Emotional Limitations

If your child cannot hike or swim due to physical limitations, needs special medication and constant medical attention, or for any other reason cannot fully participate in our very active

outdoor program, we urge you to discuss this matter with the camp director prior to camp in order to determine whether or not your child can be served at Trail Blazers. Though our high staff to camper ratio allows for an extensive amount of caring, individual attention, our terrain, and our staff structure do not allow for individualized programming or one-on-one supervision required by a child with pronounced physical or emotional limitations.

### **Clothing and Laundry**

Since we live and play outdoors, clothes can get very dirty or damaged. **Please send only your child's oldest clothing.** A suggested list of clothing is provided at the end of this handbook. LABEL ALL ITEMS OF CLOTHING. Camp is not responsible for any lost or damaged clothing!

Children should have enough clothes to last at least seven (7) days before their first laundry day. Laundry will be done once during the 2-week session, for necessary items only.

# Trail Blazers Policies

## Personal Items

We do not allow campers to bring cell phones, electronic games, expensive cameras, jewelry, radios, music playing devices, televisions, or other expensive equipment, and are not responsible for personal items brought into the camp environment. Any electronics or valuables that are brought to camp will be collected on the first day and held in our safe. Please leave anything valuable at home.

## Camp Visitations

Parents are not permitted to visit camp while camp is in session.

## Telephone Calls

Campers are not allowed to call home while at camp nor are they permitted to receive calls. However, parents are encouraged to call the camp administration at any point during the session to inquire about their child's performance and adaptation to the camp environment. The direct line to the Camp Director is (917) 594-7792.

## Mail

It is very exciting to receive mail while at camp! Parents are encouraged to send a letter a few days before their child's first day so that it will be waiting for them upon their arrival. Parents may also send e-mail to their camper using the email address [camper@trailblazers.org](mailto:camper@trailblazers.org). We print out emails from parents to deliver along with the regular postal mail.

If you are going to send your child a care package, **do NOT send food!** Food attracts curious animals! Because your child will be living in very rustic shelters and small camps, it is unsafe for them to have food in their living areas.

Within the first three days of your child's session, we will send an email to you to assure you that they arrived safely and are adjusting to camp. Your child will not have access to email during their time at camp.

## Medications and Illness

If your child is coming to camp with medication, please make sure they have enough to last the entire session. Parents of asthmatic campers should be aware that the camp environment may present different triggers than the home environment, and ensure that rescue inhalers contain enough doses to treat unforeseen flare-ups. If your child uses a nebulizer, it is encouraged that they bring it to camp with them to be stored in the health center.

All medication:

- Must be in original container
- Must be accompanied by the prescription
- Will be given to the camp nurse to be stored in the infirmary
- Will be dispensed by the camp nurse according to the indicated instructions

### Notifying Parents

We will always give you a call if your child:

- Has a fever, spends the night in the infirmary, or needs to go to the doctor
- Has not received mail for at least a week
- Is experiencing severe homesickness
- Severely misbehaves or engages in unsafe behavior

### Smoking

Trail Blazers is a smoke free camp. This regulation applies to campers as well as staff.

### Illegal Drugs, Alcohol, and Weapons

The possession and use of alcohol, illegal drugs, firearms, weapons, and/or explosive devices is strictly prohibited and will result in dismissal.

# Your Child's Experience

## What Children Gain from Trail Blazers

The advantages of a Trail Blazers experience differ for each child, though there are themes that run through every summer. We focus on four core values – Respect and Caring for one's self, for others, for one's community, and for the environment. Each child who stays for a full session will have the opportunity to:

- Feel a sense of accomplishment at following through on a commitment
- Form relationships with positive adult role models from many different backgrounds
- Build close friendships based on open communication and shared, positive experiences
- Enhance literacy skills through daily reading and writing activities
- Engage in structures and unstructured play time in an outdoor setting without use of electronics
- Learn to appreciate the environment through hands-on activities and daily living
- Enter into the Leaders in Training program as a teenager and learn to be a positive role model

## Adjustments Your Child May Experience

### Beginning of Session

The small camp group is just starting to get to know each other. For first time campers, everything about Trail Blazers is new. For returners, a lot of familiarity is countered by being with a brand new group of campers and staff.

During the first few days, your camper:

- May experience homesickness; worried about safety of family and friends, and missing comforts of home
- Might feel unsure of his/her place in the group
- Will be adjusting to living in the woods and sleeping outdoors
- Might be overwhelmed, may want to go home

Many of the letters your child writes during the first week may express these emotions. Children often write home when they miss you the most, so you may not always hear about the good parts of their day. If you have any questions or concerns, you can call us.

### Middle of Session

The small camp group is settling into some routines, and connections are forming quickly – this tends to happen when you are living with the same group of people in the same space!

Mid-session, your camper:

- Will begin to find his/her place in the group and establish friendships
- Is becoming more involved in activities and falling into a routine with Trail Blazers
- Will generally not be as homesick, and homesick letters will become less frequent

### End of Session

By the time of your child's Vagabond and beyond, when the end of camp is around the corner, your child:

- Feels a sense of ownership at Trail Blazers and within the small camp group
- Is part of a small camp group that has formed a group identity
- Has a mix of feelings about going home, including feeling sad about the end of the camp and leaving the friends he/she has made
- Feels a sense of accomplishment from living in the woods for 2 weeks

### A Note on Homesickness

We expect that every child (and many staff members!) will experience homesickness at some point during the summer. We generally don't send a child home for homesickness. A big part of what makes sleep away camp such a valuable experience is confronting challenges in a safe environment where you are supported through overcoming them on your own. These challenges range from the more overt examples, such as riding a bike up a mountain trail, to facing feelings of homesickness.

We recognize the difficulties of spending time away from home, but also recognize the benefits the child receives when they stay for the full length of the program. Each child is an integral part of their group. Removing your child from camp early not only affects their experience and opportunities, but also those of their group members.

To ease homesickness, we:

- Let children talk about their feelings
- Allow plenty of time to write letters home
- Help children focus on fun activities
- Encourage children to think about one day at a time
- Focus on team building within the small camp groups to create strong and supportive communities
- Contact families to inform them, and reassure the child that the family is safe

### How to Prepare for Camp

Share information about Trail Blazers with your child and find out how he or she feels about camp before signing up. If you must work during your child's camp session, or if going to camp makes it

possible for you to take a vacation, let your child know this. It is important that he or she is a part of the decision to go to camp. This can play a big role in how successfully campers adjust to their time at camp, and can determine whether or not the experience is a positive one.

Reading through this handbook together is a great way to ensure that your camper is prepared for the summer adventure that lies ahead!

## Camper Info

### Where is Trail Blazers?

Trail Blazers is located in Montague, New Jersey. This is in Sussex County in Northern New Jersey and is about 1 ½ hours bus drive from Manhattan. We will pick you up and drop you off!

### Where will I live?

The coolest thing about Trail Blazers is that you get to live outside! Everyone at Trail Blazers lives in canvas-covered shelters: teepees or platform tents – but NO CABINS. You will sleep in a bed with sheets and blankets, and will be protected by a mosquito net at night. You will go to the bathroom in a latrine (a non-flushing toilet). You will wash your face and brush your teeth twice a day. You will shower daily in one of our shower houses.

### What will I do at camp?

While at Trail Blazers, you will swim every day, you will go hiking, learn how to build a fire, learn how to cook outside, study nature, do arts and crafts, play games, sing songs, perform in skits or plays, go boating, go on a treasure hunt, build shelters, ride bikes, go climbing, care for a garden, write poetry, and make new friends...and that's just to name a few! If you have any ideas of your own, bring them! One of the things that sets Trail Blazers apart from most other camps is that you and your small camp group will have a lot of say in the things that you do every day.

### Is there anything I won't do at camp?

One thing that we don't do at Trail Blazers is play competitive sports. We don't have basketball courts or football fields. You will, however, play lots of active games and get to do team challenges with your group. These challenges will help you learn how to depend on each other and get to know each other better.

### Who will I live with?

You will be in a group with 8 to 10 other campers who are about the same age as you. You will also live with two or three group leaders, the adults who will take care of you. You might not be in a group with a close friend or family member, because sometimes it is easier to make new friends this way. If you do come to camp with a friend or family member who is in a different group than you, you will get to spend time together a few times during the session.

### What will my Group Leaders be like?

Your group leaders will live with you, plan activities with you, and be there for you to talk to. Your group leader will be a young man or woman who is 18 years old or older. Most of them are in or

have completed college. Group leaders come from all over the United States and many different parts of the world.

### Can I call my parents?

Campers cannot use the telephones at camp. You will “talk” to your parents by writing lots of letters. We ask all of our campers to write home at least twice a week so that your family knows that you are safe and having a good time! Mail comes to camp every day but Sunday. You cannot bring a cell phone to camp, and there are no computers for camper e-mail use.

### Can my parents or family members come visit me?

Parents/guardians and family can visit before camp at our Open House in June, but your parent/guardian and family cannot visit while you are at camp.

### What will the food be like?

You will eat a lot of different foods at Trail Blazers. Some food you may have tried before and others might be new. Everyone is expected to try everything that is served, so we have what we call our “Three Bite Rule”. If we’re serving something you don’t like, or are unsure of, you can ask for three bites, which is a small taste. If you like it, you can get more; if not, that’s all you have to eat of that item! You get to choose how much food you are served, so you are expected to finish everything you ask for. Also, we don’t serve candy or soda, but you will get to eat lots of tasty, homemade desserts and s’mores!

### What are my responsibilities at camp?

At Trail Blazers, everyone has to pitch in and do their share. You are responsible for keeping your personal belongings tidy, making your bed, brushing your teeth, and changing your clothes daily. You will also have a job each day to help your group run smoothly. This might include tidying the campsite, keeping a record of the day’s activities, or lighting the pow-wow fire. You will also help your group complete the group community job each day. Camp is more fun when everyone takes a little bit of responsibility.

### What should I bring to camp?

You will be given a clothing list explaining exactly what you need while you are at camp. You should bring warm weather clothes and cold weather clothes. You also need to bring rain-gear, shoes you can comfortably walk in, and a bathing suit. Don’t forget soap, shampoo, insect repellent, lotion, toothbrush, and toothpaste. Make sure you put your name on everything.

### Is there anything I shouldn’t bring to camp?

Please don’t bring anything valuable! This includes phones, tablets, video games, e-readers, or radios. You should also leave ALL JEWELRY at home. You will be asked to remove it at camp for

safety reasons, and we can't always guarantee that it will not get lost. You will need a bag lunch for the bus ride, but you should not bring any other candy, soda, or other food. Guns, knives, weapons, cigarettes, and drugs other than those prescribed by a doctor are NOT ALLOWED at Trail Blazers and will cause you to be sent home.

## Packing List

Please pack **old clothing** for your child and **label** all clothing. If your child arrives with unlabeled belongings, we will label them with a permanent marker. Items NOT on this list that are brought to Trail Blazers will be stored until your child's departure. Please do not pack things that you do not want to risk getting lost or dirty.

Bedding can be provided by Trail Blazers, or feel free to pack your own – sheets, pillow cases, pillows, and blankets for small camp living, and sleeping bags for Vagabonds.

### Required Clothing

12 pairs of underwear

12 pairs of socks

3 pairs of pajamas

8 t-shirts

2 long sleeve shirts

3 sweaters or sweatshirts

4-5 pairs of shorts

3-4 pairs of long pants

2 bathing suits

2 pairs boots/sturdy shoes

1 high-quality rain jacket

1 hat or cap

### Suggested Items

Photos of family

Book to read

Stationary and stamps

### Required Items

Day pack (small backpack)

Water bottle

Sunscreen

Insect Repellent

Flashlight

Flip flops, crocs, or shower shoes

1 laundry bag

2 towels

Toothbrush and toothpaste

Soap and shampoo

Sanitary supplies

Comb or brush

### Do NOT pack:

Food

Phones, tablets, or electronic games

Anything requiring a plug

Knives

Jewelry, money, or valuables

## Contact Information

Remember, if you have any questions that were not answered in this booklet, ask us. You can plan to stop by the office, call or email. Below is all the information you may need during the year and summer to contact us.

### Phone Numbers

Brooklyn Office: 212-529-5113

Camp Director: 917-594-7792



### Email

Christopher Thomasson, Camp Director: [cthomasson@trailblazers.org](mailto:cthomasson@trailblazers.org)

Registration Team: [registration@trailblazers.org](mailto:registration@trailblazers.org)

### Brooklyn Office

394 Rogers Ave

Brooklyn, NY 11225

### To Write to your child

Trail Blazer Camps

Child's Name

210 Deckertown Turnpike

Montague, NJ 07827

