



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# YMCA Camp Onyahsa

## 2026 Parent and Camper Handbook

**FOR FUN  
FOR FRIENDS  
FOREVER**

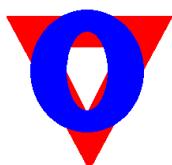
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**Summer Site Address:**  
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Dewittville, NY 14728  
Phone: 716-753-5244



Dear Campers, Parents, Guardians, and Friends:

Thank you for choosing to join the YMCA Camp Onyahsa Family! To help ensure that your experience with us is memorable in a special way, please consult the following essential information and policies carefully for your child's benefit. Please also remember that final payments (Daxko) and online health forms (UltraCamp) must be received *eight days prior* to the start of your camp session.

Prior to your campers' session, you will receive finite check-in times. Please adhere to them to prevent congestion on our road and limited parking areas. All luggage will be placed in our Welcome Depot for high-heat treatment to prevent the incursion of parasites on luggage or bedding. Therefore, remove electronics, foods, or other items that may be damaged by high heat. We will deliver belongings to your camper's cabin after the half-hour treatment. Please bundle items and *include your child's name*. Unfortunately, this process may slow down check-in procedures, but we will all feel more secure knowing that bedding and cloth belongings have been properly treated.

All campers should bring loads of enthusiasm, an openness to have fun, a willingness to try new and challenging things, and a desire to make lasting friendships to Onyahsa. The things we're sure they will take home from Camp are a lifetime of special memories, increased self-confidence, new friendships, and healthy attitudes.

Please take the time to meet and speak with your child's leaders, health staff, and counselors on arrival day. If any camper has a question or *any* type of problem, please instruct them to speak with their Counselors and/or the Camp Directors immediately. Parents, please feel free to contact the administrative staff if you have questions or concerns.

We are constantly on duty, and we are here for you. We are looking forward to camping with you soon. Thanks for registering for a great camping experience with YMCA Camp Onyahsa!

Sincerely,



Jon O'Brian, Camp Director  
and the Onyahsa Staff



## THE ONYAHSA MISSION

YMCA Camp Onyahsa was established in 1898, and today its Mission is “*to foster the Spiritual, Mental, and Physical well-being of Camp Participants of varied backgrounds and abilities within a nurturing Outdoor Environment, while creating a meaningful sense of Community among them.*” Central to this personal and social growth is the strengthening of traditional values; especially Honesty, Caring, Respect, and Responsibility.

*Our Vision is to empower Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility through quality camp experiences that place a premium on safety, health and happiness.*

Camp Onyahsa is owned and operated by the YMCA of Jamestown, New York. It is accredited by the American Camp Association and licensed by the State of New York. In 2026 it celebrates its 128<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

## THE ONYAHSA PHILOSOPHY

Onyahsa exists to build strong kids, strong families, and strong communities. Central to this vision is positive youth development. We believe resident camping should be fun, but not equated with amusement or a mere vacation. Likewise, with an average residential camper enrollment of fewer than 100 per session, we are a small camp that fosters a *real* sense of belonging. We are not a “Big Box” program; we adhere to small “class” sizes. Here, each child belongs, and no one is a “number.” Important learning takes place at Camp as we develop life skills, explore talents, and find new interests. Research has shown that quality resident camps are successful in promoting these outcomes.

**Spiritual Growth:** At Onyahsa we share and live positive values and develop character traits that include honesty, respect, responsibility, and caring. We learn to make better decisions, become more appreciative of diversity, and grateful for the gift of life and the beauty of Creation. We come to understand that we are all connected to each other and the planet.

**Growth in Intellect:** Emotional intelligence and critical thinking are vital life skills. Appropriate to our developmental level, Camp can help us to explore, develop creativity, enhance our sense of self-worth and resiliency, become more emotionally independent, and face new situations with an open mind. By thinking critically, we can respond to adversity rationally.

**Physical Well-Being:** Onyahsa stands for safe, healthy, and active lifestyles. We learn that wellness includes moderate exercise, good nutrition, stress management, relaxation, proper rest, and a realistic self-image. We stand against negative behaviors and poor life-decisions that put the health and lives of ourselves and others at risk.

**The Experience of Community:** We believe that in the truest sense, “Community” is not a place, but a positive and genuine experience of interdependent belonging. We try to foster a sense of family where we exercise improved social skills including leadership, peer mentoring, teamwork, and cooperation. We do not foster a competitive environment, but focus instead on working

together, doing our share, respecting others, and creating lifelong friendships among individuals of varied backgrounds and abilities.

### **WHAT TO BRING TO CAMP:**

- Sleeping bag and blanket
- Twin sized (single) fitted bed sheet
- Pillow and case
- Warm, water-repellant jacket
- Sweatshirt
- Water shoes (or old shoes) – must be worn in the lake to protect feet. Do not wear these beyond the lakefront.
- Athletic shoes – one pair to remain dry, the other to get wet (2 pairs)
- Shower sandals (for indoors use only)
- Suitcase/duffel bag or backpack
- Toiletries bag with toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, deodorant, shampoo, & comb/brush
- Laundry bag
- Raincoat/poncho and boots (when it rains at Camp it pours!)
- Shorts, jeans, light-colored T-shirts
- Underclothes, socks and warm pajamas
- Cap or hat with a brim; light colored for protection from the sun
- Two swimsuits (please be modest)
- Towels/washcloths
- Flashlight (check the bulb first) with new batteries
- Sunscreen (SPF 45 or higher), lip balm
- Sunglasses
- Insect repellant (non-aerosol, please instruct camper in proper use)
- Reusable stainless steel water bottle
- Small travel-size games or a deck of cards; and if age-appropriate, a stuffed animal/toy
- Letter writing supplies, stamps, or a journal
- Books or other appropriate reading material
- Self-addressed, stamped envelopes to send mail home
- A photo of family members, or pets (in case of homesickness, and to share with friends)
- Optional items include a disposable camera with film, fishing or sporting equipment, and inexpensive musical instruments
- Please put your camper's name on all items!
- You may wish to give the administration camper mail on the first day, or send it *well prior* to their departure from Camp.

### **DO NOT BRING:**

The following items are NOT allowed at YMCA Camp Onyahsa: food, pets, music boxes, electronic games or gadgets, laptop or tablet computers, cash, expensive items, skateboards, rollerblades, fireworks, matches, scooters, jack knives or any type of weapon, illicit substances, inappropriate materials, *open heel (flip-flop) sandals to be worn outdoors*, or dark or black clothing to be worn in the sun. *See also the phone policy (below). The Camp has a "no nut" policy due to the prevalence of allergies.*

If present, prohibited items will be put in the Main Office for the duration of the camp session. Any valuables (such as passports, money, and airline tickets) must be deposited in the Camp's safe. Please give these items to Camp Administration upon arrival. Camp Onyahsa cannot be held liable for lost items. If it is brought to Camp, the camper should see to its safekeeping and care.

Please check the Camp's Lost and Found at the base of the flagpole before departure. Lost items will be held until the end of the summer season.

### **ONYAHSA PHONE AND COMPUTER POLICY**

The widespread use of cell/smart phones, tablets and laptop computers has caused new challenges in the camping environment; one that should be based on a peaceful repose from society. New research is pointing to the adverse effects of prolonged and unsupervised use of such devices, especially for social media on the physical and emotional well-being of youth.

The use of devices between camper and home to communicate minor camp adjustment challenges "short-circuits" the camp experience by denying the camper the opportunity to work-out such issues with the assistance of staff. In short, it denies them the ability to build resiliency, self-confidence, and a sense of autonomy.

We do encourage campers to write home (please include stamped, self-addressed envelopes with your camper) or sign up for our printed email system. Please also know that parents may phone the Camp Administration and that the leadership will contact you if your child is experiencing problems, injury, or illness.

We ask that smart phones, smart watches, laptops and tablets not be brought to Camp.

However, recognizing that complete prohibition might be untenable for some families; the following policy will be in place:

1. Any phone or tablet/computer/smart watch brought to the Camp will be turned in to the registration table upon check-in, where it will be kept under lock. It will be retrieved by parents upon dismissal, in the Mess Hall.
2. No cell/smart phone/tablet/smart watch use will be permitted on Sunday afternoon/evening.
3. With parental permission, campers may choose to use phones/tablets/laptops in a limited and restricted manner during lunch (1:05-1:40pm). Phones will be used in a supervised and central location that will not include restrooms or cabins.
4. Campers who are in possession of phones and devices outside of the daily phone period will have these devices locked in the main office until the end of the session.
5. Parents who receive a negative message from a child will communicate any relevant issue to the Camp Administration immediately. Help us to help your child develop autonomy.
6. Campers who use phones/devices will not engage in bullying, participate in inappropriate communication, visit unsuitable web sites, or take photographs that are disrespectful.
7. Campers will not communicate with anyone outside of the Camp who has not been previously approved for such communication by the camper's parent(s), nor will any phone user invite anyone to the Camp who is not listed on their registration form.
8. Device use will be available only for communication purposes, not for viewing video.
9. Exceptions may be made for medical conditions such as diabetes monitoring.
10. Campers who remain at Onyahsa over the weekend will have broader use (more time/less direct supervision of phones and devices) during the interim session if parents permit.



## **THE CAMP SITE AND FACILITY**

Camp Onyahsa was founded in 1898 and is *one of the longest-established YMCA resident camps in the nation*. This beautiful lakefront camp is nestled within 180 wooded acres along the shores of northern Lake Chautauqua.

Its facilities include a large, winterized dining hall, year-round lodges, crafts shop, sports fields, nature areas, cabins and tents. Recent development has created a beautiful year-round facility. The site is available for group use Sep-June. Onyahsa is located at 5411 East Lake Road (aka Route 430) in Dewittville, New York, 14728.

## **HEALTH and CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURE FORMS**

Our top priority is the safety, health, and happiness of your camper. While no place is accident-free, statistics show that the organized camping environment is actually safer than that of the school or home. To prepare for your camper's health needs, Health History, Physician's Authorization, and Confidential Disclosure Forms *must be fully completed online at least two weeks before the camper arrives, in accordance with New York State Health Codes*.

All campers must have received a physical examination within the last 12 months, be in good health, and have all immunizations required for school, including an up-to-date measles vaccination. List these immunizations and dates administered, or attach a record from your primary physician. *By mandate of the NY State Health Department, the applicant's healthcare provider must complete the Individualized Orders form to allow the Camp Health Director to administer standard over-the-counter and/or prescription medications.*

*The camper's personal insurance and emergency contact information is also required.* The Camp's Health and Accident insurance only covers incidents beyond those covered by the camper's own family policy. (International campers, check the Health Form to review medical and immunization requirements for U.S. camps and to obtain travel insurance).

A Health Director resides on-site, and will be available for consultation during check-in hours. The Participant Health form will allow the Onyahsa staff to better serve your child. Please complete and submit this form with your Health Information. This information is kept confidential.

If your child will reside seven or more consecutive nights at resident camp, consult and complete the information on Meningitis included in the Health Form. *Under State law, completion is not necessary for campers staying fewer than seven consecutive nights. (One camp week equals six nights)*



## **PARTICIPANT ACCEPTANCE POLICY**

YMCA Camp Onyahsa is a traditional co-educational resident summer camp that will make reasonable accommodations to provide program experiences for participants regardless of needs. YMCA Camp Onyahsa conducts a general camp program that is not equipped to provide specialized services for participants with extraordinary physical needs or for individuals with significant behavioral problems.

Onyahsa offers a basic camp experience, staffed by young adults ages 16 and over. It does not provide 24-hour/day "eyes on" or one-on-one supervision by certified mental health professionals. As is the case with a predominance of summer camp programs, the YMCA Camp Staff members are not certified in Special Education, counseling, or other fields. Therefore, the following rules apply for acceptance into this program:

1. The decision to admit or deny admission to a participant in YMCA Camp Onyahsa's programs due to a medical condition, developmental disability, or behavioral history will be based on the Administration's determination to the extent of the child's ability to participate in the program, and the ability of the staff to reasonably meet the needs of the child. Written information regarding special behavioral or medical needs, including a copy of the applicant's IEP, must be received by the Camp Administration prior to June 1, and a conversation with the Camp Administration is required at least two weeks prior to the child's intended arrival at camp.

2. Children who receive professional services due to medical/emotional/behavioral issues, and/or children referred to the program by a mental health agency, will not be registered for a camp experience without the prior permission of the Camp Administration. The Camp Director may waive this restriction for returning campers who had a successful camping experience at Onyahsa during the previous year(s).

3. The referring agency or family must provide on-site, 24 hour/day professional adult certified supervision if the applicant has:\*

- a. Been expelled from school or any camp program within the past 12 months.
- b. Been assigned to a restrictive placement for behavioral/disciplinary reasons within the past 12 months.
- c. A documented history of aggression, violence, defiance, inability to control impulses, or sexually abusive behavior towards others.
- d. Found guilty of a crime (misdemeanor or felony) or a legal infraction.

4. For any child who has received an out of-school suspension, or similar punishment within a school or camp program within the past 12 months, a letter from a school official or an agency professional that attests to the appropriateness of the camp program to the child's needs will be required prior to acceptance of the camper's application. This letter will also attest to the applicant's ability to adhere to the Camp Onyahsa Code of Conduct (below), which must be signed by all participants.

5. Children will be excluded due to these conditions:

- a. The behavioral or medical condition poses an unreasonable risk to self and/or the children or other staff with whom the child will come in contact during the program. If the director is unsure whether the child's behavioral or medical condition poses increased risk to oneself or others, the child will be excluded until a physician gives written notification to the Camp Director that the child may attend.
- b. The behavioral or medical condition requires more care than the staff members are able to reasonably provide without compromising the needs of the other children in the program.

6. For all camper applicants, a permission form must be signed by the child's primary care physician on the Physician's Authorization Form, attesting to the appropriateness of the child's attendance in the camp program, based on the child's medical and behavioral history. Moreover, all participants will be expected to obey and heed the directions of the Camp staff.
7. Certain programs within the Camp curriculum will necessitate additional behavioral pre-requisites; including Teen Camp, off-site trips, aquatic activities, weekend camps, and other programs. Generally, these will need a higher level of self-supervision and demonstrated responsibility.
8. The parent/guardian and the applicant must sign the Code of Conduct and Informed Consent.
9. The camper must be within the stated physical age parameters for the program.
10. Exemptions to this policy may be granted on an individual case basis. To apply for an exemption, please forward a supporting letter and documentation to the Camp Office by June 1. An interview with an agency caseworker will be scheduled within a reasonable amount of time.
11. Participants who feel they have been wrongly denied admission may appeal the exclusion to the Camp Onyahsa Committee.

#### **PHOTO and VIDEO/AUDIO RECORDING RELEASE**

Please complete and sign this release on the health profile on [Campdoc.com](http://Campdoc.com).



#### **RULES and PARTICIPANTS' CODE OF CONDUCT**

All participants are expected to follow the rules outlined in the Participant Code of Conduct, found on registration site. This includes the ability to self-monitor and the ability for participants to foresee the consequences of their actions. The Camp will provide *reasonable accommodations*, but will remove campers from the program who present an undue risk to themselves or others; as well as those who significantly detract from the Camp experience.

Please review these general rules and sign the Code of Conduct with your camper before arrival. While the main focus of the Camp program is not on rules and regulations, this Code of Conduct has been created by campers, staff, and parents for the safety, well-being, and benefit of all participants.

#### **CODE OF CONDUCT:**

All Camp Participants share equal individual human rights, regardless of income, gender, race, ethnic background, religious belief, ability, gender identity, national origin, or age; and as equal members of the Camp Community, each has the responsibility to adhere to the following general rules, based upon universal values established for the Common Good:

**Honesty**- Camp Participants are expected to show honesty by telling the truth, refusing to steal, and by demonstrating integrity and moral character.

**Respect**- Camp Participants are expected to respect other members of the Camp Community by using appropriate language and gestures, minding their own property, respecting the belongings of others, by refraining from inappropriate touching or photographing, bullying, and injuring others, and by listening to staff members, and following established rules.

To facilitate the protection of all Camp participants, at no time shall one camp participant (camper or staff) be alone with another participant in a private location, if at least one of the pair is a legal minor. We call this "The Rule of Two." At any time, please inform the director if your camper experiences or is wary of inappropriate talk or actions by an adult or youth camp participant.

**Caring**- Camp Participants are expected to care for others, as they would like others to care for them. All members of the Camp Community will refrain from being hurtful in language or action to others, and will seek to help others in need.

**Responsibility**- Privileges at Camp entail responsibilities. Camp Participants are expected to act with reasonable maturity and to be accountable for their actions. As members of the Camp Community, they must be in attendance and well-behaved at all assigned activities. Older participants shall serve as good role models for younger ones.

Cabin groups, Villages, and the Camp Community may expand upon these rules by common agreement, within the parameters of general Camp policies.

Rule violators who infringe upon the rights, well-being, and camp experience of others may be suspended from camp privileges, or expelled without refund.



## **WE ARE COMMITTED TO YOUR CHILD'S SAFETY**

Talk to your child about their experience at Camp, school programs, and other activities. Trust your instincts; talk to your child and their program leader if something seems strange.

Watch for "Warning Signs of Abuse": Unexplained bruising or other markings, disturbed sleeping or eating behaviors, abrupt changes in behavior such as anxiety, clinging, blood spotting, aggressiveness, withdrawal, or depression. Be watchful if your child is receiving special attention from an adult that other children are not receiving such as favors, treats, rides, increasing affection or time together—especially outside of school or other childcare activities, or having special "secrets."

Ask your child:

Is anyone scaring or threatening you?

Is anyone asking you to keep secrets?

Has anyone touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable?

Has anyone contacted you through social media in a way that made you feel uncomfortable?

Has anyone asked you to be alone with them in a private area?

Child Safety Resources:

Child Advocacy Program: (716) 338-9844

[www.capjustice.org](http://www.capjustice.org)

Childhelp's National Hotline (800) 422-4453

[www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)

National Children's Alliance (202)548-0090

[www.nationalchildrensalliance.org](http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org)

Camp staff may not contact your camper via social media/phone, babysit for your child, or engage in social activities with campers outside of the Camp parameters (program season). Contact the Camp Director if any of these policies is transgressed.

## **COMMUNICABLE ILLNESS**

To reduce the spread of viral or bacterial illnesses, which have become common in communal settings, please stress to your camper the need to frequently wash and sanitize hands. Children should also not touch each other or share personal items (i.e., water bottles) or food.

If your child has exhibited symptoms of the flu or Covid, (sore throat, muscle aches, fatigue, and/or a temperature of 100 degrees or more), or if your child has been in contact with someone who currently has (or who has very recently had) a communicable illness or has been in a region that has experienced a widespread outbreak of illness, *please contact the office to reschedule your camper's session at no financial obligation.*

Campers exhibiting these symptoms will be placed away from other program participants and sent home to avoid the further spread of illness. Please take your child's temperature and ask about her or his well-being shortly prior to arrival at Camp.

## **HEAD LICE ISSUES**

Head lice is a common childhood condition, and should not carry a social stigma. All participants will be screened on the first day of each week-long session for evidence of head lice and bed bug bites.

Under health protocols, the parents of any participant with evidence of nits, head lice, or bed bugs will be notified, the camper will be treated by over-the-counter medications by the Camp Health Director, and all belongings will be washed.

To avoid significant inconvenience, please check your child for head lice well prior to their arrival at Camp. Tools and videos for performing this quick inspection and means to treat infection may be found at <https://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/lice-directory> and [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

## **BED BUGS**

The incidence of bed bug contact has increased societally due to both environmental and social reasons. If your household has experienced bed bug issues in the previous six months, please let the Camp Administration Director know, and bedding will be provided for your camper confidentially. In this case, please make sure all clothing has been washed and dried at high heat before bringing the items to Camp. If the provision of clothing is difficult, the Camp will provide all necessary attire at no charge.

The exterior of sleeping bags and suitcases will be checked for evidence of bed bugs during delivery to camper cabins, and discreetly re-checked at the cabins by cabin staff. Items that show evidence of bed bugs will be confidentially bagged when all campers are absent, and washed/dried in commercial equipment by the Camp staff.

All participants (campers and staff) will undergo medical checks within the first two hours of Camp arrival for signs of injury, lice, nits, and bed bug bites as part of our general health screening. Participants found to have lice/nits or probable bed bug bites will be treated confidentially (shower, etc.) on-site by the medical staff. The belongings of campers who exhibit bed bug bites will be confidentially bagged and washed/dried appropriately.

The Camp will furnish clean bedding/clothing during the interim.

Campers are not to sit or lay on the bed of another camper during their camp sessions. If the administration believes there is a possibility of bed bug presence in a cabin, that group will be moved to another location while all exposed bedding/clothing is commercially laundered/dried, and the cabin is inspected and professionally treated for parasites/insect presence.

If evidence of bed bug presence is determined, the Camp administration will communicate to all interested parties. Campers who experience bug bites during their session should report it to the staff.

Families are advised to put camper clothing and bedding directly into a bag or washer upon return home, and not into the living/sleeping areas of the household, in the event that bed bugs or other insects are unknowingly present. Parents/guardians of any camper who exhibits signs of parasitic contact (beyond the ordinary mosquito bites) should contact the Camp Director.

## **BUGS, TICKS and BATS**

To minimize the risk of mosquito or tick- borne illness, please bring insect repellant (permethrin is recommend) to Camp and instruct your camper in its proper use, and how to examine oneself for tick infestation. Please also instruct your children about the potential dangers posed by bats, ticks, mosquitoes, and wild mammals (which could carry rabies and should not be approached or touched). See [www.cdc.gov/lyme](http://www.cdc.gov/lyme) for more information.



## **TREATMENT OF INJURIES**

All injuries are treated according to the American Red Cross First Aid Handbook, and parents are notified in case of any severe injury. Parents are also notified of any illness experienced by their camper for which

symptoms last longer than 24 hours. In case of emergency, all attempts will be made to notify emergency contacts immediately.

## **SWIMMING**

Lake bacteria levels may fluctuate in the summer. If they rise to unacceptable levels, we will substitute another activity for swimming. Always be sure to avoid consuming lake water, and have our staff swab any skin lesion with an alcohol pad upon exiting the lake. Campers should not swim if they are menstruating or have an open wound.

## **YOUTH WITH DIABETES CAMP (YOWIDICA)**

Onyahsa offers a full-week residential program for children with diabetes who have a physician's approval to attend the program. This session is designed for youth ages 7-14, who can assist in self-monitoring their glucose levels, dietary intake, and general condition. During this session, a qualified nurse and trained staff will be on duty. For more information, please contact the Camp Office.

## **TUITION DEPOSIT and REFUND POLICY**

Non-refundable deposits are required to hold the camper's reservation for any session. The balance of the tuition and fees must be paid in full at least *eight days prior* to the start of the Camp session to guarantee this placement.

Cancellations must be received at least two weeks prior to the start of the Camp session to receive a refund of the balance. No refunds will be granted for children who are sent home for misbehavior, misuse of cell phone, homesickness, violating the Camp's Code of Conduct, or other reasons beyond the Camp's control.

Since camp sessions cannot be filled during mid-week, no *per-diem* rate is available for late-arriving or early-departing campers. Most sessions fill to capacity, therefore balances left unpaid one week prior to a session's start may result in the cancellation of a reservation and its re-assignment to a wait-listed camper.

## **THE ONYAHSA ASSOCIATION**

YMCA Camp Onyahsa is part of a membership organization that seeks to foster community and

belonging. It is also an experience that serves to encourage responsibility. Therefore, each resident and day camper will become a member of the Onyahsa Association on an annual (12 month) basis for a small fee assigned at registration, to help fund camp's future.

Alumni and parents are also invited to join the Association to stay connected to Camp, and to assist in the development of an endowment fund. Association fee members will receive discounts on non-summer Onyahsa programs. The Association fee will be added to each camper's first resident or day camp week, and will be good for one calendar year. Current members of any YMCA who attend camp will be automatically enrolled in the Association at no extra charge.

## **CHECK-IN TIMES and PROCEDURE**

Check-in is scheduled based on your order of full registration completion. All campers arriving for their first session of the summer must meet the Onyahsa Director and health staff during this time. Due to its importance, this process will take approximately one hour and includes cabin assignments, health screening/collection of medications, moving in, and meeting your child's counselors. Based upon the order of pre-Camp registration completion (fully completed registration form, health forms, and payment in full), campers will receive a specific check-in time via email, several days before arrival. Please note that Onyahsa's natural outdoor setting has been designed to serve children, not vehicles. Thus, parking may be limited upon arrival. Your patience is appreciated, especially in the event of inclement weather.

**Please do not attempt to check-in early. The staff will be meeting to preview the week and will not be available.** Because the first few hours at Camp are among the most important, we also discourage late arrivals. If you will be arriving late, please notify the Camp Office at 716-753-5244 to guarantee your cabin assignment.

Please understand our need to comply with State laws designed to protect the health and safety of your camper. During check-in, all medications (in their original Rx prescription containers) must be given to the Camp Health Director, so please pack them separately. In accordance with state Health Department regulations, the camper may not keep them. (However, upon approval by the Camp's Health Director, mature campers may retain asthmatic inhalers).

## CHECK-OUT TIME and PROCEDURE

Camp sessions conclude on Saturdays, at 11:15 am. An awards presentation is held after brunch, from approximately 10:30-11:00am, and parents are invited to view the awards presentation. If you will be late for pick-up, please call the Camp Office at 716-753-5244. To officially check-out your camper, you must be the authorized pick-up listed in the registration system. Please inform their Village Leader of your identity, and sign your camper out so we know they are safe.

As our counselors deserve to spend this day with their own families, *all departing campers should be picked up by 12:00pm*. Please remember to check the Lost and Found (located at the Flag Pole), and to reclaim any medications and cell phones/tablets from the Camp Health Director prior to departure.

## DEPARTING WITH NON-PARENTAL ADULTS

If you would like the Camp Administration to release your child to another adult, such as the parent(s) of another camper, please inform the Camp Director and cabin leaders upon the camper's arrival to Onyahsa.

## CABIN ASSIGNMENTS

Cabin assignments are gender and program-specific, and are made by general age. We will do our best to honor the mutual placement requests of two campers of a similar age; however, like all accredited camps, in fairness to campers who are not attending with acquaintances, *we cannot guarantee particular cabins or cabin-mates*. Nor can we guarantee specific counselors, or promise the grouping of more than two campers. Our goal is to encourage new friendships and a sense of inclusion for all.

## FOOD POLICY

Central to our wellness aims, Onyahsa offers regular nutritious meals, and fresh fruit throughout the day. The presence of food or beverages in the living areas presents safety concerns with respect to food allergies, spoilage, and rodents. It also poses equity issues. Therefore, do not send food or beverages to Camp with your camper or post them during their

stay. **Such food items brought to Camp will be removed to storage until the end of the camper's session.** Special dietary foods will be accepted with camper's name clearly marked and stored in the kitchen area for serving under the supervision of the Health Director. If you want to send your camper a non-food care package, you are welcome to make and send one of your own.

If your child has a **food allergy**, note it on the Health Form, and also make the Camp Health Director and the campers' cabin counselors aware of their needs. Onyahsa does not serve soda pop, so campers who consume caffeine on a regular basis should limit consumption of soda for several days prior to arrival to avoid the onset of caffeine-withdrawal symptoms. **Foods provided by the Camp kitchen may have come into contact with peanuts, tree nuts, and other allergens during production by processors or during preparation at Camp.**

**We encourage Health Living, so please do not send or mail snacks to Camp. Participants may also have severe allergies, and we have a strict "No Nut" policy. Do not send peanuts or other nut products to the program.**



## ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY

Consistent with our goals of promoting self-reliance and genuine (face-to-face) social interaction, we limit the use of electronic technology by campers. (See Cellphone Policy.) To protect the privacy of all participants, each member of the Camp Community is asked to refrain from bringing electronic devices other than flashlights, analog watches, and prescription medical equipment to Camp. All prohibited electronic items will be collected and held for safekeeping during the camper's stay. Disposable cameras are permitted, if they are used appropriately. No cameras may be used inside cabins

or restrooms or in any way that would be inappropriate or disrespectful of oneself or others. See also our smartphone/tablet policy.

## **DAILY SCHEDULE and CAMP LIFE**

During check-in on Sundays, campers meet the administrative staff, cabin counselors, and each other. This is a very important time in the camp program. After parents introduce themselves to the cabin staff and assist the camper with settling in, the cabin group will engage in team-building activities, practice area fire drills, create cabin rules, discuss the camp program, take a tour of Camp, have a health check with the health staff, and (weather permitting) take a swim test. An assembly of all campers and staff follows, with an overview of rules and the program, and then we share dinner. After making sure we are settled in our cabins, we learn waterfront and safety procedures, then experience our opening campfire and the "Story of Onyahsa." There's a lot more to come during the week, so we get ready for bed and turn out the lights as the bugle calls "Taps."

During the week, the typical camp day begins at 8:00am with an assembly and breakfast. Campers then do responsibility-building small jobs ("details") around camp before beginning morning activities. Traditional campers participate in three interest group areas (such as boating, swimming, and crafts), while Teen and LIT campers spend the morning on an extended activity. Around 11:30am, the entire camp assembles for morning Clubs, followed by lunch, and thereafter a rest hour and cabin inspection.

In the afternoon, Traditional Camp participants rotate through three other activity areas while Teen campers have an extended period for their particular interest. The afternoon concludes with Afternoon Clubs. After dinner most nights is cabin time. An all-camp or village activity follows, and the day concludes with an all-camp program, such as campfires, skits, theme night, or specials.

Older campers typically have extended evening program time, or take an off-camp overnight trip to our forested land with staff.

As an outdoor educational program, activities and times will be flexible and contingent upon weather

conditions. We realize that campers have a variety of learning styles and strive to offer a variety of choices and activities appropriate to their developmental level. Throughout the program, our main focus will be on personal development and the creation of friendships. Our typical daily schedule is available online at [www.onyahsa.org](http://www.onyahsa.org).

All resident campers live in rustic cabins as members of a small group with their unit staff. They are responsible for keeping their living areas clean, as well as contributing to the general camp experience by performing small daily tasks. All meals are served "family style," and campers share table setting and clean-up duties with their cabin mates. The cabin group, consisting of about eight campers and two staff members, is part of a larger Village group of two cabins. Activities take place at the cabin, village, and all-camp levels. Campers must stay with their group or let unit staff know their whereabouts at all times. While staff members are trained to spot potential problems, campers should not hesitate to inform counselors, Village Directors, or the Director if they have any problems or questions.

## **WEEKEND CAMPERS**

Campers staying more than one consecutive week may spend the interim weekend at Camp for an additional fee. This fee includes all weekend meals, laundry, a recreational activity, weekend programming at Camp, a Saturday night snack, and Sunday meals. Weekend Campers should bring mesh bags for laundry, which will be washed by staff. This weekend experience is only available for mature and self-monitoring campers who are enrolled for consecutive sessions. Please register for the weekend stay if needed when registering for a camper's regular week; weekend registration is not automatic, and space is limited.

The weekend program is not available on the date prior to the season's opening or the final weekend of the summer program.

## **TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION**

For long-distance travelers, round-trip transportation to and from the Buffalo-Niagara International air, rail, and bus terminals is available for a roundtrip fee, per camper. All campers must schedule their *arrival* to the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport between 9:00pm and 3:00pm on Sundays. All departures from Buffalo Airport must be scheduled between 12:00pm and 6:00 on Saturdays. It is the

parent/guardian's responsibility to monitor travel times for unexpected changes, and to communicate such changes to Camp staff.

Please consult Onyahsa's transportation timetables before booking air, train, or bus tickets for your camper. Information on private livery services is available through the Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce or the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport. Campers arriving at airports will be met at the relevant baggage claim area unless other arrangements have been made. Rail and bus passengers will be met at the appropriate gate.

Any camper might be transported in YMCA-leased vehicles by Camp directors. These vehicles meet relevant safety standards and are driven by approved drivers. Campers will be loaded and unloaded according to name. They must remain seated and must wear seatbelts until advised to remove them by Camp staff.

### **MID-WEEK CHECK-OUTS**

Departing from camp mid-week is strongly discouraged, except for extenuating circumstances. These departures must take place between 9:00am and 5:00pm. Campers may not return mid-week. Please do not schedule your camper for a session(s) when they have out-of-camp conflicts. Contact the office asap if unexpected circumstances necessitate early dismissal. No refunds are available for early departures.



### **VISITATION POLICY and CAMP TOURS**

For the safety of all Camp Participants, *all visitors who arrive beyond our check-in or departure times must obtain permission for entering the Camp property outside of the check-in/check-out windows. Upon arrival they must report to the Camp office, sign-in, and wear a visitor's tag.* Such visits may not include living (cabins) or program areas.

**Please be aware that visitation of campers during the week often upsets children who do not have visitors, and creates distractions for the Camp program. Because the ideal camp experience is a respite from the usual routine, please do not schedule your camp session for conflicting events.**

While it is discouraged due to program interruptions, any camper who is leaving Camp mid-week must sign-out and *will not have the ability to return during the same session.* For campers who are staying for extended sessions, the interim period (Saturdays from 12:00pm to 5:00pm, and Sundays from 12:00pm – 2:00pm) is best for visitation.

If you would like to tour the camp during the summer season or anytime during the year, please call the Onyahsa Site Office 716-753-5244 or [office@onyahsa.org](mailto:office@onyahsa.org), to make an appointment, so we can arrange staff guides without detracting from the program and campers.

### **CAMP TELEPHONE POLICY**

From years of our own experience, along with that of other respected resident camps, we recommend that parents *do not call or text children* during their first camp sessions unless it is an emergency. If your child is experiencing significant challenges, is injured, or becomes ill, *the Camp Administration will contact you.* Many campers adjust well to camp *until a call/text from a well-meaning parent.* Campers may not use the phones without permission from a director, and are asked to keep this practice to a minimum.

If you would like to check on your child's progress and welfare, or if you just need reassurance, please call the Camp Director at 716-753-5244.

The best times to make calls to campers, in order to avoid program interruption, are Saturdays after 1:00pm, or during meals. If your child is a veteran camper who is staying for an extended period, please call them at a time arranged with the Camp Administration.

### **CAMP POSTAL SERVICE**

Although we think it best not to make frequent calls or visits, we *strongly encourage* you to write and post letters or one-way email to your children. It is also a good idea to send pre-stamped and addressed

postcards or envelopes, addressed to your home, with them to Camp. We also strongly encourage campers to bring journals to Onyahsa. The paper letters and cards tend to be those that are saved and cherished later.

Please address letters in the following manner:

**Camper Name / Cabin number**

**YMCA Camp Onyahsa  
5411 East Lake Rd.  
Dewittville, NY 14728 USA**

*We cannot guarantee the delivery of mail that arrives close to the conclusion of a session.*

**CARE PACKAGES**

While it is a nice thought to leave care packages for your child, *an undue number (or size) of these packages creates equity, dispersal, and storage challenges for the Camp.* We think it best to leave or send a written letter rather than physical items, unless your camper is staying for multiple weeks. Food mailed to Camp will not be delivered to the camper until their departure.

**ONLINE PHOTO GALLERIES**

Our photo galleries are available on our camp's website, YouTube channel, and Facebook page. There is no extra charge for this service. Please note that our top priority is to provide a quality camp experience for your child by directing staff resources to the on-site program, thus the photo galleries will not be updated daily.

**CAMPER-HOUSEHOLD EMAIL**

Sign up on our registration site for one-way household emails to campers by the set-up and payment deadline. These messages will be printed and hand-delivered to the camper at lunch daily.

Campers' handwritten letters will be scanned, turned into PDFs, and emailed to the parent. The originals will be mailed to the home address. You may pre-pay for this service on the registration form.

**HOMESICKNESS and CAMPER ADJUSTMENT**

An experience at a resident camp is challenging by its very nature, but it's one of the best means to foster personal growth. At Onyahsa, emphasis is placed on individual responsibility, independence, cooperation, and social growth, not merely amusement. Gaining autonomy entails

overcoming challenges, so campers may expect to experience a period of adjustment in this new environment. This is a *normal* part of the developmental process. Most youth (and adults) have these feelings, although they may vary in intensity. By meeting these challenges, the camper's increased maturity, resiliency, and self-confidence will help to make their next away-from-home experience easier.

We realize that sending a child to camp may be stressful, for both the parent and the camper. You can help to facilitate a successful camping experience by preparing your camper and yourself for this stay-away-from-home. Let your child help with the preparation and packing for the camp experience. Pre-camp overnight or weekend stays with relatives or trusted friends are strongly encouraged. You may also wish to visit the Camp prior to their week at camp, or to view the photographs on our online gallery. Monthly weekend camps at Onyahsa are also scheduled throughout the school year.

Set realistic expectations for the camper and yourself. Like life, resident camping will have its "ups and downs." This is central to the learning experience. While you cannot guarantee to your child that camp will be "wonderful every minute," but you can let them know that caring, committed, and competent staff members will do all they can to provide a positive experience for them.

*Most importantly please make sure the camper really wants to "go" to Camp; that they are not being "sent."* Attendance must be the camper's desire, not only that of the parent. Campers who are part of the decision-making process usually feel better about going to camp.

Often children experience homesickness if there is a major transition in their home life (such as a birth, death, major illness, or divorce), or if they feel the parent(s) will not do well without them. Moreover, the parent's own confidence in their camper's successful experience is instrumental in making it a reality. In short, a secure home "base" makes for a more successful resident camp experience. Be sure that you, as a parent, are willing and able to "let go," briefly, to allow the child to grow.

Sometimes parents unwittingly create a self-fulfilling situation when they tell a child; "If you have *any* problems, you can come right home." Minor "problems" *will* arise, and campers should be encouraged to work through them rather than to view going home as the first option. Challenges are part of camp environments, and reasonable and realistic expectations must be set prior to attending camps. Letting kids know that missing home and loved ones is a normal, and healthy, response to new situations that usually subsides after a few days, will help to reduce anxiety. Getting involved in cabin life and camp activities

is very important to overcoming these feelings and gaining a level of emotional independence and resiliency.

In addition, please let your child know that they may always speak with counselors and the camp's directors at any time if they are having difficulties. The Administrative and Health Staff reside on-site, and we are *always* on duty. Thereafter, they may telephone you, if they are still experiencing significant challenges. If this happens, you may wish to encourage the camper to stay by instructing them to "call back tomorrow if you still feel the same."

However, as the child's parents you know your child best, so we also encourage you to trust your instincts. Please communicate with the Camp Administration if you feel the experience is not working for your child so we can arrange a successful departure with you.

*Campers are not to leave Camp on their own (without counselor or parental supervision) at any time, as this "run-away" situation will necessarily and immediately involve the local Sheriff's Department. No camper will be forced to endure a camp experience they perceive as negative.*

To foster a successful session, please encourage your child to write home or keep a journal. Sending pre-stamped and addressed envelopes is a wonderful idea. Let them know that it's "going to be great," that you will be "OK" without them for a while, and what a "wonderful" experience they will have.

Upon check-in, please have your new camper greet the Directors, get cabin assignments, and meet the area staff. Then accompany your child to, and help them settle into the cabin. Please introduce yourself and your child to the group's counselors, and then please allow the cabin group to begin its formation. Please also discuss your expectations for your child with their counselors during cabin check-in.

Depending on the child's age, a stuffed animal and family photo may be helpful in alleviating homesickness. In addition, reviewing the camp's daily schedule and photos (found on the camp's website) prior to the camp experience may be helpful. More advice on setting the stage for a successful camp experience may be found at: [www.aca-camps.org](http://www.aca-camps.org).

Campers are often not ready for resident camping if they are unable to independently perform tasks such as dressing, brushing teeth, showering, cutting food, etc. For these youth, a day camping experience or short-term overnight program might be more appropriate. (See our summer Day Camp in the Woods, summer Mini Camp, or September-May weekend programs).

The staff is trained to foster group cohesion, and this team-building process begins during the first hours of the camp experience. Most children will overcome this period of adjustment if they get involved with the program and if you express confidence in their ability to cope.



## **CAMP STAFF**

The Onyahsa staff is comprised of adults and young adults who have been interviewed, screened, and trained by the Jamestown YMCA. Over 75% return from previous seasons, bringing their experience to the program. The Director, Jon O'Brian, Ph.D., is a local educator. He started at Onyahsa as a child, and moved through the ranks to become Director, a position he has held for more than 35 years. The administrative staff is comprised of adults, most of whom hold bachelor's degrees, and often teaching certifications. The directors and a health supervisor reside on-site during camp sessions.

Counselors live directly in cabin areas, which have an average of two staff members per eight campers. In addition to regional staff, several international counselors join the Onyahsa Community each summer. Staff members receive training prior to the camp season on issues such as recognizing subtle signs of homesickness, handling delicate matters discreetly, and safety procedures. They meet regularly through the summer to communicate and learn leadership skills.

## **GRATUITIES and TIPS**

As a professional American Camp Association accredited program, which seeks to promote equality within the Camp Community, tipping counselors is forbidden. Parents wishing to show appreciation to Camp Staff may instead make a contribution to the Onyahsa Development Fund in the counselor's name.

## **ONLINE REGISTRATION**

You may register for camp sessions and find and print forms from [www.onyahsa.org](http://www.onyahsa.org), the official Onyahsa website. This site will also offer a link to our printed email service, FAQs, Camp Calendar, daily schedule, site rental opportunities, news, updated camp information, and email links to the Camp Director, Administrative Director, cabin staff, and campers.

## **ONYAHSA OUTFITTERS: CAMP'S TRADING POST**

Official Camp Onyahsa T-shirts, sweatshirts, caps, water bottles, flashlights, and many other official Camp items are available for sale at:  
<https://camponyahsa.itemorder.com/shop/home/>

## **TUITION ASSISTANCE**

As our mission is to bring together people from all walks of life, any local youth in need of financial assistance is encouraged to apply. Early registration discount programs, Ambassador incentives, and Multiple Week/multiple household camper tuition reductions are also available. Please contact the Camp Office for more information, or to obtain a financial aid form, beginning in the spring.

## **WAYS TO HELP**

Several fundraisers are held annually for our kids and the Camp. The annual Partner with Youth campaign, June Dockathlon, and Big Fish Triathlon help to fund scholarships to well-deserving campers. In addition, we will hold our November Gala for adults and a Polar Plunge in December. For more information on any of these worthwhile events, please contact the Camp Office.

## **CAMP ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Parents and guardians, we fully realize the tremendous trust you place in us, and while we deeply honor your confidence, we want you to know that we also need your involvement. If Camp is important to your child, please consider joining our Camp Advisory Committee. We really value your time, and would love to have your help in making Onyahsa even better! Please contact the Camp Director for more information.

## **THE SPIRO BELLO SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

The Spiro G. Bello Camp Teen Leadership Scholarship Fund, for deserving youth who display leadership qualities, has been created through the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation to honor the former Onyahsa Camp Director, who led the Camp from 1962 - 1984 and mentored countless young people. If you would like to apply for a leadership scholarship for a 14 or 15 year-old, make a contribution to this perpetual fund, or if you would like to receive alumni information, please contact the Camp Director.

## **ONYAHSA ALUMNI**

Alumni of all generations are invited to join the Onyahsans, a Jamestown-based online community of supporters. This group will assist in site projects, fundraising, historic preservation (photos and narratives), awarding the Bello Scholarship, and in general support.

Please consult the Camp Director if you are interested in joining this local and international community. See also our Onyahsa Facebook page for information and photos.

## **BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS GROUP**

If you would like to help our volunteer group of adults to maintain and improve the Camp facility through site work at varying levels of skill, or if you live a distance from Camp but would like to help this group's efforts financially, please contact the Camp Director.

## **MORE INFORMATION**

More information may be found at the American Camp Association website: [www.aca-camps.org](http://www.aca-camps.org), at our own: [www.onyahsa.org](http://www.onyahsa.org), via Onyahsa on Instagram, Camp our YouTube channel, or by contacting our offices: [office@onyahsa.org](mailto:office@onyahsa.org)

