

NEW RESEARCH!

THE HEART OF CAMP

BELONGING, RELATIONSHIPS, & GROWTH OF CHARACTER & SKILLS

Foundation for Jewish Camp's new study was published in the June 2026 issue of the *Journal of Youth Development*.

Belonging is not just an outcome of camp. It is the most powerful driver of growth.

When campers experience belonging, build meaningful friendships, and are supported by caring counselors, they develop the skills and character strengths that help them thrive long after summer ends.

STUDY AT-A-GLANCE

1,225 middle & high school campers surveyed at

5 Jewish overnight camps

THANKS TO PARTICIPATING CAMPS

Camp Ramah in Wisconsin
6 Points Sports Academy
Emma Kaufmann Camp
URJ Crane Lake Camp
Camp Laurelwood

Counselors Make a Difference.

Counselors who actively helped campers treat one another kindly had a measurable impact. For campers experiencing lower belonging, supportive counselors helped offset negative effects and were associated with higher reported growth.

Friendship Matters.

Campers who made at least one new close friend reported significantly higher growth than those who did not. This was true for new and returning campers.



85%

OF CAMPERS SURVEYED MADE AT LEAST ONE NEW CLOSE FRIEND AT CAMP.

How Camps Can Act on This:

- ✓ Prioritize belonging as a core outcome
- ✓ Create opportunities for new friendships
- ✓ Train counselors in kindness, inclusion, & relationship-building
- ✓ Identify campers who may feel disconnected
- ✓ Help campers reflect on their growth & character development

HOW DO WE MEASURE BELONGING?

Campers feel...

ACCEPTED for who they are
INCLUDED in the camp community
CONNECTED to peers
COMFORTABLE being themselves
CARED FOR by adults

High Belonging + High Skill Development

Campers reporting stronger belonging consistently reported stronger skill development across the skills to the right.

Those who experienced both high belonging + high skill development were significantly more likely to identify growth in leadership and teamwork. These strengths emerged as hallmarks of highly connected camp experiences.



Research funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

Link to full article: Moser, Rosen, Elias, Sprayberry & Ettekal (2026). *The Heart of Camp: Belonging, Relationships, and Growth of Character and Skills*. Journal of Youth Development.