

Included below is a copy of a “template” email that I sent to several day camps in the summer 2013, when Raine (name changed to protect her privacy) was eight years old.

Over the past five years, the various emails I have sent to summer day camps and sports camps have been similar in approach, although the content has differed depending upon where Raine located herself on the gender spectrum at the time of writing.

Please feel free to use/adapt this letter as you see fit.

My kid, Raine, is registered for [day camp name and session]. The reason I am writing is to ensure that she can be supported at camp.

In short, Raine is biologically a girl and normally goes by “she” but presents in appearance as a boy and identifies as neither/both male and female. Raine’s gender identify and appearance often comes with some challenges, including with respect to washrooms and change rooms. That is, gendered (male-only and female-only) washrooms and change rooms don’t work for Raine given how she identifies (or doesn’t identify), not to mention the response of others – kids and adults who don’t know her often “accuse” her of being a boy if she goes into a female-only washroom while some kids and adults who know that she is biologically a girl will make a big deal of it if she goes into a male-only washroom. The only real solution is for Raine to have access to a universal or single stall washroom. The same thing applies when it comes to changing in and out of her bathing suit. Do you foresee any difficulties in ensuring that Raine is not put into any difficult washroom or change room situations? Is there a universal or single stall washroom at the camp that Raine can use?

Another common challenge comes when Raine is meeting a new group of kids for the first time, which often leads to “are you a boy or a girl” questions. Although Raine can be very confident and articulate in responding to such questions, she is only 8 years old and her confidence can only go so far. With that in mind, the issue is not so much that she sometimes gets asked “are you a boy or a girl” questions, but rather those situations in which the person who asks the question keeps on asking and talking about it even after Raine has responded. As I’m sure you can appreciate, this can be very upsetting for Raine since the repeated questions/discussion can very easily and understandably be taken to mean that the person asking her the question didn’t believe her. And there is, of course, always the possibility of teasing and bullying. Some of Raine’s friends are going to be at the same camp, which may help, but I would ask that the counselors keep their eyes and ears open, particularly over the first few days as the kids are getting to know one another.

As mentioned above, Raine normally goes by “she”, but doesn’t mind being referred to as “he”. For example, in grade 1 half the class referred to Raine as “she”, with the other half using “he”. In other words, she can live with either pronoun – it’s having to choose one or the other (and all that comes with it) or defend herself for not choosing that’s the problem, which leads to another common challenge: instances in which kids are divided up by gender (e.g. boys versus girls or boys to this side and girls to that side). Is that kind of gender division avoided in the camp? I understand that kids often group themselves by gender, which Raine can normally negotiate. It’s the formal division as part of an activity that’s a problem.

Raine is very excited about the camp. We have, however, had a number of experiences where a camp Raine was excited about turned out not to be a positive or safe experience. With that in mind, I would greatly appreciate knowing in advance if you foresee any problems supporting Raine as described above.

If you would like to speak in person about any of this, please don’t hesitate to let me know.

Many thanks,
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