

# Life, Work & Family

Monthly work/life news for UAW-Represented DaimlerChrysler Workers

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## IS YOUR CHILD READY FOR CAMP?

So you've made your decision: This is the year. Your child is going to camp. Resistance is futile. Or perhaps it's the other way around: your child is saying that now is the time, and you're the one with doubts. In any case, there is no scientific formula to determine a child's camp-readiness. Every child is different, and parents can't forget to take into consideration their own needs and circumstances, as well. Try tossing around some of the following questions to see if the timing is right for everyone.



### Does Your Child Want to Go to Camp?

If your child is already talking about camp, you're way ahead of the game. Your job as a parent is to figure out just what it is your child expects the camp experience to be, and make sure that you're both on the same pages as you start researching possibilities.

### What Was Last Summer Like?

Did your children spend eight or more weeks last summer complaining about how bored they were? This is definitely a message: look at camp alternatives. Involve your child from the get go, and discover what's out there – it's far from boring.

### How Old is Your Child?

- **Children under 7** often have a hard time adjusting to being away from home, so consider a day camp where kids come home every night.
- **Children 7-12** are usually good candidates for resident camps, or "sleepaway" camps. Whatever their age, it helps if kids have overnight experiences at a friend's or relative's house before camp.
- **Teens (& 'Tweens)** who are "too old for camp" can find cool activities in travel, adventure, sports, and Counselor in Training programs, among others.

### Do your Child's Friends Have Summer Plans?

The last thing you want is for your child to be left at home with nothing to do, and no one to do it with. So make summer camp plans when other kids will be away. Or think about sending friends to camp together. It's great for anxious first-time campers.

### Will Your Child Care Program Take a Vacation?

Before it's too late, check with your child's regular child care provider about scheduled summer breaks. If there are any, a camp could fill the gap.

### **Could your Child Use a Change, or a Challenge?**

Maybe your child needs different kinds of activities than your child care arrangement provides. You might want to introduce a child who is timid or uneasy to new experiences. Also, kids are often ready to expand their circle of friends without realizing it. Camp can work wonders in these situations.

### **Could You Use a Break?**

If your role last summer was “town taxi” or “entertainment director,” maybe you’re ready to play “devoted parent at a distance,” and to give your child a taste of independence. If so, share your tales of positive camp experiences and start to explore today’s possibilities together – surf the Internet and take virtual tours of camps, attend camp open houses and get all of the information you need to find a camp that really fits all of your family’s needs.

Then, have a great summer!

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## **MAKING THE MOST OF SMALL TALK**

It’s easy to minimize the importance of small talk. To the people who are good at initiating casual conversations and connecting with other, it’s second nature and automatically part of life. But to the rest of us, social situations and one-on-one encounters can leave us feeling completely ill-equipped. Let’s face it: the ability to meet and greet and make people comfortable does make a big difference. Why? Because we live in a land of first impressions and we don’t always get a second chance. So even if “expert chitchat” isn’t on the top of your resume, here are some ways of handling the challenge, which could open doors.



### **Names Come First**

It might sound obvious, but it’s rule number one: the simplest way to approach someone is to introduce yourself, by name. Forget about coming up with a witty opener. Whatever the occasion or greeting, start by putting your name out there.

Your second step is to get the other person’s name. Again, this may strike you as a no-brainer, but it’s the little things which slip our minds when we’re uncomfortable.

### **Looks Do Count**

We’re not talking physical appearance here, we’re talking eye contact and the awareness of physicality. It’s essential that you look the other person in the eye while talking. This doesn’t mean staring, it means directly facing them, engaging their focus and staying connected – not allowing your eyes to wander off midsentence or roam around the room when listening.

Also, a firm handshake should generally accompany an introduction for both men and women. In most cases, the physical act can start to break down psychological barriers. Then, during the conversation, make yourself available by giving the other person your full attention. Stay aware of your own body language, and pick up clues from theirs.

### **Keep Things Light**

When venturing into a group of strangers or meeting someone for the first time, many people dread the prospect of small talk, or dismiss it as meaningless and boring. But small talk does have a purpose in our society. Keeping things light and casual actually gives us more information about who someone is and how they live their lives, than intense debates, which are burdened by the weight of the world’s problems.

Talk about the weather, entertainment, books, current events, sports, hobbies, or what you love and hate about your jobs. Compliment the other person if the compliment is sincere, and not inappropriate for the situation. Stay positive, be yourself, and remember to smile.

Are there forbidden topics when it comes to small talk? Probably. As a general guide, avoid talking about religion, politics, marriage, divorce or sex when you're just getting to know someone, whether on a personal or professional basis. To judge each situation, pay attention to whether the other person seems comfortable with your discussion; you never want anyone to be embarrassed about what they've shared with you.

### **It's Not About You**

OK. This is really the number one small talk rule; don't talk so much as listen. As much as you're able, let the other person do the talking by asking questions. Rather than bringing up topics that allow you to impress someone with your expertise, turn it around.

Find out about their interests, likes, dislikes, and experiences. Ask questions which are open-ended and lead to other questions. Keep your contribution short and sweet, and bring it back to them.

Listening—really listening, not just biding time and scanning the room for someone better to talk to—takes practice but it's a skill worth developing.

### **Is That It?**

Even if things are going well and you wish you could go on talking forever, let the other person decide how long the conversation lasts. Get signals from their body language, listen to their choice of words and when it's time, make a graceful exit. Remember that by definition, small talk is just that: a short chat.

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## **GETTING YOUR ELDER INVOLVED OUTSIDE THE HOME**



Research has shown that people who have a strong social support network are less prone to depression and may even be healthier. It isn't surprising that an older person who has few contacts with friends or community may dwell on ailments and is more apt to feel blue. This can become especially problematic with someone who suffers from a chronic illness or disability when it's harder to maintain activities and social connections. If you're looking for a way to help a loved one get more involved, either at home or in town, consider the following suggestions.

### **Getting out of the house**

Most people like to get out and do things. Older adults and those with disabilities can feel trapped in their homes due to difficulties with mobility and transportation. If your loved one has stopped driving, investigate options that would help. You can help organize a network of friends and family to provide rides for shopping, worship and other outings. Many cities have taxi programs for seniors, if your loved one can travel unaccompanied. Contact local taxi companies regarding their rates and the ability to load a wheel chair or help an older person in and out of the cab. Explore public transportation options including paratransit services.

### **Taking advantage of community resources**

Talk to your loved one about interests and hobbies. Try to get a sense of what would be enjoyable (bearing in mind what is realistic). Senior centers offer a range of classes for older adults, everything from social dancing to current events. Many centers offer transportation to and from their site. Look into offerings by local community groups such as:

- Art classes
- Poetry or writing
- Flower arranging
- Cooking classes
- Computer literacy classes
- Oral history workshops
- Choir
- Music appreciation
- Social dancing
- Book groups
- Religious classes
- Community gardening
- Bird watching
- issues/advocacy
- Volunteering at a library, day care center or charity group

In addition, most YMCA centers have fitness activities for seniors such as yoga, swimming or other physical strengthening.

### **Group care options**

If your loved one could benefit from social activities, but requires more care or supervision than a healthy active person could, consider adult day care or community respite centers (available in some cities). Adult day care offers a secure, safe environment where a loved one can socialize with others while having basic care needs met. In this setting, participants who might otherwise be at home alone can engage in a variety of activities with their peers from sing-alongs and crafts to current issues and therapeutic recreation.

Respite centers, often run by voluntary agencies, church groups, or as part of publicly funded services, typically cater to individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. They are small group programs meeting anywhere from once a month to a few days a week. Similar to adult day care, the programs give participants the opportunity to be with others in a secure, supportive environment. Your local Area Agency on Aging should be able to tell you if a respite program exists in your community.

### **Getting support at home**

Even if someone is homebound, there may be options for helping them feel more connected. Senior companions or "friendly visitors" are individuals who visit frail elders and disabled adults in their homes. In general, companions do not provide any hands-on caregiving. Instead, they offer company, conversation and some supervision. Many programs operate on a volunteer basis. This can be a wonderful opportunity for an isolated elder to develop a one-on-one rapport with someone.

### **Telephone reassurance**

A growing number of communities have established telephone reassurance programs, usually designed for seniors living alone. In most cases, the person receives a daily phone call to check in and see that everything is alright. If there is no answer, some programs will follow-up with an emergency contact or emergency services. These programs may be run through local senior services or even the police department.

### **Giving your time**

If family members live nearby, you can try to schedule regular visits and outings with a loved one. A weekly lunch or dinner, outing to the beauty shop or park can be routine ways to ensure that a loved one gets some company on a regular basis. You can also offer to help a loved one's friends come to the house by offering rides or helping prepare for guests (e.g., delivering food, straightening up beforehand or cleaning up afterwards).

If you're wondering how best to spend time together, think about a fun, ongoing project to work on. Ideas include organizing photo albums, collaborating on a garden, interviewing for an oral history or becoming a pen pal through an international organization or a group like The Pen Pal Network. For those who live far from their isolated family member, a regular telephone call is a good way to check in, chat and show you care.

**Benefits of a warm fuzzy**

For someone who feels lonely, a pet can offer unconditional love and companionship. Many people are devoted to a cherished dog or cat and the benefits can be mutual for both the pet and owner. Some studies have shown that being with a pet can improve well-being and lift spirits. While guide dogs for the blind are well-known, you may not know that canine companions for independence trains dogs to help people with physical limitations.

Pets require care though, so make sure your loved one can handle the responsibility of pet ownership (e.g., providing daily food, walking the dog, cleaning the cat box, regular vet visits, etc). You may be able to figure out a way to share pet duties to make it more manageable. If this is not realistic, consider visiting pets. Some residential facilities and day programs have "mascots" for everyone to enjoy. You can also visit the local Humane Society or Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) to find out about how to volunteer as visitors for animals in their shelters.

**Getting online**

If you're reading this on the computer, you know that the Internet isn't just for the young. More and more, people of all ages are using their computers to help them connect with others. If your loved one doesn't have a computer, consider getting them one. The Federal Trade Commission has a consumer tip sheet on purchasing low-cost computers. Special equipment such as modified keypads and voice activation software are even making computers accessible to those who lack finger dexterity or have difficulty typing. CareGuide's community and support allows people with common long term care and caregiving-related issues to connect and get mutual support. Joining an online support group can put even a homebound person in touch with the world.

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