WESTPORT WESTON FAMILY YMCA

SPECIAL CARES CAMP

FOR CAMPERS WITH DIVERSE ABILITIES

2027



PARENT HANDBOOK

CAMP MAHACKENO SPECIAL CARES PROGRAM HANDBOOK

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Families,

We are so glad you are considering Camp Mahackeno Special Cares program for your child. Camp Mahackeno offers our Special Cares program to campers who require a 1:1 aide for camp. This program is intended to benefit campers whose special needs would otherwise prevent them from enjoying the summer camp experience. Our mission is to create an inclusive, supportive, and safe environment where all campers can thrive, make friends, and have fun.

There are specific guidelines designed to ensure that as many special needs campers as possible are given access to the program and that the program is the right camp experience for your child. This Special Cares Program Handbook will guide you through our inclusion philosophy, registration policies, supports, and expectations. Please make sure to read it in full.

For general Camp Mahackeno policies, see the Camp Mahackeno Parent Handbook. The contents of that handbook are pertinent to all Camp Mahackeno campers and families, including those participating in the Special Cares program.



EMILY REGAN
Camp & Recreation Director
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YMCA CAMP MAHACKENO EST. 1938

OUR PHILOSOPHY

- Every child deserves the opportunity to experience camp in a safe, fun, and inclusive setting.
- We celebrate differences and teach empathy, patience, and teamwork.
- Inclusion is a partnership between parents, staff, and campers.



HOW TO REGISTER

REGISTRATION DATES

1st PRIORITY DATE • WWFY Family 1+ or Family 2+ members	**Opens January 8, 2027, at 8:00 AM**
2nd PRIORITY DATE • WWFY Youth members	**Opens January 13, 2027, at 8:00 AM**
COMMUNITY MEMBER REGISTRATION • Non-members	**Opens January 15, 2027, at 8:00 AM**



SPECIAL CARES REGISTRATION PROCESS

Camp Mahackeno has Special Cares for weeks 1-8 only (not Week 9). As such, there are specific guidelines designed to ensure that as many special needs campers as possible are given access to the program.

- **Registration is by Waitlist Only for 4 preferred weeks** via Camp Brain
    - All registrations will initially be by Waitlist.
    - If you register for more than 4 weeks, we will reach out immediately to determine which weeks to unregister.
    - Waitlists are not a guarantee that a spot will be available for the preferred week.
    - If additional weeks become available, we will reach out to offer additional sessions.
    - There is no fee to be put on the waitlist.
- **Required Forms due by January 29.** The following documentation must be submitted. The waitlist registration will not be complete without these forms.
    - A Special Cares Assessment Form, completed on Camp Brain at the time of registration.
    - The camper's most recent IEPs, Medical and Behavioral Reports, submitted by email to specialcares@westporty.org
- **Waitlist Registrations will be reviewed by the camp leadership**
    - Waitlist registrations will be reviewed when all required documentation is submitted. The sooner the Special Cares Assessment Form and IEP, Medical and Behavioral Reports are submitted, the sooner the camper's application can be assessed.
    - Camp Administrators will review all information to determine whether Camp Mahackeno can provide a meaningful and safe camper experience to meet your camper's special needs.
    - A parent registration meeting with Camp Administrators may be requested to determine whether our camp is adequate for your camper's needs.
    - The Camp Director has sole discretion to issue final approval of registration or to decline to admit a camper to the Special Cares Program. Our priority is to ensure your camper has a safe, productive and fun experience at camp and the determination of whether we can provide the services necessary for your camper's specific needs is our primary goal.
- **Offers of placement from the waitlist will begin in late January and early February.**

- Families have 2 days (48 hours) to accept a spot off the waitlist, whereupon the spot will be offered to the next child on the list.
- A $50 per week deposit and a one-time $60 registration fee will be applied upon registration. The payment plan outlined in the Camp Mahackeno Parent Handbook will be put in place. The payment, refund and late fee policies of the Camp Mahackeno Parent Handbook apply to Special Cares Program registrations.

FOUR WEEK REGISTRATION MAX

Each Special Cares camper is permitted to attend a **maximum of 4 weeks** of camp. If there is availability after all campers are allocated weeks, we will reach out to offer additional spots that may remain.

- **Facilitate Camper Stamina:** Long stretches in a highly stimulating camp environment can be tiring or overwhelming for some campers with special needs. Limiting the weeks prevents camper fatigue, stress, or regression in skills/behavior.
- **Equitable Access for Our Special Cares Community:** We keep our Special Cares program intentionally small to provide a safe, supportive, and meaningful camp experience. So that we can give as many Special Cares campers as possible in our community an opportunity to be a part of the program, we limit the number of weeks that each camper may attend.

SPECIAL CARES CAMP INFORMATION

WHO QUALIFIES FOR SPECIAL CARES CAMP?

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and all Behavioral Reports are required as part of the registration process. Documentation must be provided by January 29, 2027.

- Grade Limitations:
  - Special Cares is for campers who are **Rising K** (or turning 5 as of September 1, 2027) **to Rising 5th Grade**.
  - If you have a Special Care camper ages 3-6, you can also inquire about Special Cares at Camp Mini Mack by emailing kgigio@westporty.org.
- Admittance as a Special Cares camper is generally contingent on receiving 1:1 service at school. While an IEP does not, on its own, qualify a camper for the Special Cares Program, it is an important factor for consideration as well as whether the camper receives 1:1 services in school.
- A meeting with the Camp Director may be needed to explore what accommodations and support a camper might need to be successful at camp.
- In limited circumstances, Special Cares registration may be appropriate where the camper does not have an IEP or receive 1:1 services. This will be on a case-by-case basis.
- The Camp Director has sole discretion to issue final approval of registration or to decline to admit a camper to the Special Cares Program. The Camp Director may determine that:
  - Special Cares is the appropriate program to manage the accommodations and support needed by a camper.

- Traditional camp is sufficient to manage the camper's accommodations and support and decline to admit the camper to Special Cares.
- Decline to admit a camper to traditional camp if it is deemed that Special Cares would be necessary for the safety and maximum success of the camper, the staff and other campers, requiring transition to 1:1 support.
- Decline to admit a camper to Special Cares if the level of accommodation and support required is beyond the level that can safely be provided by our Special Cares Counselors.

- If a camper is registered for Special Cares, they will be ineligible to attend traditional camp for additional weeks without bringing a personal aide (subject to the Special Cares Attendance with Special Aide Policy on page 6).

SUPPORTS WE PROVIDE

Camp Mahackeno provides Special Cares Counselors who serve as a 1:1 aide during the camp day. Special Cares Counselors at Camp Mahackeno are staff who have experience with and an interest in or are studying special education. The Special Cares Counselors we provide are typical high school and college camp staff. ***While they provide support and care, Special Cares Counselors are not licensed or trained professionals in the special needs field. For this reason, the Special Cares program may not be able to accommodate children who require a higher level of support or professional care.***

- The Special Cares Counselors who serve as a 1:1 aide will assist campers in navigating the camp day. They will help campers with transitions, participating in activities, and making their way around the facility.
- Special Cares Counselors cannot assist in toileting, and all Special Cares campers must be fully toilet independent and able to swim without swim diapers.
- Staff training for Special Cares Counselors
  - Training includes approximately 20 hours of preparation focused on behavior management strategies, child protection policies, and emergency procedures. Counselors learn practical tools for supporting campers with mild special needs, including techniques to encourage positive behavior, de-escalate challenging situations, and create an inclusive camp environment.
  - Training also covers mandatory reporting, maintaining safe boundaries, recognizing signs of distress, and following established camp safety protocols.
  - In addition, counselors practice emergency response procedures to ensure they are prepared to act quickly and appropriately in case of medical, behavioral, or other emergencies.



- Commonly used support tools
  - Visual Supports: Schedules and picture cards

    - Flexible Programming: Activity adjustments when appropriate.
    - Sensory Tools: Fidgets, headphones, calming spaces.
    - Alternate drop-off and pick up times or locations, as necessary to limit overstimulation of Special Cares campers.
    - Scheduled parent check ins during the day, if needed by the camper
- Behavioral and Medical Support
    - The Special Cares Coordinator and Camp Health Director are on site daily.



PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

- Share accurate and complete information about your child's needs, including all IEPs, Medical and Behavioral Reports as well as the Special Cares Assessment Form
- Provide updated medical information, medication, and emergency contacts.
- Partner with staff on consistent strategies.
- Communicate proactively about successes and challenges.
- Be available to pick up a camper within 30 minutes if a behavioral or medical emergency arises or ensure there is an emergency contact who is available to do so.

BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS & SAFETY

As with all Camp Mahackeno campers, participants in the Special Cares Program are expected to follow our Camper Code of Conduct: Respect for self, others, and environment. If unsafe behaviors occur, staff will:

- Redirect and use calming strategies.
- Remove camper from an activity if needed.
- Contact parents or the emergency contact for support or early pick-up.
- In rare cases, if the safety of the Special Cares camper, staff or other campers cannot be maintained, the remainder of a camper's registration may be cancelled. Full or partial refunds will be on a case-by-case basis.



EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

- Staff are trained in crisis management and emergency action plans. Initial responses will always involve implementing those policies, including involvement of the Camp Director, the Assistant Camp Director, the Special Cares Coordinator and the Unit Directors
- Parents or authorized pick-up will be contacted immediately in the event of a medical or behavioral emergency.
- Parents must be available to pick up within 30 minutes if a medical or behavioral emergency rises to a level where the safety of the Special Cares camper, staff or other campers is at risk.
    - Parents must ensure that the emergency phone numbers for all parents or guardians are updated on Camp Brain.

- There must be an emergency contact provided by the parent who will be able to pick up within 30 minutes if a parent or guardian is unavailable.

CANCELLATION AND REFUND POLICY

The cancellation and refund policy contained in the Camp Mahackeno Parent Handbook governs cancellations and refunds for the Special Cares program.

PARTNERSHIP PROMISE



We believe inclusion works best when parents and staff partner closely. Together, we can help your child build friendships, gain independence, develop confidence, and have a safe, memorable summer.

CONTACT INFORMATION

- Camp Director: Emily Regan | 203-571-6045 | eregan@westporty.org
- Assistant Camp Director: Kathy Klaasens | kklassens@westporty.org
- Special Cares Coordinator: | specialcares@westporty.org
- Camp Health Coordinator: 203-226-2565 | camphealth@westporty.org
- Camp Office Director | 203-635-1954 | mahackeno@westporty.org

Please contact the Camp Leadership team at mahackeno@westporty.org to discuss whether Camp Mahackeno Special Cares is a good fit for your camper.

This Parent Handbook is designed to familiarize you with the policies and procedures of Camp Mahackeno, and to provide you with information about our policies, guidelines, and programs. It is not intended to be 100% comprehensive and, as a living document, the information contained herein is subject to change at any time. Such changes may supersede, modify, or eliminate existing policies, guidelines, and programs without prior notice.

Although we strive to communicate changes by publishing any and all revisions to the Parent Handbook in a timely manner on our website at westporty.org, a policy, guideline or program may be added, altered, revised, or discontinued without notice.