



Talisman Summer Camp

Exceptional Programs... Exceptional Children...
2026 Parent Handbook

64 Gap Creek Road, Zirconia, NC 28790
828-697-6313 (Camp Office)

www.talismancamps.com info@talismancamps.com

Dear Parents,

Welcome to Talisman! This handbook provides the information you will need to prepare yourself and your camper for camp. Look here first for answers to your questions and use this handbook to guide you through the summer and support your camper. Through cooperation and coordination, we can work together to provide your camper with a successful summer.

Please call us if you have further questions.

Thank you for becoming a part of the Talisman Family! Sincerely,

Admissions Director
Josh Gunalda

Important Upcoming Events/ Dates: (All times Eastern Standard)

PARENT WEBINARS & CAMPER E-CAMPFIRES

In an effort to help you and your camper transition to camp, we offer several online webinars for parents of enrolled campers. Learn details, ask questions, and alleviate any anxiety and fears you have prior to camp. Camper E-Campfires are your child's version of a webinar. Your camper will meet some of the staff prior to camp, get answers to any questions they have, and learn more about what to expect while at camp. Enrolled campers and families will receive an invitation.

1. **Talisman Camps 2026 Open House:** Saturday, March 28th, 10:00am-2:00pm
***If you are interested in scheduling a private, pre-camp visit with your camper, please contact Josh at josh@talismancamps.com or 828-412-1385*
2. **Pre-Camp Parent Webinars:**
 - A. Discovery, Sight, and Foundations Programs: Wednesday, May 6th at 6:30pm
 - B. Insight, Teens, and Young Adults Programs: Thursday, May 7th at 6:30pm
3. **Pre-Camp Camper E-Campfires (Webinars for campers)**
 - A. Discovery, Sight, and Foundations Programs: Wednesday, May 13th at 6:30pm
 - B. Insight, Teens, and Young Adult Programs: Thursday, May 14th at 6:30pm



Vision Statement

Talisman envisions a world where people with social, learning, or emotional differences grow together with their communities through acceptance, fun, and authentic connection.

Mission Statement

Talisman creates joyful, caring communities that foster confidence, independence, and authentic connections for young people with social, learning, and emotional differences.

Values Statement

Acceptance

We welcome each person authentically as they are, embrace differences, and celebrate individuality.

Growth

We foster critical thinking, confidence, and self-reliance through meaningful, hands-on experiences.

Integrity

We act with honesty and consistency, follow best practices for care, steward our resources wisely, and do the right thing even when it's the hard thing.

Connection

We build lasting relationships and facilitate them in the families we serve.

Joy in the Journey

We infuse fun, play, and the value of the outdoors into everything we do—because joy fuels learning and growth.

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Talisman Summer Camp

Talisman Camps is ACA Accredited ACA, or the American Camp Association, is the only independent accrediting organization reviewing camp operations in the country. Its nationally recognized standards program focuses primarily on the program quality, health and safety aspects of the camp's operation. ACA collaborates with experts from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Red Cross, and other youth-serving agencies to assure that current practices at the camp reflect the most up-to-date, research-based standards in camp operation. For more parent-focused information about accreditation, visit ACA's site: <https://www.acacamps.org/campers-families>

Talisman Camp's Philosophy

We are an experiential learning camp that supports children in developing physical and social competence in an atmosphere that encourages and supports self-regulation and self-direction. We believe that every child wants to do well, and that every child has unique strengths, struggles, and outlooks on life. In order to help all of our campers reach their potential, we must meet them where they are as individuals and not attempt to fit them into one mold. Therefore, we use a variety of tools to guide our campers as they strive to meet their objectives in socially appropriate and fulfilling ways. We believe that structure and accountability are critical in this process – as are positive relationships and the recognition of accomplishments – and that as a child's self-concept improves, they will make better decisions, relate better to others, and experience a more satisfying life.

About Talisman Summer Camp

Talisman Summer Camp provides opportunities for youth and young adults living with neurodiverse conditions such as ADHD, Autism Spectrum, or other learning differences to practice physical and emotional competence and a more positive and confident self-image. Our summer adventure programs encourage life skills development, emotional awareness, and their application in real life situations. This is achieved through community living, choice-based participation, and intentional group process.

Summer camp offers campers the chance to practice good decision-making as well as what to do when a poor decision has been made. This knowledge can be carried from the program and applied at home and school to improve relationships with friends, parents, and teachers. Most importantly, this knowledge allows our youth to feel good about themselves and be okay with their own differences. Talisman strives, above all, to provide a positive and fun environment in which our campers feel accepted and successful.

Statement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Talisman believes in the dignity and worth of every person. We commit to welcoming, including, and valuing people of diverse cultures, ethnicities, identities, faiths, and socio-economic backgrounds. We strive to create a safe and supportive environment which fosters respect, honesty, empathy, equity and belonging.

Talisman Contact Information

Email Contacts:

General information: info@talismancamps.com

Admissions: josh@talismancamps.com

Camp Director: Andrew@talismancamps.com

Medical Coordinator: medicalcoordinator@talismancamps.com

Finance and Billing: josh@talismancamps.com

Letters: Use the Companion Mobile App (Instructions below)

Fax: 888-807-5115

Website: www.talismancamps.com

Contact Policies: Program Managers will send an email at the end of Day 1 and again on the morning before Closing Day. These updates will highlight the overall group and program activities taking place. If parents have specific questions about their camper, they may reach out to the Program Manager directly via email to schedule a call or address their concerns. All program manager emails will be provided on opening day.

For many campers, summer camp can be an anxious time. It is common for campers to express dislikes about camp due to the new environment, different food, interpersonal challenges, and community living. Our counselors will support each camper in overcoming homesickness through patience and active engagement. We generally do not facilitate phone calls between campers and family unless there is an emergent need to do so. This is for a few reasons:

1. Homesickness is a normal part of camp. (see page 17)
2. Calling home can sometimes make homesickness worse
3. Overcoming homesickness with the support of counselors and peers can be very rewarding.

Examples of when we may facilitate a call:

1. Your camper has a birthday during their camp session
2. Family emergency
3. When mutually agreed upon between family and camp leadership that ongoing challenges may be managed best with a phone call home.

Opening and Closing Day Procedures

Detailed opening and closing day procedures will be provided for all campers and families in advance of opening day for your session. Generally, camper arrivals on opening day will be structured in 45-minute windows beginning at 9am and extending to 4pm. All campers are to be picked up between 9am-11am on closing day.

Transportation to and from Camp

1. Please fill out the transportation form on Camp InTouch or the Campanion Mobile App regardless of whether your child is flying or coming by car.
*If you are transporting them to and from the airport, they are car riders.
2. It is policy of Talisman Summer Camp that all transportation information is confirmed with parents and/or guardians.
3. If your child is flying and we are providing the shuttle, please include all flight information on the transportation form. Talisman also requires that parents pre-pay unaccompanied minor and luggage fees prior to camp or include money for luggage via a credit or debit card, as most airlines don't accept cash.

Airport Procedures

1. We ask that you schedule arriving and departing flights between 9am and 2pm into Greenville/Spartanburg, SC (GSP) or Asheville, NC (AVL).
 - If this is not possible, please call us to discuss the best options.
 - We recommend unaccompanied minor service or passenger assistance, especially if your child has never flown alone or has anxiety about the flight.
 - Let us know ahead of time if you are using this service and be sure everything is set up for the return flight. (Prepay if at all possible)
2. If you are flying with your child, please plan to rent a car and drive to camp. We will want a chance to meet you and show you around our campus. **We cannot provide round-trip transport to and from airports for parents. Rideshare services are not available from our remote camp location.**
3. Camp staff wearing staff shirts with our logo will meet your child at the airport. They carry a document with your child's photo and parent contact information. You will be notified when your child has been placed in our care. Similarly, we utilize a "wheels up" approach when campers leave. This means that you will be notified when your child's plane has left the tarmac and is enroute to their destination. Any flight delays will be communicated to you as well.

**If driving to drop off or pick up your child, please notify us if you will be late. This helps us alleviate anxiety in your child who is anticipating your arrival.

Lodging

If you and your family are looking for somewhere to stay the day before dropping off or pick up, the Asheville area has numerous hotels, B&B's and more. If you are looking for a great hotel close to camp we recommend:

1. Mountain Lodge in Flat Rock, NC
 - The Mountain Lodge offers suite-style rooms, a pool, complimentary hors d'oeuvres and a wonderful breakfast. Visit <http://www.mountainlodgeflatrock.com/> for a full list of their accommodation.
2. Mountain Inn and Suites in Flat Rock, NC
 - The Mountain Inn and Suites offers rooms and suites, breakfast, and a beautiful setting. Visit www.mountaininnflatrock.com for a full list of their accommodation..
3. Tuxedo Falls, Tuxedo, NC
 - For a more memorable experience, Tuxedo Falls offers upscale boutique lodging and unparalleled outdoor experiences. Whether you're chasing waterfalls or soaking in your private outdoor tub, their unique blend of high-end hospitality and wild, natural beauty makes for the perfect retreat. [Welcome - Tuxedo Falls](#)

Camp Registration

1. All campers must have a completed camp application in order to be considered for camp participation. The camp application may be found here: [Camp Application](#)

For all 2026 Sessions, Dates and Rates please visit here: [2026 Sessions, Dates and Rates](#)

2. Once approved and registered for camp, all families will have access to their "Camp In Touch" account using the same log in credentials created during the application process.

Log in here: [Camp InTouch](#) Here you will find a menu for important information:

- Forms and documents: All required forms and documents need to be completed and returned 2 weeks prior to your camper's opening day.
- Camper Application: You may view and/or update your camp application here.
- Contact Information : Here you may update your contact information
- Financial Management: Here you may make payments and check your camp balance
- Photos: Here you may view photos of your camper throughout camp

CAMPANION MOBILE APP:

Stay connected!! [PHOTOS, LETTERS, UPDATES AND REMINDERS]

The Companion App is the BEST way for you to stay connected to your camper's experience, receive camp updates, view photos and send/ receive letters.

1. Download the Companion App here: <https://companionapp.com/>
2. Provide a clear headshot photo of your camper. **Companion uses facial recognition software (Face Finder) to identify your camper in group photos and direct them directly into your Companion stream for viewing*
3. Using the "Hamburger menu at top left", you will see viewing options displayed:

**** Please enable "Push Notifications" for each section so you are alerted to new posts**

- a) **Stream**: Here you will find reminders from camp about paperwork, upcoming events, camp activities, etc., as well as photos and letter notifications
- b) **Photos**: Here you will find both individual photos of your camper, as well as full group albums.
- c) **Favorites**: Here you may view any posts or photos that you mark as "favorites"
- d) **Letters**: Here you may write and send letters to your camper and receive letter responses from your camper.
- e) **Registration**: Here you may view and update your camp application
- f) **Forms**: Here you may view and complete all required camp documents, FAQs, and access helpful information and instruction on the overall camp process, .
 - Most documents are electronic, allowing you to complete, sign and submit directly from your device*
- g) **Forms (Cont.)**: There are three required documents that must be printed, signed, and returned.

****You may return these three documents to camp via:**

 - Uploading directly to Camp In Touch
 - Email at office@talismancamps.com
 - Fax at **888-807-5115**
 - i. Authorization to Treat. This document requires a Notary signature and official seal that is clearly legible. Please bring a hard copy of this document with you to opening day as often times the notary seal is illegible due to scanning.
 - ii. Medical Clearance to Participate. This document requires a physician's signature.
 - iii. Camper Healthcare Recommendations. This document requires a physician's signature.

Our Programs

Base Camp Programs

Discovery: Designed for children ages 6-7 who may have ASD (autism spectrum disorder), ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), learning disabilities, or social anxiety. In six days, campers sample many of our popular on-camp activities. This program emphasizes both consistency and compassion, as campers build foundational skills in social communication and conflict resolution within a developmentally appropriate peer group.

Sight: For youth ages 8-13 with high-functioning autism. The program is designed to increase self-confidence, improve peer and social interactions, and encourage campers to discover and pursue their own unique interests and goals. A structured and comfortable atmosphere encourages campers to feel secure and accepted in their environment, allowing them to learn and have fun in turn. Our goal is to help each child have a fun and successful summer camp experience through making new friends, exploring new interests, and gaining independence.

Foundations: For children ages 8-13 who have been diagnosed with ADHD and who struggle with social and executive functioning needs. Campers participate in a wide variety of adventure activities designed to promote better communication and cooperation skills. Through our problem-solving groups, they practice personal responsibility, respectful interactions, and thoughtful decision-making. Emphasis is also placed on focus, organization, and achieving goals, as well as having fun and making friends.

Insight: Introduction to our wilderness programming specifically for teens with high-functioning autism. Groups learn and practice a variety of outdoor skills on an overnight backpacking trip, low-impact adventure day trips, and numerous on-campus activities. Staff work with campers to increase participation, responsibility, and independence, as well as communication and social interaction skills. Teens will often start at Insight and later try a Teen Adventure program.

Teen Adventure Programs

Teen Adventures offers more challenging off-campus expeditionary adventures that focus on skill mastery while building personal responsibility, leadership, and decision-making skills. We blend campers with ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and similar neurodevelopmental challenges so they may learn to appreciate differences and work with a more diverse group. Teens depend on themselves and each other throughout their expedition, helping to increase both independence and cooperative living skills.

Flora & Fona: Join us for an exciting, hands-on adventure into the natural world! Campers will explore local plants and wildlife through guided hikes to waterfalls, visits to a nearby nature center, and daily nature journaling. This immersive program encourages curiosity, observation, and a deeper connection with the environment through fun, educational outdoor experiences.

Mountain Odyssey: Campers will explore history, folklore, trails, and tales of Western North Carolina. They will travel across the lands of the Cherokee, pioneers, and rangers that made this area the first Wild West. Campers will take day and overnight trips to discover the courageous, fearless, adventurous, lawless, and fiercely independent people and culture of the mountains.

Quest: A wilderness-based treasure hunt for ages 13-17. The group learns survival and orienteering skills while searching for geocaches. This leads up to a multi-day canoe expedition on a lake, where they camp out on islands and seek treasure. The focus is on learning cooperation, problem-solving, and goal completion.

Tri-Adventures: For teens 14-17, this program provides an in-depth introduction to three popular outdoor sports while incorporating social interaction lessons into each day. Campers delve into multi-day expeditions in rock climbing, paddling, and backpacking. Campers hone leadership and decision-making skills while building self-esteem as they master each skill.

Caves & Mining: C&M is a great way to explore new heights and depths. The group explores many caves located in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. The focus is on proper technique, environmental education, and the geology and biology of caves and mountains. Then they visit a number of types of local mines and learn to pan for gold and search for gemstones.

Leadership (Teen and Young Adult): Our Leadership Program is for returning campers (16-22) who have shown great growth and potential in their years at Talisman. This program is a requirement for those campers who would like to apply to be on Krewe. The Leadership Program includes a wilderness trip, which the participants are responsible for planning, organizing, and leading. Other activities range from community service to assisting with running a full-campus event. This group runs independently with guidance from staff on important leadership skills and roles. The Leadership Program is a place to fine-tune and build on the social skills, communication skills, and peer group skills that our adolescents have learned throughout their years at Talisman.

Young Adult Programs

Young Adults: Our young adults, 18-22, who generally have ASD, focus on learning to become healthy and responsible adults. They work on independent living skills, which may include self-care, cooking skills, cleaning, budgeting, job readiness, and community involvement. They may go off campus to tour local community programs like colleges and transition programs or attend a community event. They also participate in traditional camp activities such as camping, rock climbing, and arts and science as further opportunities for physical activity, socialization, and practice in problem-solving and communication.

Krewe: For leadership graduates aged 16-22 who have been recommended by staff based on social skills level, trustworthiness, motivation, and readiness to take on greater responsibility for the camp community. This is a job preparation program; Krewe members are assigned work each day, including dishwashing, sanitation crew, and facility crew. They also assist counselors in other camp groups. They focus on learning time management, follow-through, and pride in work. Their tuition is half price; they also have an hour of electronics time each day and some more freedom of movement on campus.

A Typical Day

Every day is different for each program. Most days for the Teen programs involve a good bit of hiking, paddling or climbing, with group members increasingly taking charge of daily tasks.

Foundations, Sight, and Insight groups usually get up, clean cabins, do morning chores, eat breakfast, and head out into their day's activity. This could be a field trip to a waterfall, rock climbing, tie dying, swimming, or packing up for a camping trip. On campus, meals are served in our dining hall, and groups take turns with kitchen clean-up. Group discussions happen throughout the day, to plan for the next activity, to talk about what we learned in the last activity, or to resolve an issue. Evenings are time to wind down and prepare for bed. Cabin and activity groups are age- and developmentally based, allowing us to practice age-appropriate peer interactions.

Daily Schedule for Base Camp Programs

- 7:30: Rise and Shine
- 7:45: Morning Routine
- 8:15: Morning Group
 - Discuss the day's activities, resolve any outstanding issues, and set goals
- 8:30: BREAKFAST
- 9:15: Morning activities
 - Check cabin calendar for your group's scheduled activities
- 12:15: Lunch Group
 - Discuss the plans for the 2nd half of the day as well as any issues and goal review 12:30 12:30:
- LUNCH
- 1:30: Down time
 - A great time for reading, writing letters or taking a nap 2:30: Afternoon activities
 - Check cabin calendar for your group's scheduled activities
- 5:15: Dinner Group
 - Discuss how the day's activities went- is there anything that needs to change? Resolve any issues
- 5:30: DINNER
- 6:45: Evening Activity
- 8:15: Evening Group
 - Discuss how the entire day went – review goals, talk about the positive accomplishments of the day. Briefly review next day's schedule. Resolve any issues.
- 8:30: Nighttime Routine
- 9:15: Flashlight Time
- 9:30: Lights Out! Sweet Dreams

What to Bring

You will find a complete gear list on our website, and on your Camp In Touch account resources. Please read the list of prohibited items before you and your child pack. Call if you have any questions concerning the gear list.

Electronics

Talisman is a no tech/low tech camp. Electronic devices such as cell phones, personal computers, or any other device that connects to the internet is not allowed.

Campers MAY bring to camp:

- MP3 players with preloaded content. MP3 players must not connect to the internet.
- E-Readers
- Noise canceling headphones
- Small, battery-operated fan

Prohibited Items

- No weapons of any kind (including pocket knives)
- No drugs, alcohol, tobacco products, or drug paraphernalia
- No mouthwash, cologne, breath fresheners, mints, gum or candy
- No personal food, unless discussed and agreed upon by admissions and program leadership.
- No money in personal space (any money brought will be held in a lock box in the office)
No medication of any kind (staff must hold all medications, even over the counter)
- No unapproved clothing No aerosols No inappropriate reading material

Note: The best way to avoid having anything sent home is to stick with the gear list. If you have any questions concerning items to bring, please call our office.

Clothing including swimming– Talisman's only dress code has been to wear safety-appropriate clothing, e.g., close-toed shoes to most activities, longer shorts to tree climbing; and to avoid wearing words or pictures that are disrespectful, offensive or depict illegal things (alcohol, drugs, etc.). When swimming, we have traditionally requested one-piece suits for girls, mainly to avoid embarrassing wardrobe malfunctions that come with bikinis. At this time, we are encouraging all swimmers to cover up top and bottom, so that all genders have the same expectation. We are not currently making this a requirement.

A NOTE ABOUT CLOTHING AND PERSONAL ITEMS

Camp is a busy place. Over the course of a session, campers visit many places both on campus and off. This sometimes means that campers may misplace their personal items. Through our structured morning routine, close supervision, and seemingly constant reminders, we try our best to help our campers keep track of their personal items. However, campers sometimes lose items, just as they do at home and school. Although we cannot be held responsible for lost items, every possible effort is made to return clearly labeled personal items. Please do not send your child's best or most expensive clothing. Expect that all clothing and personal items will get dirty, misplaced, or generally abused through extreme fun and adventure.

Sunscreen and Insect Repellent

You may supply your own specific sunscreen and/or bug repellent for your camper. Staff may administer sunscreen and insect repellent in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. This means spraying insect repellent as needed in the morning and evening, and after time in the pool/pond. To keep bug bites to a minimum, staff may have campers change into a light long sleeved poly pro shirt and pants in the evenings when groups are on trail or outside at night. We use insect repellent with 25% DEET and sunscreen with SPF30. When bug bites become a serious issue, counselors will apply anti-itch cream and cover bites with bandages if the camper won't stop scratching. If campers continue to pick and scratch their bug bites, the camper will be seen by the medical coordinator. If you know your child is prone to bug bites, please let the medical coordinator and counselors know on opening day, so they can enact preventive measures from the start.

Medications at Camp

Many Talisman campers take some form of prescription and/or over the counter (OTC) medication; therefore, it is very important that the administration of medication be a safe and smooth process.

****Summer camp is NOT a good time for a med vacation! If your child is usually on medications, please continue them for their time at camp, and do not make changes for less than 30 days before camp. There are so many changes and stresses of coming into a new social environment, that chemical changes can really complicate things.**

Campers are not allowed to keep any medications, even over the counter, on themselves. We provide all regular over-the-counter meds, such as ibuprofen, Benadryl, sunscreen, and bug spray. If your camper requires a specific sunscreen or bug spray, you may provide those, and the counselors can be responsible for applying them as needed

Trained counselors in each cabin group carry a week's supply of their campers packaged meds in their locked med pack, which they wear at all times. They administer meds to their campers and keep a precise record; our medical coordinator oversees the process. This system helps us ensure that all campers receive their meds on time no matter where the group is. It helps the process if meds can be scheduled at mealtimes and bedtime, but we can make accommodation when needed.

Talisman has a strict system in place to ensure that each camper gets their medications timely and accurately. When your camper takes medication, it is our policy to watch while they swallow it. No camper is ever forced to take medication. If a camper refuses the medication, we document that refusal and inform the parents. This is rarely an issue, as taking meds is a normal part of the day at camp.

Medical Coordinator

Our medical coordinator is on campus seven days a week. Additionally, we have a psychiatrist and pharmacist on-call. The medical coordinator provides all initial care for campers who become sick during camp. Your program manager or the medical coordinator will call you to update you if your camper is sick or injured. The medical coordinator will also make any decisions necessary for doctor visits or further treatment, in consultation with you as the parent. In an emergency, we will immediately transport your child to the nearest hospital (or call 911 if needed) and contact you with a report as soon as we are able. Our medical coordinator also oversees medication administration, as described above.

Medication Packaging

PHARMACY INFORMATION: Medication, Vitamins, and supplements

All prescription and over the counter medications **MUST** be packaged for camp in blister packs for ease of administration and up-keep.

- This year we are working with **Americare Pharmacy Consultants**, a local pharmacy in Fairview, NC. Americare can assist you in the process, and I would recommend reaching out to Americare as soon as possible following receiving this packet in order to ensure proper packaging, refills and management.

***Exceptions** to this policy need to be discussed directly with Josh Gunalda who may be reached at 828-412-1385 or josh@talismancamps.com

Americare Pharmacy Consultants

www.americarepharmacy.net

828-628-1120

Address: 1185 Charlotte Highway Suite K

Things to know:

1. Americare will need prescriptions sent over to them for all medications, prescription and over the counter. These need to be sent to them directly by the prescribing physician. Please have the physician call in the over-the-counter medications as well.
2. You may have your local pharmacy blister pack your camper's medications if you wish and bring them with you to opening day.
3. For "controlled medications", we understand you cannot fill these until 1-2 days before they run out. Please call and speak with your pharmacy and your prescribing physician to get instructions on the best process. We strongly suggest not sending bottles of controlled medications!
4. For campers coming from out of state, and who are on Medicaid, please contact Americare directly to ensure any complications are addressed in a timely manner.

There will be a \$10 per week service fee for Americare's support of camp this summer.

- Please call Americare with any questions about insurance coverage, supplements, liquids, and other information.
- Please make sure to register and complete their forms.
- Please don't hesitate to contact Americare directly with any questions or concerns about their process.

FORMS MUST BE COMPLETED TW WEEKS BEFORE YOUR CHILD STARTS CAMP TO AVOID PAYING A RUSH FEE! Talisman is NOT responsible for fees due to late filing or processing with Americare.

Self-Packing Medications

PLEASE NOTE: Medication errors occur at a higher frequency when not packaged with a professional packaging company or pharmacy. *Anticipate that your opening day medical check-in will take much longer if you self-package your camper's medications.

IMPORTANT! Do not pack any gummies or pills with liquids in them (like fish oil). They will melt or break and ruin the rest of the medications. We do not accept these meds for camp.

Please follow these instructions at home to prepare for camp:

***We require that you bring the original Rx bottles and a copy of prescriptions with you, to verify that we are administering as prescribed. You may take the bottles home with you after verification on opening day. *Our standard times for medication administration: 9am, 1pm, 6pm, 9pm.

1. Purchase these blister packs and labels, or similar items:
 - Labels: [Blister pack labels](#)
 - Blister packs: [Blister Packs on Amazon](#)
2. **Label:** *Ensure this is done with a permanent marker and is legible for our staff. Example:*
Peter Parker
9am Ritalin 10mg x2
Vitamin C 500mg
3. Package all medications (Rx and OTC) that are administered at the same time, in the same blister.
4. Package all PRN (As needed) medications in their own blister and label clearly.

DO NOT PACK:

- Gummy versions of vitamins or supplements
- Gel versions of fish oil and garlic oil, or any other supplement that has a strong smell, soft gel covering with low heat tolerance or high content of sugar.

Food Policy

1. We provide wholesome food that is generally familiar to children (e.g. hamburgers, hotdogs, fresh fruit, sandwiches, bacon & eggs, etc.).
2. We encourage campers to accept a "no thank you" helping of everything unless they are truly allergic to it. They do not have to try it, but we encourage them to consider it, and we celebrate when they do.
3. We will always offer appropriate alternatives as needed and will never let a child go hungry. At every meal, there will be vegetarian, gluten free and dairy free options available.
4. We do not use food as reward or punishment.
5. We do not feed our campers junk food and only occasional sweets.
6. We will have regular vegetarian, gluten free, and dairy free alternatives for each meal.
7. If your camper does have special dietary needs, please inform us. We ask that you discuss your camper's dietary needs with admissions, and that you complete each enrollment document related to your child.
8. To ensure a positive camp experience, campers must be willing to eat at least 50% of main menu items, and at least one meal alternative. Parents of picky eaters please request a menu and work with the camp director.

Please reach out to Josh in admissions by email at josh@talismancamps.com or by phone at 828-412-1385 to discuss any dietary concerns or questions

Camp Life, Policies and Procedures:

1. **Writing to Your Camper:** We encourage family and friends to write letters to your camper. Letters and cards may be mailed through USPS during your camper's session. We will deliver them to your camper, typically the same day we receive them.

Mail letters to: **Talisman Camps, 64 Gap Creek Rd. Zirconia NC 28792**

Example:

Camper Name, Program Name
Talisman Summer Camp 64
Gap Creek Rd.
Zirconia, NC 28790

2. **Sending Digital Letters for Quicker Delivery:** Please see the Companion Mobile App instructions on page 7 for instructions on how to send and receive letters electronically.
3. **Care Packages:** Talisman does not accept care packages for a few reasons. Care packages often shift focus from people to things, add more "stuff" for campers to manage, and may contain allergens. Campers may not receive any type of packages while they are at camp. All large envelopes, padded envelopes, and regular envelopes containing anything other than your letter are considered packages and will be returned to the sender. However, if it is necessary to send things like a new pair of glasses, medications, or items left at home such as toiletries etc.), we are happy to accommodate. First, please email Office@talismancamps.com to alert us that the package is on the way. Then, you may ship the package to:

Talisman Camps

Attn: (your camper's full name)
64 Gap Creek Rd.
Zirconia, NC 28790

4. **Our Counselors:** Positive and appropriate relationships are crucial to leading children effectively and safely. Our counselors are carefully screened for competence, responsibility, compassion, and understanding of our population. They are typically college students or graduates planning a career in education, psychology, outdoor leadership/education, or social work, and who have great enthusiasm for working with our campers. Our counselors come from across the United States and around the world! Our comprehensive staff training includes certifications in CPR, Wilderness First Aid, and optional lifeguarding certification. We will have dedicated lifeguards on staff throughout the summer sessions. Counselors also receive professional-level training on ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, learning disabilities, and other diagnoses affecting our campers. Then, using our interactive training model, staff learn to apply specific strategies utilizing the camp environment to build social skills, independence, and confidence in our campers. All staff go through a national background check and pre-hire drug screening. Many of our staff go on to careers in teaching, counseling and social work – with some returning to work at Talisman each summer!
5. **Gender and Inclusion Policy:** Talisman believes in the dignity and worth of every person. We commit to welcoming, including, and valuing people of diverse cultures, ethnicities, identities, faiths, and socio-economic backgrounds. We strive to create a safe and supportive environment which fosters respect, honesty, empathy, equity and belonging.
6. **Talisman's Gender Inclusion Policy:** As stated in our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement, we believe in the worth and dignity of every person. Our focus at camp is to foster respect for and acceptance of all, just as they are in the present, thus creating a safe space for everyone. This includes campers and staff of all gender identities and expressions. We will never try to influence anyone's beliefs or identity; we welcome each as they are and focus on building social skills and a sense of community. We are guided by respect for the rights of all, the need for each person to feel safe, and the limitations of our facility. We recognize our responsibilities to guardians as our paying customers, campers as those

under our protective care, and staff as employees due to a safe working environment. We strive to balance all with integrity, equity, and confidentiality. We recognize the wide range of developmental stages of our campers and address the issues of this policy in a developmentally appropriate manner. We also strive to avoid values bias outside the scope of this policy. Staff are trained in all elements of this policy and how to address issues and support campers with integrity and within the bounds of this and other camp policies and any applicable laws.

7. **Identifying** – We ask each camper and their family how they would like to be addressed. We honor the use of their chosen name and pronouns. These must stay the same throughout their stay at camp for consistency with staff and peers. We will not ask anyone for preferred pronouns in group settings, but we allow people to offer them as they wish. At camp we utilize he/him, she/her, they/them, he/they, and she/they pronoun sets. Staff will support campers in using preferred pronouns for fellow campers as a part of our teaching social skills - respect and affirmation as well as part of our effort to foster inclusion and belonging.
8. **Family Conflict** – When there is disagreement about names and pronouns between parents and campers, we seek and require a mutually-agreed-on resolution before the camp commences. If needed, we work with the family on creative solutions that meet all needs. We will not place camp in the middle of an unresolvable disagreement. Example solutions include using initials as names and they/them pronouns.
9. **Relationships** - Exclusive or intimate relationships are prohibited among campers, who are supervised at all times and not allowed to share hard-to-supervise spaces. All showers, changing rooms, and toilet facilities are private. Thus, there is no opportunity for intimate contact or viewing between any individuals.
10. **ACCEPTANCE OF POLICY** – All camper guardians and all staff will receive this policy, within the manuals provided them before camp. Having a child attend, or by accepting employment, is construed as acceptance of this policy. No refunds will be given for any camper pulled from camp because of any part of this policy. Nor will accommodation be made for a camper or staff to avoid any other camper or staff due to any gender-related situation. Camp administration will maintain transparency as far as feasible while protecting the privacy rights of all. Anyone with concerns is encouraged to speak with an administrator to seek understanding and resolution.
11. **Laundry**: Each group does their laundry together, so please have your child's name clearly marked on each clothing item to prevent mix-ups. Every child should have a laundry bag, also clearly marked or monogrammed, in which to put their dirty clothing. Each group's laundry will be picked up and returned on their laundry day; the group takes time that evening to fold and put it away in their trunks. Our 13-day programs will have scheduled laundry, and 7-day programs will do laundry as needed.
12. **Bedwetting**: A handful of campers every session have bedwetting incidences due to medication or other factors. Talisman will work to help your child alleviate this problem as well as keep it discreet, but we ask that parents please notify us before your camper arrives that this problem exists. We also ask that, for our base camp programs, you send an extra set of sheets with your camper so that they may have bedding when their first set is in the wash. We recommend that you discuss with your child the possibility of using disposable absorbent underwear, which we can manage discreetly. This is especially important for multi-day camping trips, when using sleeping bags.
13. **Birthdays**: If your camper has a birthday during their stay at camp, all campers in the same cabin will receive a treat and the camper with the birthday will receive a small gift..

- 14. Managing Homesickness:** For many of our campers, building independence is a goal of being at camp. We believe that learning how to manage homesickness is an important step in building that independence. Talisman has been supporting campers with homesickness for over 40 years and, in partnership with families, has implemented several effective strategies. It is important for both you and your child to know that most of our campers have some amount of anxiety about the transition to camp life. Even more importantly, the overwhelming majority of campers finish camp having thoroughly enjoyed their experience! In fact, campers who initially were anxious about attending camp often additionally struggle with having to leave!

Based on recent research and our own extensive experience, we feel that taking the following steps will help alleviate potential homesickness:

- **Learn about the program**

Spend time looking at our brochures and website. This will allow you and your child to have a better idea of what to expect as far as the structure of our programs (i.e. where they will sleep, what they will eat, what types of activities they will participate in). Also listen to our podcast, Autism Outside!

- **Practice time away from home**

Practicing spending time away from home (for at least 2 nights) can prepare your child for camp life. This can take place at a friend's or relative's home, or other safe environment, giving your child a chance to adjust to life outside of their regular home environment. To make it even more fun, have your child try out their sleeping bag (if never tried before), or even try setting up a tarp (what we use for hiking trips) to sleep under in the backyard. Make sure to debrief the experience with your child, asking questions about what went well and what may have been difficult about the experience.

- **Take advantage of webinars and other online resources**

Over the spring and early summer, Talisman offers pre-camp webinars for both parents and campers. Here you can connect with fellow campers and parents, ask questions, learn more about the program itself and be better able to plan for a smooth transition into and home from camp. Campers get their own webinars in which we address questions like "what kind of food do we eat?" "What does my cabin look like?" or "where will I shower?" so that they can start to get to know camp long before they set foot on campus. Or attend our spring open house. Read *Homesick and Happy* by Dr. Michael Thompson, an amazing book on the insight and benefits of homesickness!

- **Set them up for success**

Part of having a successful camp experience is believing that it will be just that – a new, positive experience and a whole lot of fun! You can help your child get into this mindset by having talks about camp, discussing which activities they think they may enjoy most, and also asking what concerns they may have. However, beyond clearly hearing their concerns and discussing them rationally (i.e., "I really hear you're worried about the hike and that others may go too fast - just remember that other campers will have the same worries, and the staff will make sure to set a pace that works for everybody."), you can additionally support them by avoiding making "I'll come get you if you don't like it" contracts. This type of deal presumes that their camp experience won't be successful. Instead, continue to talk about their thoughts and concerns, and help them to think about camping in a positive light.

- **Call or email our camp**

We are always available to talk with you or your child about what camp will be like, answer any questions, and help to support them in the transition from home life to camp life.

- 15. Behavior Management:** At Talisman, we understand that behaviors are a natural part of learning and growth. We use Choice Theory as a framework to guide behavior management. This approach emphasizes that every action has a consequence, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, but always directly connected to the choice made. By helping campers recognize this connection, we encourage responsibility, self-awareness, and the ability to make thoughtful decisions over time. Punishment and physical discipline are never used at camp. Instead, we rely on consistency, natural consequences, and supportive conversations to guide campers through challenges. However, certain behaviors pose significant safety concerns and may prompt discussions for dismissal from camp. These include physical violence, sexual or inappropriate conduct, off-campus elopement, and intentional destruction of property. Expectations are communicated so campers understand boundaries while still being supported in their personal growth.

16. Talisman's Group process

Group at Camp

At camp, "group" is a structured time where campers come together to share, reflect, and problem-solve as a community. Groups can take place in the morning to prepare for the day, in the evening to reflect on progress and accomplishments, or at any time to work through challenges that arise. The purpose of group is to build independence, encourage responsibility, practice social skills, and strengthen the sense of community within cabins and programs.

Through group, campers learn to set goals, reflect on their growth, and work together to create positive solutions.

Why Group is important at Camp

Pre- and post-processing strategies support campers by lowering anxiety, strengthening focus, and encouraging independence. These approaches build predictability and help campers manage challenges related to transitions and sensory processing. Group processing enhances our programs by offering a structured and supportive space where campers can practice social skills alongside peers with similar experiences. This environment fosters belonging and community, decreases feelings of isolation, and creates opportunities for observational learning, teamwork, and shared experiences. Together, these elements promote growth in communication, emotional regulation, and overall social competence.

Type of Groups

- **Morning Group** – Morning Group takes place before breakfast. Counselors review the daily schedule to ensure campers are dressed appropriately and have everything they need from their cabins to be successful throughout the day. Campers also set personal goals during this time, helping them build independence and responsibility.
- **Evening Group** – Evening Group happens before nightly cabin time. This includes **PPLs** (Proud, Positive, Learned), where campers reflect on what they are proud of from the day, something positive they look forward to tomorrow, and what they learned. Campers also review their progress on daily goals and prepare for their evening routine. This practice encourages reflection and growth each day.
- 2. **Issue Group** – Issue Group can happen anytime the whole cabin needs to address a concern, such as completing chores or managing group behavior. The purpose is to discuss the issue together and find a solution as a team, reinforcing accountability, responsibility, and teamwork.

Thank you for taking the time to review our family handbook. We are so honored for the opportunity to serve your family, and to provide a meaningful camp experience for your camper.

Happy Camping!!