

Lost and Found

Help Keep Belongings Coming Home!

By: Melissa Madden

With Gore-Tex jackets to buy, expensive sporting equipment to source and waterproof bags to pack it seems fitting that many parents already have summer camp preparations underway. Yet at the end of camp season all this preparation is inevitably put to shame when the happy camper says, "Mom and Dad, camp was great but I can't find my new hiking boots, my toothbrush, my camera...." Before you start thinking this is a lost cause, think again. With a little bit of savvy labeling any parent can prevent their child from coming home from camp empty handed.



Labeling camp gear is an increasingly popular choice parents and camp directors make before the start of the camp season. The Director of Hockey Opportunity Camp in Ontario, Kevin McLaughlin has taken labeling a step further. In the springtime, he refers parents to a custom labeling company. McLaughlin says durable, washable and noticeable labels are great for all the stuff kids bring to camp. "They are cool and they work," he says.

Let your child know that their property is valuable and that there are consequences to not taking care of it. "I tell my kids, if they lose their favourite sneakers or new camera that they won't get a new one."

McLaughlin is not alone in his labeling cause. A recent survey of North American Camp Directors revealed that four out of five say the best way to reduce items in the lost and found at the end of each camp season is to label everything, according to Bridge Global Strategies.

More and more people are turning to custom labeling companies to meet the growing need for labeling camp gear. "Think of purchasing durable custom labels as an insurance policy," says labeling guru Julie Cole, a mother of five. "From flashlights to canoe paddles, everything looks the same at camp," she says. "Having stuff clearly labeled lets counselors and other campers know whose stuff is whose and makes sure your investments get home."

Look for Sticky Labels which are large labels that withstand

showers, the pool and even the lake, says Cole. She suggests using laundry-safe Iron-Ons and Tag-Mates (that stick to clothing care tags) for labeling clothes. "And for all those expensive hiking boots and sneakers a shoe label with a special waterproof overlay for the insole of the shoe is perfect." Smaller sticky labels called Skinny-Minis fit perfectly on the handle of a toothbrush and Bag Tags attach to packs and cases.

Cole says custom labels will not only save parents' money but it will also save them time. "Let's face it, with all the demands of family life who has time to write on everything with a marker only to have it rub off or to see labels on clothes or even go looking for lost stuff?" she asks.

Yet, saving time and preventing items from getting lost are not the only perks of labeling; it also ensures children assume responsibility for their own property. "We call it stewardship," says Cole.

Longtime camp mom, X Y describes her decision to start labeling her children's camp gear last summer as a life saver. "And it's not just about saving money," says Y. "It's about instilling a sense of ownership in my kids so that they will take pride in their things and want to look after them." At the end of last year's camp season Y says she wasn't surprised to find her kids came home with everything they left with.

So, the end of June rolls around and camp is only a few days away, what do you do with your new custom labels? Here are some tips on how to put your labels to best use.

Order Early "Because custom labels have to be shipped and can't be bought in stores, due to their very nature, make sure to order early so as to have them for the start of camp," says Cole.

Work As a Team Label and pack all items going to camp together with your child. "It's important kids know what they're bringing to camp in the first place so they can take a mental inventory," says Cole who also lets her kids decide where they want the labels placed on items. "If you involve them in the labeling and packing process then they become part of the solution and not part of the problem."

Label Everything! "Toothbrushes, cameras, prescription medicine, sporting equipment, shampoo bottles, flashlights, jackets, rubber boots, running shoes, hats, towels, sunscreen,

backpacks, swimming goggles, t-shirts, bug repellent, water bottles, asthma inhalers..." Cole says leave no item left unlabeled.

Watch for Stowaways Camp Directors indicated that kids often bring items to camp that they're not supposed to bring, such as ipods, expensive digital cameras, cell phones and video game equipment, according to Bridge Global Strategies. Cole says that if they own something irreplaceable then make sure your child knows not to bring it to camp. "But just in case your kid smuggles in electronic contraband then stick a label on this gear before it even leaves the house," says Cole.

Tell It Like It Is Let your child know that their property is valuable and that there are consequences to not taking care of it. "I tell my kids, if they lose their favourite sneakers or new camera that they won't get a new one."

Be Positive "A little encouragement never hurt anyone," says Cole. "I let my kids know that I trust them and that I know they'll do great." She adds, "And really, that's the best I can do."

♥ *Melissa Madden is the Marketing Assistant for Mabel's Labels. She is a recent graduate from King's College University School of Journalism. You can contact Mabel's Labels at www.mabel.ca or 1.866.30.mabel*