

WHAT IS AUSM SUMMER CAMP?

The mission of the Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM) is to create connections, empowering everyone in the autism community with the resources needed to live fully. AuSM seeks to enhance the lives of all who are a part of the Minnesota autism community, with a fundamental commitment to advocacy, education, support, collaboration, and community building.

AuSM camps serve autistic children and adults of all abilities. Camp programs are planned and operated utilizing the most promising practices for supporting autistic people, including low staff-to-camper ratios, succinct and direct expectations, visual schedules, a verbal notice of upcoming transitions, sensory accommodations, camper choice, and adaptive programming. All camp staff participate in annual training that includes in-depth information about autism, proactive behavior management and support strategies, and the individual campers that they will be working with.

WHEN IS AUSM CAMP?

AuSM Summer Camps take place June-August, 2024. Here are the camp sessions and dates, including age-ranges for campers per session:

Hand in Hand #1 (ages 18-23) June 19th-23rd

Hand in Hand #2 (ages 14-17) June 25th-29th

Discovery #1 (ages 18+) July 1st-5th

Discovery #2 (ages 11-17) July 7th-11th

Hand in Hand #3 (ages 10-13) August 5th-9th

Hand in Hand #4 (ages 24+) August 11th-15th

HOW DO I GET INTO AUSM SUMMER CAMP?

To apply for an AuSM Camp, an autistic adult or a minor child's family must have a current AuSM membership. [Become a member online here](#). If you are unsure whether you are a member of AuSM, call 651.647.1083. Members can apply to summer camp between 12:01 a.m. Monday, January 1 and 11:59 PM on Friday, March 22.

HOW DO I APPLY? WHEN SHOULD I APPLY?

Camp applications open on Monday, January 1, and are completed online. This year, **all camp paperwork** except proof of an annual medical exam **must be submitted by the application deadline for a camper to be entered in the lottery**. If a camper or

parent needs help to complete an application, they must call the AuSM office (651-647-1083 x116) or email camp@ausm.org to request help. The application deadline is 11:59 PM on Friday, March 22nd.

HOW DOES THE CAMP LOTTERY WORK?

Applicants who have submitted all required online paperwork by 11:59 PM on Friday, March 22nd will be placed in a random lottery. Lottery and scholarship results will be emailed to all applicants on April 15th.

CAMP REGISTRATION MATERIALS

Applicants are not considered registered for camp until all camper forms have been completed and AuSM has communicated the camp placement. *This includes proof of an annual medical exam completed within twelve months of the start of a camper's session.*

Any camper who has not completed the full registration process by May 15th will forfeit their spot to a camper on the waitlist. Exceptions may be made for families who communicate their circumstances before this date.

IS THERE A WAITLIST?

Yes. Applicants who are waitlisted will be contacted if a spot becomes available.

DO I HAVE TO LIVE IN MINNESOTA TO SEND MY CHILD TO AUSM SUMMER CAMP?

You do not have to live in Minnesota for your camper to participate in a camp, but AuSM reserves the right to prioritize campers from Minnesota in accordance with our mission to serve the Minnesota autism community.

CAN MY CAMPER ATTEND MORE THAN ONE WEEK OF CAMP?

No. Due to the high demand for camp spots, campers may attend only one session of camp.

HOW MUCH DOES THE CAMP COST? IS THE FEE REFUNDABLE?

The cost of one camp session (five days) will be \$1,999 in 2024. By applying and registering for camp, a camper's family agrees to pay all associated costs that may not be covered by a waiver, grant, or scholarship. If a camper cancels **at least three weeks before** the start of a camp session, a full refund will be issued. If a camper

becomes sick, a full refund will be issued. Please do not bring campers to camp if they are sick! Full or partial refunds beyond those described above will be determined by AuSM on a case-by-case basis.

DO WAIVERS APPLY?

If your camper's MN Choices Assessment Plan documents a need for social or recreational supports, and if you have Consumer-Directed Community Supports (CDCS) – then your waiver can be used to pay for an AuSM camp.

If you plan to pay for camp using a waiver, please [refer to this document](#) covering qualifying requirements and recommended language. For more detailed information on the appeals process, please [refer to this guide](#). Also, [here is a letter of support from AuSM](#) to accompany your annual budget proposal or appeal.

A small number of our campers have also received partial scholarships or grants from programs in their counties or from tribal nations. By registering for an AuSM camp, you agree to pay in full any amount not covered by the third-party payer.

ARE THERE SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE?

Yes, a small number of scholarships are available due to the generous support of AuSM's donors. Anyone may apply for a scholarship. Please note that there has been a significant increase in need and scholarship funds are limited; applicants need to remain diligent in finding other ways to pay for camp. Scholarships are awarded based on camper and familial need, the amount of aid a camper has received in the past, and according to the funds available. The scholarship application is part of the Camp Payment Form.

DOES MY CAMPER NEED TO GET A PHYSICAL TO ATTEND CAMP?

Yes, camper physicals are required for Camp Hand in Hand, Camp Discovery, and AuSM Day Camp. Campers are not registered for camp until they have submitted proof that an examination has been performed by a licensed physician less than 12 months before the first day of camp.

HOW CAN I PROVE THAT MY CAMPER HAS HAD A PHYSICAL EXAM THAT WILL BE LESS THAN 12 MONTHS OLD ON THE DAY CAMP STARTS?

Most families choose to download a copy of the [Physician Signature Form](#), write their camper's name at the top of the sheet, and then drop the form off at their camper's clinic. A nurse will complete the form, get the doctor to sign it, and fax it directly to the AuSM office.

Alternatively, a discharge summary showing the exam date, camper's name, physician's name, clinic name, and visit summary can be uploaded within our registration software.

HOW SHOULD I BRING CAMPER MEDICATIONS TO CAMP?

All prescription medications and over-the-counter medications must arrive at camp in their original packaging, with labels intact, and stored in one or more Ziploc bags. Put all prescription bottles in a sealed bag and write the camper's name in permanent ink on the bag.

Prescription medication can be packetized at your pharmacy by request and is strongly preferred by our nurses. This also increases safety because each dose is dispensed, sealed, and labeled for your camper.

While some over-the-counter medications are permitted, most vitamins are not an appropriate medication to send to camp and can diminish the nurses' capacity to administer medications to other campers on time.

WHAT IS THE FOOD LIKE? WHAT IF A CAMPER HAS DIETARY RESTRICTIONS OR FOOD PREFERENCES?

Each camp employs attentive local cooks who intentionally design the camp menu around foods that are popular amongst campers, and they find gluten-free, dairy-free, and vegetarian versions of those same foods for campers with dietary restrictions. Before camp, you will receive a menu of all items that your camper will be served. If you see a meal on the menu that you know your camper won't eat, you may provide a prepared, labeled alternative. (Ex. John Smith, Wednesday lunch) Kitchen staff will properly store, reheat, and serve the meal as directed.

WHAT SHOULD CAMPERS BRING TO CAMP?

You will receive a recommended packing list that doubles as an inventory of personal belongings. Include a copy of the completed inventory inside your camper's luggage. Write your camper's name at the top of the camp packing list and indicate how many of each item you are bringing to camp so that campers and staff have a list to work from when re-packing.

Label *everything* with a permanent marker or with semi-permanent adhesive clothing labels. Do not bring anything that is expensive or irreplaceable.

IS THERE A LOST & FOUND?

Yes. Lost and found items from camp will be stored at the AuSM offices in St. Paul. The owners of identifiably labeled items will be notified. Unclaimed items will be donated or discarded after 10 days.

HOW DO YOU ENSURE CAMPER SAFETY?

Your camper will be in the hands of dedicated, loving adults whose goal is to share the joy of camp. All campers will be supervised, supported, included, and listened to. We will ensure that campers receive medications, drink plenty of water, eat at every meal, brush their teeth every day, etc. There will always be a counselor nearby in case your camper wants or needs help.

Parents and guardians will be contacted in the event of injury or to be kept apprised of any difficulties or interventions. AuSM does not practice restraint techniques. Only staff with specialized training and certification – usually licensed special education teachers – will *ever* use a supportive restraint technique with a camper, and they will only do so when all other strategies have been exhausted *and* there is an imminent risk of camper harm to self or others.

CAN PARENTS/GUARDIANS VISIT THE CAMP?

Parents and guardians are not permitted to visit or stay at camp unless they are part of the camp staff.

WHICH AUSM SUMMER CAMP IS RIGHT FOR MY CAMPER?

AuSM offers two overnight camps for autistic youth and adults. We don't currently offer a day-camp option, but intend to bring it back in 2025.

Camp Hand in Hand, which exists through a partnership with Camp Knutson, offers camps to autistic youth and adults of all abilities. Every camper has their own counselor. Cabin leaders, lifeguards, activity leaders, nurses, site directors, and a certified music therapist provide programs and additional supervision. This staffing model enables camp to happen according to each camper's needs at any given time. Campers can choose to participate in a scheduled activity – and they are encouraged to do so – but they may also opt to climb on the playground, use exercise balls, jump on a mini trampoline, draw or color, play lawn games, or use the swings. They can

choose to go on a short hike with their counselor, lie in a hammock, or hang out in the Lego room. There are only three things that Hand-in-Hand campers are required to do every day:

- Take their prescription medications as dispensed by the nurse.
- Eat something at each meal.
- Go to bed at night.

Camp Hand in Hand is held at Camp Knutson in Crosslake, Minnesota.

Camp Discovery, which exists through a partnership with True Friends Camp Courage, is a less-structured, lower-support summer camp for those who are consistently able to follow simple multistep instructions, choose from among several activity options, and stay with a small group for at least 45 minutes. Most Discovery campers either attend mainstream classes for part of their school day or they work part-time in their communities. The staff-to-camper ratio is 1:4. Camp Discovery will take place at True Friends Courage South in Maple Lake, Minnesota.

We recommend the structure and additional supervision of Camp Hand in Hand for campers who deal with these common challenges:

- Require step-by-step verbal instructions to complete daily self-care tasks
- Become physically aggressive or self-injurious when dysregulated
- Require lots of time and personal space to stay regulated
- Demand individual attention to stay engaged or on-task
- Struggling with puberty – ineffective or changing medications, discomfort with physical or hormonal development, mood swings
- Uncontrolled grand mal seizures
- Frequent meltdowns
- Elopement
- Require toileting or bathing assistance

Both overnight camps are on beautiful forest land with a lakefront. Campers sleep in comfortable cabins with electricity, heating, air conditioning, privacy stalls for toilets and showers, and community space outside of the sleeping area.

Please choose the camp that is best suited to your camper. Consider the sorts of settings in which your camper thrives. **Keep in mind that a person who hates the outdoors and craves an antiseptic environment is not a good match for *any* summer camp.**

If you are unsure, please contact Director of Camp Programs Melinda Harris at camp@ausm.org. She will ask you what questions or concerns are impeding your ability to decide.

AuSM makes every effort not to turn campers away or send campers home.

CAN I WORK AT CAMP?

Camp staff applications will be available online January 2, 2024. Staff who have worked previous summers are welcome and encouraged to notify us of their availability at any time. People who are interested in working at the camps can learn more online at ausm.org/camps/work-at-camp or by contacting us. All positions receive a small stipend in gratitude for their time and commitment to camp. Every summer we hire more than 100 people to work as counselors, cabin leaders, nurses, and directors. Please recommend this opportunity to your favorite PCAs, paraprofessionals, and teachers!

I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS, WHO SHOULD I CONTACT?

Please direct questions to the Director of Camp Programs, Melinda Harris at 651.647.1083 ext. 116, or via email at camp@ausm.org.