



2026 Miniwanca Camper and Family Handbook

American Youth Foundation

Miniwanca | 8845 West Garfield Road, Shelby, MI 49455

miniwancacamps@ayf.com | 231-861-2262

Aspire Nobly, Adventure Daringly, Serve Humbly

Table of Contents

- Welcome to Miniwanca** 3
- Camp Contact Information** 3
- What's New for Summer 2026** 4
- Important Dates and Forms** 5
 - Session Dates and Forms Deadlines 6
- Miniwanca Program Goals** 7
 - Community Responsibilities 10
- Getting Ready for Camp** 11
 - What to Bring to Camp 11
 - Lice Prevention 12
 - Preventing Homesickness 12
 - Words to Know 13
- Opening Day** 14
 - Directions to Camp 14
 - Check-In Process 15
- Living at Camp** 16
 - Typical Daily Schedule 17
- Staying in Touch with Campers** 18
 - Visitation Policy 19
- Closing Day** 20
 - Release Policy 21
- Health at Camp** 22
 - Medication Management 22
 - Illness, Injury, and Medical Emergencies 24
- Behavior and Dismissal Policy** 25
- Tuition, Fees, and Refunds** 27

Welcome to Miniwanca

Dear Camp Families,

We are so excited to have your camper join us at Miniwanca for Summer 2026! This simpler way of life on the sand dunes is the perfect opportunity for your camper to seek balanced living, build lasting relationships, and discover their best self. Campers will play, create, and explore while reflecting on their values, asking important questions, and growing in self-confidence.

A key part of summer preparation is completing your camper forms. In recent years, we have simplified this process by providing all documents in a fillable online format. To access the forms, please log in to your [CampBrain account](#) using the same password you used to register. Please complete and submit these forms no later than April 1, 2026.

The required [Camper Physical Form](#) must be completed and signed by your camper's physician. This form confirms your camper has had a physical exam within 12 months of Opening Day and is prepared to participate in the camp program. If your camper's physical will take place after April 1, please submit all other forms and email miniwancacamps@ayf.com the date of the physical.

It is essential our staff review these forms before Opening Day so we can prepare for your camper's arrival, create a smooth transition into the camp community, and make the registration process faster for everyone. Thank you in advance for completing these forms on time.

Miniwanca will soon echo with the joy and laughter of campers and staff. This handbook contains everything your family needs to prepare for a great summer. If you have questions after reviewing this information, please email or call us.

Thank you for sharing your child with us. We cannot wait for another amazing year!

Our best,

Griffin Vogler

Executive Director of Miniwanca

gvogler@ayf.com

Sandra George

Girls Camp Director

sgeorge@ayf.com

Tiwi Freeman

Boys Camp Director

tfreeman@ayf.com

Miniwanca | 8845 West Garfield Road | Shelby, MI 49455

miniwancacamps@ayf.com

Main Office: 231-861-2262

Girls Camp Office: 231-861-3343

Boys Camp Office: 231-861-3342

What's New for Summer 2026

Every summer, we take stock of what we learned and look for ways to make the Miniwanca experience even better. Here is a look at what is new for 2026:

More Flexibility in Medication Management

This year, we are offering two clear options for daily medication management, giving your family more flexibility and our Health Team more consistency.

Option one is multidose packaging prepared by a pharmacy: a pharmacist prepackages your camper's medications by date and time so everything is organized and ready to dispense. Option two is bringing medications in their original prescription packaging, and our Health Team will sort and prepare them at camp.

Both options are designed to keep things simple on Opening Day and safe every day of the session. Full details are in the Health section of this handbook. Our complete [2026 Health and Wellness Policies](#) are also available online.

Cycling Returns to Four Trails

Four Trails is Miniwanca's off-site expedition program, offering older campers the chance to adventure by canoe, kayak, bicycle, and hike through some of the most beautiful wilderness in the country. This summer brings exciting updates to the program, and we could not be more energized about what lies ahead.

After a pause following the pandemic, cycling returns to Miniwanca in 2026, rebuilt with new routes, updated gear standards, and a fresh vision that stays true to what Four Trails has always been about.

Explorer campers will experience a trip that weaves together cycling and backpacking, traveling scenic rail trails and rural byways. As with all Four Trails experiences, the focus is on community and personal growth, not miles traveled.

Campers participating in Four Trails programs should review the preparation guidance and packing lists in the [Four Trails Handbook](#). Those make a real difference in having a safe and fulfilling trip.

Important Dates and Forms

The most important forms — Health History, Physical, and Immunization Record — are due on April 1 and should be submitted through [CampBrain](#). Closer to Opening Day, we also ask families to submit an optional Camper Health Update if anything has changed after April 1, along with the Letter to Leader written by your camper.

The Letter to Leader is one of our favorite traditions. It gives your camper a chance to introduce themselves to their Leader before the session begins, and it gives our staff a meaningful head start building that relationship.

Required by April 1, 2026:

- Remainder of 2026 tuition
- Acknowledgement of 2026 Health Policies
- Camper Health History Form (completed by parent or guardian)
- [2026 Camper Physical](#) (signed by healthcare provider based on recent exam)
- Immunization Record

* If your camper's physical is after April 1, please contact us at miniwancacamps@ayf.com to let us know the date.

If Applicable:

- Asthma or Allergy Action Plan
- [Permission to Self-Administer Emergency Medication Form](#) (for campers prescribed an EpiPen and/or rescue inhaler)

Session Dates and Forms Deadlines

Program	Opening Day	Required Forms Due	Optional Forms Due	Closing Day
Session A: 1-week	Sunday, June 28	April 1: Health History, Physical, Immunizations	June 1: Camper Health Update, Letter to Leader	Saturday, July 4
Session A: 2- and 5-week	Sunday, July 5	April 1: Health History, Physical, Immunizations	June 8: Camper Health Update, Letter to Leader	2-week: Friday, July 17 5-week: Saturday, July 25
Session A: 3-week	Sunday, June 28	April 1: Health History, Physical, Immunizations	June 1: Camper Health Update, Letter to Leader	Friday, July 17
Session B: 1-week	Sunday, July 19	April 1: Health History, Physical, Immunizations	June 22: Camper Health Update, Letter to Leader	Saturday, July 25
Session B: 2-week	Sunday, July 26	April 1: Health History, Physical, Immunizations	June 29: Camper Health Update, Letter to Leader	Friday, August 7
Session B: 3-week	Sunday, July 19	April 1: Health History, Physical, Immunizations	June 22: Camper Health Update, Letter to Leader	Friday, August 7

Miniwanca Program Goals

For our campers to have fun and learn, they need to be and feel safe. Campers and staff work together to create this environment. The Miniwanca program is built around the following goals.

1. Discovering and Developing Your Own Best Self

AYF program days are filled with new experiences designed to encourage participants to develop a deeper understanding of who they are and what they are capable of achieving — their own best self. They will grow in confidence as they learn to celebrate their unique sense of self, while taking advantage of opportunities to put their best self into action.

Participants will:

- Value themselves as unique, capable individuals.
- Grow in self-confidence as they discover more about their capacities.
- Explore how their values and “Best Self” influence their decision-making.
- Recognize their agency, articulate their ideas, and act with purpose.

2. Growing Through the Four Folds

AYF’s Four Folds is a signature framework through which participants assess their strengths and areas for growth across four complementary facets of life: mental, physical, social, and reverential. Program days provide diverse activities in each fold, creating opportunities for young people to stretch their minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits.

Participants will:

- Reflect on the mental, social, physical, and reverential facets of their life, identifying strengths and areas for exploration and growth.
- Practice developing clearly defined goals and taking healthy risks.
- Gain resilience as they work through the challenges of trying new things.
- Identify how each day includes opportunities in all four folds.

3. Working Together to Build a Community

When youth come together to create AYF program communities, they gain a greater understanding of their impact on the people around them. They develop the skills for creating and maintaining healthy friendships and gain a greater understanding of their role and value within a group.

Participants create shared expectations for how they will have fun and work together successfully, with safety and kindness at the core. Programs provide opportunities to strengthen relationships, practice acting with integrity in navigating challenges, and share in the responsibility of caring for a larger community.

Participants will:

- Develop skills important to creating and maintaining healthy friendships.
- Practice effectively working within a group to achieve a common goal.
- Learn positive leadership skills and show support for others.
- Identify their role in creating a sense of belonging within community.

4. Making a Positive Difference in the World

In AYF programs, participants are called to reflect on their actions and impact — both positive and negative — gaining a greater understanding of the positive difference they can make for others. Staff guide campers in making connections between program and home, helping them see how their actions each day have the power to make a positive difference in their communities and the world around them.

Participants will:

- Recognize how their actions and interactions impact others.
- Take responsibility to act for the good of others and for a sustainable environment.
- Make connections between lessons learned in program and how they apply to home.
- Develop a greater understanding of how everyday actions have the power to make a positive difference.

By working toward these goals, we believe our campers will:

1. Return home with newly gained confidence in themselves.
2. Be able to talk about who they are and what they can achieve.
3. Feel empowered to strive and develop their own best self.
4. Act in ways consistent with their values.
5. Help create a community where trust, cooperation, and respect are the cornerstones.

Core Values

We believe how we act and interact reflects who we are as a community. At Miniwanca, we value:

Investing in Youth

Empowering youth is the core of our mission. We aim to offer equitable access to outdoor, experiential adventures. We seek to amplify youth voices as they recognize their own agency, articulate their ideas, and act with bold purpose throughout their lives.

Stewarding the Environment

Our programs foster a sense of respect and reverence for the natural world. We commit to using only what we need in order to minimize our impact on the planet. We practice environmental

stewardship, conserving resources for future generations and offering the experience of connecting deeply with the natural world.

Enkindling Inner Sparks

Each person has inherent strengths and passions that, when ignited, form the foundation of best self and a balanced life. We challenge people to be brave, think creatively, develop wholehearted social connections, and explore their values and beliefs.

Belonging in Community

Our communities are joy-filled, optimistic, hopeful places where each person is encouraged to explore through play and express their own authentic spirit. We aspire to create spaces where all people are included and feel a sense of belonging. In these thriving program communities, diverse perspectives provide a foundation to build greater understanding and foster equity.

Growing Together

Teamwork and collaboration provide essential tools for overcoming challenges. We believe powerful growth happens when we live in community, set boundaries, and take healthy risks. To adventure daringly with the support of others is an opportunity to put our best selves into action.

The Power of Our Community

At Miniwanca, the diversity of our community is one of our greatest strengths. When young people from different backgrounds, beliefs, and identities live and learn alongside one another, something remarkable happens. Perspectives broaden. Assumptions are gently challenged. Friendships form that would never have been possible anywhere else.

We welcome and celebrate campers, families, volunteers, and staff of all races and ethnicities, religions, ages, backgrounds, sexual orientations, and gender identities, including transgender and gender-expansive individuals. We are actively building a community where everyone belongs, and that work belongs to all of us. Every person who walks through these gates shares the responsibility of making this place what it is.

We ask that campers and their families come ready to engage with people whose experiences may look different from their own with curiosity, kindness, and an open heart.

Creating a Fun, Safe Summer

Creating a Miniwanca community where everyone feels valued and secure requires commitment from all campers and staff. Once camp begins, Camp Directors Tiwi Freeman and Sandra George will meet with each age group to discuss what a fun, safe summer looks, sounds, and feels like. We encourage campers to let staff know if there is a problem. Every camper can meet individually with their Cabin Leader and has a weekly age-group check-in with a Camp Coordinator.

Please encourage your camper to talk to any staff member if others are not adhering to the Community Responsibilities below, or if they feel physically or emotionally unsafe. We depend on them to help us create this unique community.

A successful summer experience begins at home as you prepare for camp, and it continues throughout the summer through the partnership between you and the Miniwanca staff. Please review the following Community Responsibilities with your camper before arrival and help them understand that breaking this agreement may be grounds for immediate dismissal.

Community Responsibilities

At Miniwanca, I will show...

Respect for Others

We respect other people's ideas and values, even if they differ from our own. Miniwanca embraces a diverse community, and this should be displayed in all ways, including language, humor, and behavior. All actions and language should have a positive impact on the Miniwanca community. Any disrespectful behaviors that could potentially harm (physically or emotionally) a camper or staff member are unacceptable and may result in dismissal.

Respect for Self

We take care of ourselves by eating balanced meals, getting plenty of sleep, and practicing good hygiene: brushing teeth, wearing clean clothes, and showering. We participate fully in camp activities, are punctual, try new things, and have a positive attitude. We seek to reach the challenge of "My own self, at my very best, all the time."

Respect for the Environment and Camp Facilities

Miniwanca should feel like home, so we all help take care of it. We share the regular cleaning of personal and community areas, including the Eating Lodge, restrooms, cabins, and activity spaces. We leave any space better than we found it.

We are sensitive to Miniwanca's fragile environment by staying on trails, caring for plant and animal life, recycling, composting, and putting litter in trash bins. The buildings and activity equipment at Miniwanca are for all campers to enjoy. We care for both responsibly.

Respect for the Health and Safety of Self and Others

We look out for others' physical and emotional safety. We seek help when needed. We are in our cabin or tent by lights out and remain there until the rising bell rings.

We respect the safety standards provided by the staff, especially in water-related and adventure/challenge experiences.

We recognize that possession and use of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs, and the possession of fireworks, firearms, and other weapons, are prohibited onsite and will result in immediate dismissal. We acknowledge that threats to harm ourselves or others will be taken seriously and will result in dismissal.

Getting Ready for Camp

Preparing for camp can be a big undertaking logistically and emotionally. We encourage families to review articles from the [American Camp Association](#) on this topic as they prepare for summer.

What to Bring to Camp

We dare our campers to live more simply at Miniwanca: pack fewer clothes, bring fewer bags, and aim to bring or buy less plastic. We encourage campers to bring no more than two large duffle bags or a trunk and one carry-on-sized bag to camp.

[Packing lists are available online.](#) Clothes worn at camp are subject to hard use; we suggest you avoid bringing expensive or favorite items. Families must clearly label all camper items.

We recommend functional swimwear for active movement and play on the waterfront. Clothing should reflect our camp values. Please leave clothes with inappropriate slogans or images at home.

Electronics such as smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, or fitness trackers are not allowed at camp. If a camper arrives with a smartphone or other internet-connected device, Miniwanca staff will place it in safekeeping for the duration of the session. Campers will not have access to these items during their time at Miniwanca. All items in safekeeping will be returned on Closing Day. We do allow digital cameras, but we recommend disposable cameras due to the sand.

Miniwanca staff will do camper laundry once per week and in the event of an accident or emergency. All clothing, equipment, and laundry bags must be marked with the camper's name.

Miniwanca is not responsible for personal items lost, stolen, or damaged during camp. Campers should frequently check the Lost and Found for missing items. Labeled items left at the end of a session can be mailed home, but the family is responsible for shipping costs. We will hold all found items for two weeks following the session; unclaimed items will be donated.

If you are planning to ship luggage, we suggest doing so two weeks before the start of camp to ensure it arrives before your camper. Please make sure the camper's name is clearly written on the mailing label. Address it to:

[Camper Name]
Miniwanca, [Boys or Girls Camp]
8845 West Garfield Road
Shelby, MI 49455

If your camper is shipping luggage home, mark the boxes to be saved and make sure your camper knows to set their luggage out to be shipped on Closing Day.

Lice Prevention

We screen all campers for head lice during camp check-in. Please review the [Head Lice Prevention Policy](#) to ensure that your camper is completely free of lice and nits before arrival.

If campers have head lice or nits upon arrival and live within reasonable driving distance, they cannot return until they are lice-free. Campers who arrive via plane or who live more than four hours away will be treated onsite for a \$500 fee. The camper will stay in the Health Center, and their activities will be limited until they are lice-free.

Early and regular checks will allow time to treat before Opening Day. Please check your camper's scalp weekly, preferably after the hair has been washed and is still a bit damp.

Look for: an itchy scalp, small rashes around the hairline or behind the ears, white or tan specks (similar to dandruff) in the hair

If your camper has lice before Opening Day, we strongly encourage you to work with a lice treatment professional to ensure your camper is lice-free when they arrive.

Preventing Homesickness

Feeling a little homesick is one of the most normal things in the world, and at Miniwanca, our staff are well prepared for it. We plan the first 48 hours of camp with the adjustment process in mind, helping campers settle in, find their footing, and connect with the community around them.

Families can put many strategies in place at home to help set campers up for a successful transition. The American Camp Association's article "[Homesickness Dos and Don'ts for Parents Preparing for Camp](#)" is an excellent resource, especially for first-time campers or those who tend toward homesickness.

One of the most common — and well-intentioned — mistakes families make is what camp professionals call the Pick-Up Deal: "If you feel homesick, I'll come and get you." We understand the impulse; it comes from love. But these promises tend to undermine a camper's confidence and independence, and they often become self-fulfilling prophecies. Instead, we invite you to express genuine excitement about this adventure, and trust us to help your camper find their stride at Miniwanca.

If your camper is struggling to make the transition to camp, our staff will work with them to set goals, make friends, and navigate the adjustment process. If feelings of homesickness persist, the Camp Director will reach out to you directly and assess next steps together.

Joining a New Community

One of the most powerful things about Miniwanca is the people your camper will meet. Every summer, young people from different cities, backgrounds, and life experiences come together to create something remarkable — a community built on trust, curiosity, and shared adventure.

Before camp begins, we encourage families to have open, positive conversations about what it means to be part of a community that may look, think, or live differently than home. A few ways to start:

- Encourage your camper to approach new people with genuine curiosity. Different backgrounds are what make this community interesting.
- Talk about what it looks and feels like to make someone feel genuinely welcome.
- Share examples from your own life of friendships or experiences that broadened your perspective.
- Brainstorm together how your camper might respond with grace when something feels unfamiliar or surprising.

These conversations do not have to be long. What matters is that your camper arrives ready to show up with an open heart.

Words to Know

If this is your family’s first summer at Miniwanca, some of our traditions and language may be new. Here is a quick reference for terms you will hear throughout this handbook and throughout the summer.

Term	What it means
Four Folds	AYF’s signature whole-person framework: mental, physical, social, and reverential. Activities and reflections throughout the day connect to one or more folds.
Interest Groups	The activity periods that make up much of each program day, from sailing and ceramics to hiking and improv. Campers choose from a rotating menu of offerings.
Quad Communities	Your camper’s team (their “Quad”) for friendly competition and community building.
Polar Bear	An optional early-morning swim in Lake Michigan. It’s cold, it’s bracing, and it’s beloved. Don’t knock it until you’ve tried it.
Night’s Doings	The evening program — games, performances, traditions, campfires, and surprises. Often a highlight of the day.
Evening Reflection	A quieter close to the day for personal and group reflection.
Four Trails	Miniwanca’s backcountry expedition program, in which older campers embark on multi-day wilderness trips by canoe, kayak, or foot.
Odyssey / Voyageur	Four Trails programs for older campers that culminate in backcountry expeditions. These are multi-week immersive experiences.
Nostos	The homecoming celebration when Four Trails participants return to camp, a joyful gathering of the full Miniwanca community. Families and alumni are welcome.
Cabin Leader	Your camper’s counselor, a trained, background-checked adult (18+) who lives with the cabin group, leads daily activities, and builds individual relationships with each camper.

Opening Day

Session / Program	Opening Day
Session A: 1 and 3 week	Sunday, June 28
Session A: 2 and 5 week	Sunday, July 5
Session B: 1 and 3 week	Sunday, July 19
Session B : 2 week	Sunday, July 26

All families driving to camp should plan to arrive between 1 and 3 p.m. ET.

The first full meal is at 6:15 p.m. ET, so we suggest your camper eat something in the car before arriving. Snacks will be available all afternoon.

Directions to Camp

Heading north on US-31, take Exit 140 (New Era/Stony Lake Road) and turn left on Stony Lake Road. Head west approximately 7.5 miles until you reach a dead end at Scenic Drive. You will see the sign for Miniwanca.

For Boys Camp: Turn left onto Scenic Drive. The entrance is immediately on the right.

For Girls Camp and Main Office: Turn right onto Scenic Drive and follow the road about a half-mile along Stony Lake until you reach the Stony Lake Store on your right and a small park on your left. Stay left on Scenic Drive and continue until you see the Miniwanca sign on the left. Staff will show you where to enter through the parking lot to drop luggage and park.

St. Louis Bus or Airport Shuttle

Miniwanca offers one-way or round-trip bus transportation from St. Louis for an additional fee. The bus departs St. Louis on Opening Day of each session at 6 a.m. CT and returns to St. Louis on Closing Day around 6 or 7 p.m. CT. There is an additional bus trip to Miniwanca for the two-week Opening Day of Session A only.

Miniwanca also offers one-way or round-trip shuttle pickups from Gerald R. Ford International Airport in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Staff will collect campers on Opening Day and drop them off on Closing Day. Families can sign up for the bus or shuttle through [CampBrain](#).

Bus Transportation	Cost
One-way STL Bus	\$195
Round-trip STL Bus	\$390
One-way Grand Rapids Airport shuttle	\$75
Round-trip Grand Rapids Airport shuttle	\$150

Before You Arrive

Please inform the Health Team if your camper becomes ill or is diagnosed with an illness or lice in the 10 days before camp. This does not necessarily mean they cannot come as planned, but it is important information for us to have.

On the morning of Opening Day, perform one final lice check.

Please do not come to camp if you or your child is sick. Contact Miniwanca at 231-861-2262 as soon as possible to inform the Health Team and discuss next steps.

Check-In Process

Opening Days are some of our favorite days of the year, and we want your family to feel that way, too. A little advance planning makes the arrival experience smoother for everyone. A quick note: Please leave pets at home for everyone's safety.

When you arrive, here is what to expect:

- **Girls Camp** families will drop luggage, walk to the main camp area, meet their Cabin Leader and proceed through the check-in process. Staff will show you the way and can help with access into the main camp if you need it.
- **Boys Camp** families will drop luggage and meet their Cabin Leaders at Bryant Field, then proceed through the check-in process.
- If your family has **campers in both camps**, please drop off your Boys Camp camper first, then head to Girls Camp.

During check in, you will turn in all your camper's medications. This includes vitamins, supplements, over-the-counter and prescription medications, and anything inhaled, topical, or injectable, such as inhalers or EpiPens.

Miniwanca staff will screen each camper for lice, signs of illness, and take their temperature. Anyone with a fever of 100.4 degrees or higher must return home until they are fever-free without fever-reducing medication for 24 hours.

After that, families are welcome to use the restroom, stretch their legs, and look around.

A note on goodbyes: The research is consistent, and our experience confirms it — brief, upbeat goodbyes set up campers for faster, easier transitions. Keep the send-off short, and trust your camper to find their footing. Our staff will take it from there.

Living at Camp

Your Camper's Cabin

Your camper's cabin is their home, and their cabinmates will be their family. A cabin consists of up to six campers of the same age and a Cabin Leader. Our cabins are rustic, screened spaces with bunk beds and no electricity.

We strive to place campers in the strongest possible cabin groups, mixing youth from different communities and backgrounds. Having detailed information about each camper is essential in forming these communities. We cannot guarantee cabin placement requests, but we do take them into consideration. If there is a specific concern about cabin placement — with or without another camper — please share that with the camps team before Opening Day.

Your Camper's Cabin Leader

A Cabin Leader lives with campers, and campers will get to know many other Leaders through camp activities and Interest Groups. Our Leaders are thoroughly trained youth empowerment professionals who are just as excited about the summer as their campers. Many were Miniwanca campers themselves.

Cabin Leaders are at least 18 years old. They go through an extensive hiring process, including interviews, three reference checks, and a background check. They receive all training needed for a successful summer before camp starts. All Leaders are certified in CPR, first aid, experiential education, and group dynamics.

Miniwanca Food Program

Food at Miniwanca is about more than nutrition — it is woven into the program itself. We gather at meals as a full community, slow down, and practice the values that define our summer together. Our Food Program is guided by four principles:

1. Inspire respect and reverence for food, understanding the value of what we have and the knowledge that many in our world go to bed hungry.
2. Reduce the carbon footprint of our food program, both in getting food to our tables and in reducing waste.
3. Educate and empower participants and staff toward action. We spend time talking about what and why we eat, and why we compost our food waste. We are mindful of the link between how we fuel our bodies and the development of our best self.
4. Develop menus that provide a variety of healthy options. We seek to offer “premium fuel” menu options including whole grains, fresh fruit, and vegetables.

Dietary Restrictions and Allergies

Miniwanca’s menu does not include tree nuts, and our kitchens do not serve food containing peanuts, peanut butter, or peanut oil. Note that some snacks and desserts may contain trace amounts of peanuts or may have been manufactured in a facility that processes peanuts. Vegetarian, dairy-free, and gluten-free options are available at each meal.

Families should disclose any special dietary needs in the Camper Health History Form to help us determine if Miniwanca can meet your child’s needs.

Typical Daily Schedule

Though there will be special days throughout the summer, we primarily follow this schedule.

Time	Activity
7:30 a.m.	Polar Bear (optional early swim)
8:00 a.m.	Rising Bell
8:30 a.m.	Morning Stretch/Flag Raising
9:00 a.m.	Breakfast
10:15 a.m.	Quad Community Time/Assembly
10:45 a.m.	Interest Group 1
11:45 a.m.	Interest Group 2
12:45 p.m.	Lunch
1:45 p.m.	Rest Hour
2:45 p.m.	Quad Community Time/Assembly
3:30 p.m.	Interest Group 3
4:15 p.m.	Snack
4:30 p.m.	Interest Group 4
5:15 p.m.	Free Time
6:15 p.m.	Dinner
7:15 p.m.	Night’s Doings
8:30 p.m.	Evening Reflection
9:00 p.m.	Bed Time Prep
9:30 p.m.	Lights Out (grades 3 to 8)
10:00 p.m.	Lights Out (grades 9 to 12)

Staying in Touch with Campers

Summers at Miniwanca provide a rare opportunity for young people to slow down, live simply, and experience community in a beautiful outdoor setting. Campers reconnect with nature and step away from smartphones, social media, video games, and other technology.

We understand families appreciate the reassurance of seeing their smiling camper having a wonderful summer. Our approach to photography is designed to balance that need with the spirit of simple, disconnected community life that makes Miniwanca so special.

Onsite Photos

Families will receive free, password-protected access to photos taken at camp through SmugMug. You will receive login information via email once your camper's session begins. Photos are uploaded every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

At the close of their session, each family will receive a printed photo of their camper's cabin group and a link to the summer highlights slideshow.

Because Four Trails trip leaders' primary focus is camper safety and well-being, real-time photography from backcountry trips is not possible. Photos from Four Trails trips will be available online once groups have returned to camp.

One-Way Email

Miniwanca offers a one-way email service for families to communicate with campers. We print and deliver these emails to campers once per day. We will provide the link to this service once camp begins. You may share this link with family and friends, but please do not share it too widely so we do not overwhelm the system.

Care Packages and Mail

Families are welcome to send letters, postcards, and care packages with inedible items such as books, cards, games, and stickers. Campers will open care packages in the office under staff supervision. Because we have campers with severe food allergies, food, candy, and gum are not allowed and will be disposed of if sent in care packages. This rule is strictly observed for camper health and safety.

Please address care packages and mail to:

[Camper Name]
Miniwanca, [Boys or Girls Camp]
8845 W. Garfield Road
Shelby, MI 49455

Visitation Policy

We do not have a formal visiting day at camp and discourage individual family visits, as they are disruptive to the camper experience. If campers are homesick, an outside visit can often deepen those feelings or spark them in other campers.

Closing Days

Session / Program	Closing Day	Arrival Window	Closing Circle
Session A: 1-week	Saturday, July 4	9:00 to 10:00 a.m. ET	10:30 to 11:30 a.m. ET
Session A: 2- and 3-week	Friday, July 17	9:00 to 10:00 a.m. ET	10:30 to 11:30 a.m. ET
Session B: 1-week	Saturday, July 25	9:00 to 10:00 a.m. ET	10:30 to 11:30 a.m. ET
Session B: 2-, 3-, and 5-week	Friday, August 7	9:00 to 10:00 a.m. ET	10:30 to 11:30 a.m. ET

Family members are invited to celebrate the end of camp with their camper on Closing Day. The gates open at 9 a.m. and you will be free to head out by 12 p.m. ET. If your travel plans require a quicker departure, please let us know and we can work to schedule with you.

If you have campers on both sides of Miniwanca, begin on the Boys Camp side and pick up luggage and reconnect with your camper. Then proceed to the Girls Camp and Mills Center entrance to pick up luggage, park, and walk into camp for a combined Closing Circle ceremony.

Odyssey and Voyageur Families

Odyssey and Voyageur campers will celebrate the culmination of their Four Trails experience with the entire Miniwanca community at **Nostos, a homecoming celebration that takes place on the morning of Wednesday, August 5**. Families and alumni are welcome to witness their triumphant return. More information, including parking and arrival details, will be emailed to families before Nostos.

Closing Day Details

Miniwanca will email families a slideshow of summer highlights and a roster that includes camper names and contact information so they can stay in touch throughout the year. If you would prefer your camper's information not be included, please [email](#) or call us to make that change.

If your camper is shipping luggage home, our staff will assist with mailing boxes or trunks through UPS. Shipping and packaging charges will be applied to the credit card on file. Please do not send prepaid shipping labels to camp with your camper. Once the luggage is sent, you will receive an email with the UPS tracking number.

Release Policy

Your camper's safety is our responsibility from the moment they arrive until the moment they leave Miniwanca. Campers may only be released to a parent or legal guardian authorized in writing during the registration process. This is both AYF Policy and Michigan state law, and we hold it without exception.

If your pick-up plans change after you have submitted your registration, call the camp office at 231-861-2262 and we will help you submit new Authorization for Release.

Health at Camp

Keeping campers healthy and safe is at the heart of everything we do at Miniwanca. Our Health Center is staffed by a registered nurse and Health Officers in residence. A doctor is on call, and all Miniwanca staff are trained in CPR and first aid.

Camper Health Forms

The more we know about your camper's health before they arrive, the better we can prepare for a great summer. All families are required to complete a [Health History Form](#) by April 1. If your camper's medical information changes after you submit the Health History Form, we encourage you to complete the Camper Health Update form four weeks before arrival.

Medication Management

Many campers take daily medication, and our Health Team will safely administer all medications, including prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and supplements. At camp, medications are only administered after meals and at bedtime. If your camper requires medication at another time, please contact us as soon as possible to discuss.

Families should not send common medications like Benadryl, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen with their camper, as the Health Center is well-stocked with these items.

This year we are offering two options for your camper's medications:

Option 1: Multidose Packaging Prepared by a Pharmacy

A pharmacist prepackages a camper's medications by date and time, rather than sending an entire pill bottle to camp. For example, all medications a camper takes at breakfast on a specific date are packaged together in one sealed pharmacy pouch.

Families can learn more about multidose packaging through providers like PillPack and many CVS and Walgreens pharmacies. Ask your pharmacist about Dispill and similar services. The pharmacist may ask your insurance company for a vacation override to fill a prescription early or to fill more than a 30-day supply.

Option 2: Medications Packaged by the Miniwanca Health Team

The Miniwanca Health Team can package and prepare a camper's medications on-site. Medications must arrive at camp in their original prescription packaging with the camper's name on the label. Please do not self-package your camper's medications in individual containers or bags — Miniwanca cannot accept them in that form.

The following medications must arrive at camp in their original valid prescription packaging with the camper's name on the label:

- Liquid, cream, oral contraceptive, inhaled, and injectable medications (such as inhalers or EpiPens)

- Controlled or Schedule II medications (this includes many ADD/ADHD medications)
- Antibiotics prescribed immediately before camp that will be taken for a limited time

Important Reminder

Please do not send any medication — even over-the-counter or as-needed medications — in your camper’s belongings. Campers are not allowed to self-administer any medication except EpiPens and rescue inhalers with a completed permission form on file.

EpiPen Devices and Inhalers

If your camper is prescribed an EpiPen or rescue inhaler, you must bring two devices to camp: your camper will keep one with them, and the other will be stored in the Health Center. You must also submit the [Permission to Self-Administer Emergency Medication Form](#) signed by a parent or guardian and your camper’s healthcare provider.

Behavioral and Mental Health Medications

We want every camper who takes behavioral or mental health medication to have a safe and successful summer, and that starts with some important timing considerations.

We ask that campers arrive with the same medication, at the same dose, that they have been taking for at least three months. This gives enough time to confirm the medication is working well and that your camper is settled and thriving on it. We also ask that no changes be made to the type or dosage of any behavioral or mental health medication within six weeks of Opening Day.

If any medication changes are under consideration, now is the time to work with your camper's physician so that any adjustments can happen well within that window.

One exception: If your camper takes ADD/ADHD medication during the school year but routinely takes a medication holiday over the summer — and has done so before — the six-week rule does not apply.

For full details, please review our [2026 Health and Wellness Policies](#).

Immunization and Vaccination Policy

The American Youth Foundation requires Miniwanca campers to be immunized in accordance with the state of Michigan camp licensing requirements. Proof of vaccination is required before arrival at camp to finalize the enrollment process.

Medical Review Process

We believe camp should be accessible to as many young people as possible, and we put real effort into making that so. We review every camper application with an eye toward inclusion, and our team will make every reasonable effort to accommodate campers with a wide range of conditions, strengths, and abilities.

As part of that process, we may reach out to gather additional information about your camper's health history or connect with our Medical Review Team to think through what support or accommodations might be needed. When that happens, please know it comes from a genuine desire to set your camper up for success, not to create barriers.

There are some conditions that fall outside what we can safely manage in a camp setting, and in those cases, we may not be able to enroll a camper. Those conversations are never easy, and we approach them with care.

The most important thing you can do is share everything. A recent diagnosis, an ongoing condition, a medication change — all of it helps us prepare and is essential to our ability to safely meet your camper's needs. We can often welcome campers with newly diagnosed conditions; what matters is that we have the full picture.

If a camper is asked to leave due to a health condition that was not disclosed on their forms, families may not be eligible for a medical refund. The more we know, the better we can serve your camper.

Illness, Injury, and Medical Emergencies

We expect your camper to spend the summer healthy, active, and having the time of their life. We also believe in being prepared, and we want you to know what to expect if something comes up.

If your camper becomes ill or injured, our Health Team will assess them promptly. Most campers recover quickly and are back with their cabin group before long. If outside care is needed, we will contact you right away. The local hospital and health clinic are both within 15 miles of Miniwanca.

If a camper is unable to participate in the program for 24 hours or more, we may ask that they return home to recover fully before coming back. Miniwanca does not have the resources to provide extended medical care on-site. This applies to both physical and mental health concerns.

Please make sure your camper's [Health History Form](#) includes your family health plan information and a copy of their insurance card. If a camper requires a doctor's visit or medications, the family is responsible for all associated costs.

Other Emergencies

In case of a local or national emergency, please visit ayf.com for the most current information about your camper and our programs. We will reach out by email with specific information as it becomes available; our phone lines will be reserved for communication with authorities.

We maintain a comprehensive, layered approach to emergency preparedness. [Learn more online.](#)

If an emergency arises at home and you need to reach your camper, call us at 231-861-2262. Office staff answer phones from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET, and we check voicemail at 10 p.m. ET and 8:30 a.m. ET the following morning.

Behavior and Dismissal Policy

Our goal is for every camper to have a fun, safe, quality summer, and we partner with you to make that happen. A successful experience begins with preparation at home and continues throughout the summer through open communication between families and Miniwanca staff.

Expecting the Unexpected

Camp is a living, breathing community, and like any community, incidents can take place that create unexpected challenges. Weather changes, group dynamics, camper behavior, and other environmental factors arise and our plans must change. In our experience, those moments are often where the most meaningful growth happens. Our staff are trained to meet the unexpected with creativity and calm, and to turn disruptions into some of the greatest catalysts for teaching life skills.

When an incident occurs, our first priority is always the safety and well-being of the full community. Depending on the situation, our response might involve a conversation with the campers involved, a broader community discussion, or an adjustment to the day's schedule. We handle these moments thoughtfully, and we are good at it.

We do ask that campers arrive ready — physically and emotionally — to engage fully in the program. That readiness makes a real difference, both for your camper and for the cabin community around them.

When a camper's behavior affects the safety or experience of others, our staff will step in. For most situations, we will work directly with you to understand what is happening and build a plan that helps your camper find their footing. Camp staff will remain in contact with you and assess next steps. If a situation cannot be resolved, dismissal may be necessary, and certain behaviors will result in immediate dismissal without a prior warning.

Behaviors That Result in Immediate Dismissal include:

- Threat to harm self or others
- Possession or use of drugs or alcohol
- Possession of a weapon

This list is not exhaustive. The safety and well-being of the full community will always guide our decisions.

It is never easy to determine that a camper should be dismissed, and we know it is a difficult thing for families to hear. Miniwanca staff must balance what is best for the group and community with the needs of the individual camper. If a camper's actions negatively affect their cabin or the wider community, or if a camper is physically, mentally, socially, or emotionally unable to participate in camp activities, they may be dismissed.

When a camper is dismissed, the family must arrange for their child to return home as soon as possible. Families are responsible for any costs associated with removing a camper from camp and for transportation home.

Tuition, Fees, and Refunds

We want every family who wants to be at Miniwanca to find a way to get here. The AYF offers discounts and need-based financial aid — please call us at 231-861-2262 to learn more.

Payment Full tuition is due by April 1, 2026. If you cannot meet this payment deadline, please contact us at 231-861-2262 as soon as possible so we can discuss potential options.

Cancellations and Refunds If you cancel before April 1, all tuition paid — except the \$300 registration fee — will be refunded. After April 1, tuition is nonrefundable.

If your camper needs to withdraw before camp begins due to illness or injury, all payments except the \$300 registration fee will be refunded upon receipt of a written physician's report. A minimum \$35 processing fee applies to all refunds.

Withdrawals During the Session If a camper needs to leave during the session due to illness or injury, a prorated refund will be issued. In the case of a voluntary withdrawal or dismissal for behavioral concerns, no refund will be issued. In all cases, families are responsible for any transportation costs incurred.

Additional Resources

Please visit ayf.com for additional resources and the most current information regarding Summer 2026.

Visit the [American Camp Association](https://american-camp-association.org) for helpful tips and research about the camp experience.

As Opening Day approaches, know that Miniwanca is ready for your camper. The trails are waiting, Stony Lake is cold, the sand dunes are steep, and the community that will form this summer is already beginning.

Generations of young people have returned from these shores carrying more confidence, deeper friendships, and a clearer sense of who they are and what they are capable of. This summer, your camper joins that story.

We are grateful and honored to share this experience with your family.

See you on the dunes,

The Miniwanca Team

American Youth Foundation | Miniwanca

8845 West Garfield Road, Shelby, MI 49455

Main Office: (231) 861-2262 | Girls Camp: (231) 861-3343 | Boys Camp: (231) 861-3342

miniwancacamps@ayf.com | ayf.com

“My Own Self, At My Very Best, All the Time”