

# WORKBOOK & DISCUSSION GUIDE

## HAPPY CAMPERS: 9 SUMMER CAMP SECRETS FOR RAISING KIDS WHO BECOME THRIVING ADULTS

This reading guide for Happy Campers includes an introduction, reflection/discussion questions, suggested additional books and resources, and a Q&A with author Audrey Monke.

The suggested questions are intended to help you individually or with your parenting partner or reading group (if you are reading it with others) find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that this guide will enrich your conversation and provide encouragement to make simple (and more complicated) changes to create a happier and more connected family culture where each person feels valued and loved.

### INTRODUCTION

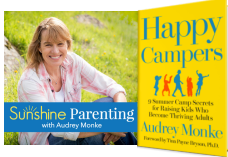
In Happy Campers, Audrey “Sunshine” Monke has created a parenting guidebook aimed at helping families create a loving and nurturing environment where children thrive and grow the character traits and skills they need to be successful future adults.

Using carefully curated research and proven strategies from her three decades of directing Gold Arrow Camp, Audrey reveals nine camp secrets and shares practical ways to implement them in your own home.

Audrey reminds us that new habits and activities take time to develop and are best incorporated one at a time. She wants this book to serve as a resource that parents refer back to and suggests that, for some parents, they may just want to focus on one “secret” at a time so as not to get overwhelmed. The chapters do not need to be read in order, as each secret, together with the suggested activities, can be read on its own.

No family (including Audrey’s!) could ever do all of the activities suggested in each of the chapter’s Bringing Camp Home sections. Before you start reading Happy Campers, look through the topics covered and decide which areas you are most interested in addressing in your own family.

Below is a list of the chapters, with a brief summary of what the chapter covers. Highlight or mark next to the secrets you are most interested in learning about and consider reading those chapters first. Depending on the age(s) of your child(ren), different topics might be more relevant to your family right now.



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### CAMP SECRET #1: CONNECTION COMES FIRST

**Parents can optimize their children's success and happiness by providing a connected, nurturing family culture wherein close, secure bonds are formed.**

### CAMP SECRET #2: CATCH THEM DOING SOMETHING RIGHT

**Responding calmly and constructively, instead of punitively, elicits lasting, more positive behavioral changes and creates a more productive learning environment.**

### CAMP SECRET #3: POSITIVE PRACTICES PRODUCE OPTIMISTIC KIDS

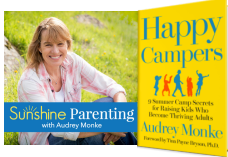
**Positive interactions in and out of the home create healthier relationships and happier lives.**

### CAMP SECRET #4: ALL KIDS CAN BE MORE INDEPENDENT (EVEN CLINGY HOMEBODIES!)

**Helping children develop autonomy and problem-solving skills is essential to becoming a thriving adult.**

### CAMP SECRET #5: GRIT IS GROWN OUTSIDE THE COMFORT ZONE

**Between the "Comfort Zone" and "Blackout Zone" is the "Growth Zone", where children may experience discomfort but develop resilience, self-reliance and confidence—all necessary qualities for their long-term success.**



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### CAMP SECRET #6: KIDS ARE MORE CAPABLE THAN PARENTS THINK THEY ARE

**Expecting kids to delay gratification and contribute to household duties by doing chores helps them to develop important life skills, including time management, responsibility and independence.**

### CAMP SECRET #7: KIDS THRIVE WITH STRUCTURE

**A set schedule, clear expectations and simple routines around daily events make family life less stressful and more fun and relaxed.**

### CAMP SECRET #8: MAKE IT COOL TO BE KIND

**When parents value kindness and model respect, kids learn to be considerate and positive contributors to society.**

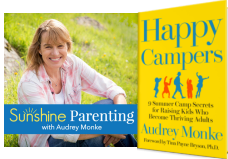
### CAMP SECRET #9: COACH KIDS TO BETTER FRIENDSHIPS

**Fostering healthy social skills helps improve kids' mental and physical well-being as well as their academic and career performance.**

## TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### Introduction: What Parents Can Learn from Summer Camp

*"It's no wonder that—with screens safely stored at home, less focus on competition and more focus on collaboration, and lots of fresh air and outdoor fun—campers feel that camp is a haven, a safe place to relax and be themselves. Without the pressures of academics, athletics, social media, and their parents', teachers', and coaches' expectations, kids—many for the first time—experience living in the moment, enjoying each other's company, challenging themselves, and figuring out who they truly are and what they really like. Many campers feel healed, restored, or changed by their camp experience and don't want to leave." xvii*



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1. Over the years, the number of kids with anxiety disorders, depression, addiction and suicide has continued to rise. These issues must be addressed on every level. Discuss any experience you or your family have had with these epidemic issues. Think about how these problems not only affect the people involved, but our society at large.

2. Among the factors being blamed for these increasing health problems are lack of sleep, poor nutrition, poverty, increased screen use, and over-parenting. Have you witnessed these issues in your life or in the lives of those around you?

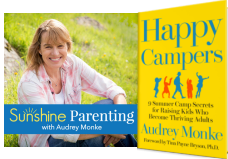
### The “Magic” of Summer Camp

*“While teaching a child to waterski or rock climb, we know they’re gaining far more important skills, like the courage to try something new and the perseverance to do it over and over, despite failure. As parents, we can look at the skills we teach our children in the same way. When we have our child help with a regular daily household chore, like washing dishes, they are learning more than just kitchen hygiene. They’re gaining a sense of responsibility,*

*a work ethic, and an understanding of how each family member contributes to running the household...With this framework, it’s clear that washing dishes is not just about having a clean kitchen.” p.2*

1. Many former campers and their parents talk about the “magic” of camp, which Audrey Monke attributes to the “very specific, planned practices” they have implemented to create a culture wherein children thrive. Making some intentional changes in the home, as described in Happy Campers, will produce similar results. If you had a magic wand, what changes would you make in your home life?

2. Just like children practice important social skills at summer camp, at home kids can gain those same crucial relationship skills by regular, positive interactions with family members. When do you find the time to engage with your children? Is it around the dinner table, in the car, before bedtime? What are the obstacles, if any, that keep you from connecting with your children more often?



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### They Call Me “Sunshine”

*“If a camper learns to be a little kinder or more grateful, or overcomes homesickness, anxiety, or a social fear to thrive at camp, or a parent discovers a way to have a closer connection with their child because of something I’ve shared, then I have successfully made my dent.” p.6*

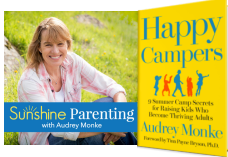
1. Steve Jobs once said, “We’re here to put a dent in the universe. Otherwise, why else even be here?” Audrey’s aim is for parents to develop closer connections with their children and for children to have a home where they feel acceptance and belonging. How can affecting one child’s life have a ripple effect on their family, their associations in the community, and even on future generations?

2. A “Happy Camper” is a thriving, positive individual who feels a sense of purpose and belonging. Think about the members of your family and how they demonstrate their sense of purpose and belonging. Is your home a “safe place to land” for all?

### Strategies for Bringing the Magic of Camp Home

*“To make Happy Campers a useful parenting tool that encourages, inspires and doesn’t leave you overwhelmed, in the back of each chapter I’ve included the “Bringing Camp Home” section which contains specific activities and discussions to foster the character trait or skill you are interested in develop in in your kids.” p.7*

1. The “Bringing Camp Home” section is comprised of the following categories: One Simple Thing, The Sticky Note Solution, Make It Fun, Around the Campfire, Family Meeting Topic, and Diving Deeper. Which of these categories were the most appealing to you? Are there any ideas which you have been able to incorporate into your family life?



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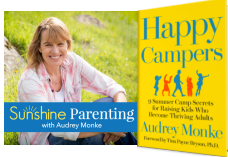
2. Audrey Monke offers “Sticky Note Solutions” for each of her nine camp secrets. There are times when the best form of communication is simple and straight-forward. Discuss when using sticky notes would make an impact and clearly get your message across to your family. How does this ease communication and get kids’ attention?

3. A family contract is another way to get everyone on board with change. What are some important issues you would want to address in your family contract?

### Camp Secret #1: Connection Comes First

*“Very little that is positive is solitary. When was the last time you laughed uproariously? The last time you felt indescribable joy? The last time you sensed profound meaning and purpose? The last time you felt enormously proud of an accomplishment? Even without knowing the particulars of the high points of your life, I know their form: all of them took place around other people.” p.11 --Martin Seligman, Flourish*

1. “If campers don’t feel accepted, included and valued, nothing else we do at camp matters.” What simple change you can make to help your family feel more connected?



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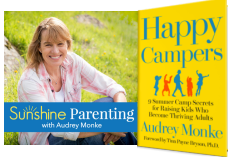
## HAPPY CAMPERS: 9 SUMMER CAMP SECRETS FOR RAISING KIDS WHO BECOME THRIVING ADULTS

2. We know that social connections are the greatest predictor of all aspects of lifelong success, including health, academics and career. PERMA stands for positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Have you focused on any of these elements in your home? Which area is a strength in your home and which area may need some work?

3. Happy Campers can differentiate between relationships and “REALationships”. We need to show love and acceptance for who our children truly are and not who we want them to be. The simple equation,  $A + B = C$  (meaning Acceptance + Belonging = Connection) is a good reminder. Are your child’s interests internally or externally driven? Does your child ever feel compared to others? Think about what makes each member of your family unique and how they contribute positively to the dynamic in your home.

4. Audrey emphasizes the importance of assigning chores and requiring every member of the family to help with housework. How does this create a greater sense of belonging? How are the household responsibilities shared in your home? Are your children doing age-appropriate jobs?

5. One suggestion for strengthening family bonds is sharing individual and group memories in Sharing Time at dinner. Stories, photos, and videos can help create a sense of belonging. How do old family movies make you feel? When was the last time your family watched a video together and what was the outcome?



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6. Camp is a no-device-zone which has proven to be so rewarding for campers. Using technology in our home is necessary and overuse is hard to avoid. Unfortunately, most adults are modeling the constant checking of phones during any moment of pause or boredom. We know that disconnecting from technology allows for more time for reflection, introspection and connection. We are advised to “unplug and connect face to face.” Consider imposing a “no phone, shotgun seat” rule or “no screens at the dinner table” rule. What are some other ways to minimize screen use as a family? (See examples provided on p. 32.)

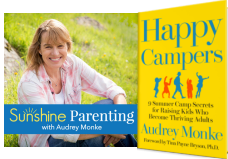
### Camp Secret #2: Catch Them Doing Something Right

*“When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it’s our job to share our calm, not join their chaos.” p.40 --L.R. Knost*

1. Research shows that negative responses to bad behavior, for example: nagging, yelling, punishing, and time-outs, don’t produce the lasting, positive behavior changes we desire for kids. Think back to instances in your childhood when these “traditional” forms of punishment were used around you. Do you remember how you felt about being negatively reprimanded? How did it affect your relationships?

2. Prioritize connection before correction. Can you think of a time when emotions ran high and positive communication was hindered? Happy Campers offers 9 tips (p. 42) for ways to respond calmly in emotional situations. It is important to know when to take breaks and seek help. Which of these solutions would work best for you?





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3. Theodore Roosevelt said, “Comparison is the thief of joy.” No one wants their weaknesses to be compared to the strengths of others, yet many of us do it to ourselves. Instead of pestering children about their shortcomings, make it a habit to flip the conversation and make their strengths and “what went right” the focus. Think of an area of weakness your child has shown and then identify some gain they’ve made addressing that issue. How can you focus on a positive aspect, encouraging your child and preserving your relationship?

4. Clearly articulate your expectations. Are there any non-negotiable rules in your home that you have not yet discussed with your children? Are your kids familiar with your expectations? How have you communicated your values to them?

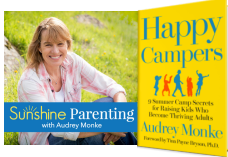
5. This chapter discusses the importance of positive behavior management strategies and offers eight suggestions. Tina Payne Bryson’s Skills to Build worksheet is another great resource. As parents, ask yourselves what is going well in your family each week. What are your areas of strengths? In what areas are you struggling? Focus on ideas and action plans rather than criticism and blaming.



### Camp Secret #3: Positive Practices Produce Optimistic Kids

*“When we’re intentional about engaging in activities that allow us to laugh with our children, we’re creating an environment where optimism will flourish.” p.72*

1. In this chapter we read about the importance of optimism. Who would you consider the bigger optimist, yourself or your partner? Is this an area where you can improve? If so, Audrey offers many suggestions for improving your outlook. How can you make sure your home is a “happiness pocket” for your kids?



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2. Camp is full of positive messages, from the WOW bulletin board to the bathroom stalls. You can post inspirational quotes in your home, as well. What is your favorite quote? Can you think of the perfect spot in your home to display some inspiration?

3. Going outside is a positivity practice. Being in nature provides stress relief, promotes better sleep, boosts brain health and decreases anxiety and depression. What are some ways that you can bring nature into your daily lives? How can your family access the great outdoors with more frequency?

4. Assess your family's PQ (Positivity Quotient) to see if you need a positivity intervention. This may include monitoring the tone of conversations in the home, the types of media, the attitudes we are modeling. What would that look like in your home? Which of the suggestions offered (on p. 70 - 71) would work best for your family?



### Camp Secret #4: All Kids Can be More Independent (Even Clingy Homebodies!)

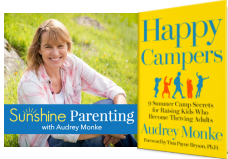
*"Our kids need to be allowed to slowly unfurl their wings, not be abruptly shoved out of the nest. No bird is going to fly and thrive if one day they're having worms spoon-fed into their mouth and the next they're expected to go fly and figure out how to catch them.*

*Independence doesn't happen overnight." p.85*

OR

*"The rocky, uneven dirt paths at camp offer the ideal metaphor for why campers experience so much growth in their independence in such a short period of time: they are allowed to stumble and trip, experience some discomfort and difficulty without concerned parents swooping*

*in to save them." p.86*



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1. People often experience discomfort when learning to do new things; gaining independence is no different. Can you think of a skill that was challenging to learn but through perseverance you were able to master that ability? Our children must be allowed to do things on their own and so develop autonomy and confidence. Think of an area where you may be doing too much for your child.

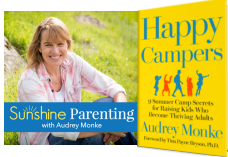
2. When your children come to you with a problem, one of the best ways to help them to be more independent is to ask them, "What are you going to do?" Have you seen your child come up with a creative solution to a problem? How can we avoid rescuing our children from their mistakes?

3. Our kids need to understand the relationship between their increased responsibilities and their increased privileges and freedoms at home. A conversation about how independence is not a function of chronological age is important. For example, what are some reasonable expectations relating to chores for a 16-year-old who would like driving privileges? Or for the child who wants a cell phone, what responsibilities should be required?



### Camp Secret #5: Grit Is Grown Outside the Comfort Zone

*"Most growth and learning happens in that magical space just outside our comfort zone, where we are just a bit scared or challenged. Our slightly elevated heart rate and nerves actually propel us to work harder and do better." p.108*



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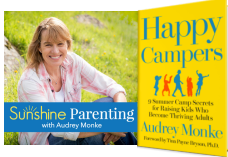
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1. The over-parenting trend that emerged in the 90s led to a “generation of adults who hesitate to take risks, fear failure, turn to substances to stifle difficult emotions, and want rewards for average performance.” We now see that allowing kids to experience discomfort is necessary for the development of resilience and growth in confidence. Think back to your upbringing. Were you raised in a sink-or-swim atmosphere or in a home with “helicopter” parents? How has your own family history influenced your parenting style?

2. Comfort zones vary greatly depending on a person’s temperament. How willing are you to try new things? How about your children? We know that resilience paves the way for long-term happiness and success. Happy Campers offers three ways to help kids get out of their comfort zones: let them do it alone, practice “baby steps”, and remember the “blessing” of the least favorite activity. How can you celebrate “the courage of trying” and even mistakes and failures in your children’s lives?

3. If we want to raise kids with grit, we need to model resilience and perseverance. Think of some personal goals you can set to help you demonstrate resolve and determination. It can be a physical or non-physical goal, but let your child know what you’re doing and discuss your progress. What individual goals come to mind?

4. When setting goals, use the SMART acronym: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time bound. Remember, written goals are 50% more likely to be achieved so decide now where your family will write down their goals. What are some other ways that you can show support and hold each other accountable for your goals as a family?



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### Camp Secret #6: Kids Are More Capable Than Parent Think They Are

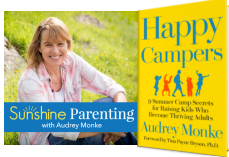
*"It is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves, that will make them successful human beings." – Ann Landers*

1. What are some things you are doing for your child that they are capable of doing for themselves? Audrey's Household Chore Audit is a great tool for helping you see where you can give your kids more responsibilities.

2. A good work ethic is an invaluable life skill. Asking the magic question, "What else can I do?" is a habit that teaches taking initiative and finishing a job well. When we take the time to teach our kids how to do for themselves, we set them up for future success as reliable, self-starters. What are some other questions you can teach your children to ask?

3. It's never too late to start asking your children to help more around the house. Print a copy of Sunshine's Ready for Adulthood checklist and explain to older children that it is for their well-being and preparation for leaving home. What are some ways that you can involve them in dividing household responsibilities?

4. According to K.J. Dell'Antonia in How to be a Happier Parent, yearly chores for kids work better than a daily or weekly rotation for making chores stick. Have your attempts at assigning household duties ever been thwarted? What are some of the obstacles you've faced in the past? What are some ways to get kids to buy in to the process?



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5. Our kids are so busy that many parents are reluctant to demand more of their time. But we know that learning how to balance and schedule work, leisure, and household responsibilities is an important life skill needed by competent adults. If your child's schedule is "too busy" then what change can be made to free up more time? How do you show appreciation for the work they do around the home and encourage more engagement?

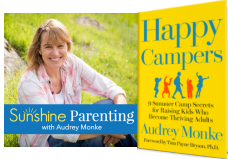


### Camp Secret #7: Kids Thrive with Structure

*"If our kids can depend on some predictability and structure in that very important place called home, we provide them a safe, calm buffer against a chaotic world." p.158*

1. In this chapter, Audrey refers to Gretchen Rubin's The Four Tendencies, which describes the roles people take on in relationship to one another: Upholder, Questioner, Obliger, and Rebel. Each individual in your family will have their own approach, with unique strengths and weaknesses. Have you discovered your family's tendencies? Has this helped you to better understand others' perspectives or actions?

2. A set schedule, clear expectations, and simple routines around daily events make family life less stressful and more fun and relaxed. Routines around waking up, making good food and exercise choices, and getting homework done help our kids learn and develop self-discipline. This continuity is especially important during high stress times, such as weekday morning, homework time and bedtime. Is there a time of day when chaos reigns in your home? What changes would you like to see in your family's routine?



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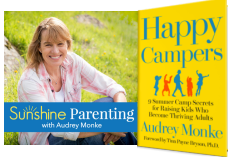
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3. Life brings about many unpredictable changes. Feeling out of control causes stress levels to rise, which is why having a routine that's consistent and reliable is a family stress buster. If you can only muster the energy for one family routine, Audrey suggests making it dinner. Kids who eat dinner with their families on a regular basis are more emotionally stable, less likely to abuse substances, perform better academically, are less depressed and healthier overall. Think about your dinnertime routine and commit to making this time together a priority. What changes would you need to make to your family's schedule? Can the members of your family contribute more help to plan, cook, and clean? How can you maximize this time together?

4. What bedtime routines do you have in your family? Reading together, nightly chats or "tuck-ins" are wonderful habits providing connection and stability. Are your children getting enough sleep? Are you modeling healthy sleeping patterns, too? If needed, how can you structure your bedtime routine to make it more calm and pleasant?

5. Look at Sara Kuljis' Family Pace and Space questions from her parenting workshop on page 162. After reflecting on your family's pace of life, are your answers in line with your family's values or can they serve as a catalyst for change?

6. In Daniel Siegel's The Yes Brain, Siegel and David Rock create a "Healthy Mind Platter" which consists of seven "daily essential mental activities": time for focus, play, connecting, physical, time-in, down time and sleep. Are you getting short-changed in any of these areas? What's missing from your family's schedule?



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7. Down time is crucial for a healthy mind. How does your family relax? What gets you in that great state of “flow” where you lose track of time? Is there a craft or creative activity that helps you feel rejuvenated? Help your kids recognize what “flow” is and discuss how they can make some time for relaxation each day.

8. As the CEO of your family, evaluate your family’s current culture. Does the attitude and atmosphere in your home align with your values? Do the members of your family share the same vision and goals for your home life? What are some strategic goals for the future? Does your family have a mission statement?



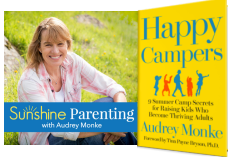
### Camp Secret #8: Make It Cool to Be Kind

*“The world in which we are living—and raising our children—clearly needs more kindness. It can start with us and our families and produce a ripple effect outward to our schools and communities.” p.180*

1. One of the most important lessons reinforced at camp is the importance of kindness. What would your kids say you value more—grades and achievements or kindness? Do your actions and conversations reflect your desire to promote kindness? How do we teach our children to view other kids who do mean things through a lens of compassion and empathy?

2. Audrey shares tips from her blog post called “5 Steps to Help Kids Resolve Conflicts” and presents these suggestions at camp when teaching conflict resolution. How does empowering your children to find solutions when there is a conflict teach them important life lessons?





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3. Consider doing one of the Random Acts of Kindness challenges in your family. Ask your kids to help incorporate some kindness practices into your routines. How can you support your family's focus on being kind in and out of the home?



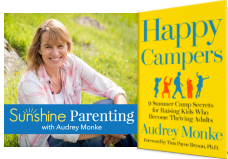
### Camp Secret #9: Coach Kids to Better Friendships

*"Making friends is the primary task of childhood...The importance of quality childhood and adolescent friendships cannot be understated." p.197*

1. Throughout our lives, making friends is crucial to our emotional well-being and happiness. How can you help your child to be a better friend? Are there any social skills your child needs to work on? As your child's friendship coach, you can help them improve their skills through modeling, discussion, instruction and role playing. What are your own areas of social strengths? What about areas where you can improve?

2. When we invest too much effort into forcing our kids to be friends with certain people, we limit their ability to find their own "tribe". Does your child seem to have intimacy, kindness, mutual-liking and reciprocity in their friendships? Or does your child need exposure to more children in order to find a close group of friends?

3. We are social animals who are made to connect, and we all want to connect with others. Is there someone in your life you've been missing or wanting to reconnect with? Audrey challenges the reader to think of a neglected friend or family member and call, text or mail them a letter. That's a simple way to be a good friend and show your kids how it's done.



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### Enhance Your Book Club or Family Discussion:

Visit <https://sunshine-parenting.com/happy/to> to download the book's many resources including:

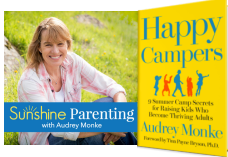
- VIA Character Strengths
- Family Positivity Quiz/Quotient
- Sara's Pace & Space PDF
- Lunch Packing Instructions
- Skills to Build Worksheet
- Household Chore Audit
- Sunshine's Ready for Adulthood Checklist
- Social Skills Assessment Worksheet

### A Conversation with Audrey Monke

**Happy Campers grew out of the success of your Sunshine Parenting podcast and blog, which has helped thousands of parents (of campers and non-campers alike) with a range of issues. When did you first realize you wanted to write something more in-depth about bringing the magic of camp home?**

I started sharing ideas and activities with parents on my website (sunshine-parenting.com) back in 2012. I found that so many of the things we train our counselors to do in their work with campers are just as applicable for parents.

As I wrote more and more, and then added my podcast, I kept getting great feedback from parents who said my writing and podcast were encouraging them and helping them. I loved feeling like my words could bring encouragement to others, and I felt that the format of a book – with the opportunity to share many more words than I can share in a blog post – would be a great way to get all my parenting ideas in one place. With my own kids getting older (and being pretty darn independent!), I have had a lot more time in recent years to pursue some of my own goals. One of my lifelong goals was to write a book. And I knew that for this first (of I hope many) books, the best topic would be the one I know the most about – my insights about summer camp, positive psychology, and parenting!



# WORKBOOK & DISCUSSION GUIDE

## HAPPY CAMPERS: 9 SUMMER CAMP SECRETS FOR RAISING KIDS WHO BECOME THRIVING ADULTS

**Your book is structured so that after each secret shared there is a “Bringing Camp Home” section full of specific tips and strategies in six subcategories. While some readers will find the suggestions in “One Simple Thing” the most applicable, others will gain more from the recommended “Family Meeting Topics.” In your own family, which strategies were the easiest to implement and did you ever run out of sticky notes?**

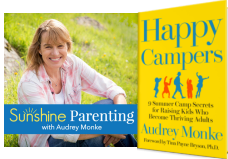
Ha! My sister recently reminded me that I definitely inherited my sticky note obsession from my mother. Sticky notes are her main organization method and are always nearby. There are usually 5-10 sticky notes around her cabinets and kitchen counter. I love shopping for office supplies, so I NEVER run out of sticky notes. In fact, whenever I organize my desk or office, I usually find an extra stash of sticky notes. I go through a lot of them, and not just with reminder notes for my kids!

For me, the number one strategy that has been most impactful in my family is our sharing at family dinner. Even when we’ve gotten off track with chores and other things, we always manage to come together and chat at dinner. I love family dinners. It’s usually my favorite part of the day. And, although we don’t always have a formal “Family Meeting” these days, we do use our family dinners to discuss important topics. Just this week at a dinner with my fifteen-year-old son and his friend, we had an indepth talk about what consent means in relationships and how the bar in a romantic relationship should be much higher than just a mere “consent.”

**You did so much research in preparation for writing this book and it is clear you’ve drawn on the research and expertise of many others over the years. From Love and Logic to How to Raise An Adult, your book has a rich bibliography. Of all the sources listed, which ones do you credit as the most instrumental in helping you form the strategies at camp and in the home?**

Oh my goodness! Don’t make me narrow my list. I almost included a book resource list in the back of my book, but it was getting too long for what my publisher wanted. So instead I’ve made it available on my website ([happycampersbook.com](http://happycampersbook.com)). You’ll find a list of all the books that have been most influential to me as I formed the strategies I wrote about in Happy Campers. One side note is that many of the books that I have learned a lot from and used in my parenting and at camp, are not designated as “parenting” books. I believe leadership practices that are helpful in a work setting are often equally applicable at home.

**You also connect with camps from all around the country on a regular basis. How much did you draw upon input from other camp directors and how much was it based on your own experience at Gold Arrow Camp?**



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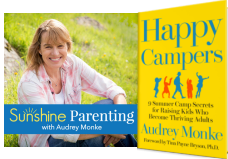
The camp industry is such an amazing one, and I have formed many of my closest friendships over the past three decades with owners and directors of other summer camps. We don't feel like competitors – more like collaborators in trying to get the camp message out to the world. We share tips and ideas from what we have learned at our own camps with each other, and I've learned so much from many different mentors and friends over my years at camp. We call each other when we're facing a problem or need help with something, and we support each other and share resources. Especially among my bestie camp friends in WAIC (Western Association of Independent Camps), we feel more like one big camp than a bunch of separate programs.

While I have the most experience at my own camp, I wanted to make sure the ideas in Happy Campers resonated with others – and were consistent – with what happens at other camps, as well. I had a lot of conversations with other camp directors while researching and writing the book. I asked what activities they use at their camp to teach kids important skills. The feedback I've received from camp directors who read the early release copy of Happy Campers is that many of the stories and ideas I shared could be from their own camps. One director texted me (after reading the first few chapters), "It is everything we do at camp. You have captured it perfectly." That's what I was aiming for!

I didn't want this book to be about Gold Arrow Camp, but about the lessons and ideas and connection practiced at many well-run camps. For many families, their summer camp is a very important part of their family's tradition and they feel a strong loyalty to their specific camp. My hope was always that the stories and ideas in Happy Campers would resonate with all camp people, not just the people who know me and my camp. I also hoped that even parents who never experienced summer camp (or sent their kids) could benefit from what I've learned at camp.

**You have launched a few of your own children into the “real world” and a you have a couple of kids still living at home today. What changes, if any, would you make if you could return to the time when you had all your kids living at home?**

There was one amazing, magical spring where I didn't get organized to sign my younger kids up for any activities outside of school. We were all home, every evening, for family dinner together. We were never in a rush to get anywhere, everyone had plenty of time to do homework and do relaxing activities. It was the final school year when all my kids still lived at home (before my oldest left for college). If I could return to the earlier years, I would definitely prune out more activities (all but the most loved and essential ones). Definitely less is more when it comes to happiness and connection.



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## HAPPY CAMPERS: 9 SUMMER CAMP SECRETS FOR RAISING KIDS WHO BECOME THRIVING ADULTS

Time together just hanging out are some of our best family memories, and on those days when we were rushing around to get to a bunch of different activities, we weren't really having much fun. I remember how we'd all cheer when a practice got cancelled due to rain. How crazy is it that we sign ourselves up for so many things that we don't end up enjoying them very much? I would tell my younger self, "Just chill. None of these activities is very important. Just keep the things each of you really enjoy and ditch the rest."

### **How do you see camps like Gold Arrow changing in the future?**

My hope is that we won't change much. Much of what makes camp amazing is what doesn't change – being outdoors, being unplugged, being together, singing, dancing. The old-fashioned feel of summer camp reminds me of one of my favorite country songs, Rascall Flatts' "Mayberry." The song talks about "sitting on the front porch" and "people pass by and you call them by their first name."

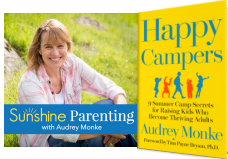
### **In doing all the research for this book, what did you discover that most surprised you?**

I keep coming back to the idea that simple changes can make such a big difference. Sometimes I think parents feel so overwhelmed by their child's behavior or a negative family culture, and they think they have to make huge changes. It turns out that small changes – like just spending a bit more time focused on listening to each other or creating a new family habit or tradition – can make a big difference. I hope that gives parents some encouragement!

### **After running Gold Arrow Camp for 34 years, you've seen generations of campers go through. How are today's campers different from a generation ago? How has parenting changed in that time? What gives you hope for the future?**

In a lot of ways, kids are the same as they were when I first started working at camp. They have so much fun together and form extremely close friendships at camp. They challenge themselves and love roasting marshmallows and chatting around the campfire.

There has been a rise in the number of kids who have different diagnoses (including ADHD, Anxiety, Depression, OCD, and more). I know some of that is due to better diagnosis, but I also believe that our culture and the pressures on kids (and parents) are not good for our kids' well-being. I think camp has always been fun for kids, but it now provides kids with a much-needed break from the pressures they face at home and school. That break seems even more important and relevant now than it was three decades ago.



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One of the biggest changes has been that kids in the 1980s and 1990s didn't have phones, so we used to talk about the break from TV kids got while at camp. Now summer camp is a break from the many hours of screen time these kids experience when they're not at camp. Being "unplugged" and in the outdoors might be one of the most amazing benefits of camp experiences.

I've noticed a huge change in parents. They are much more anxious than they were in my early years at camp. It would be hard for parents to imagine their child being at camp and them not being able to see photos posted by camp. But in my first two decades at camp, parents survived their child being away without seeing even a single photo. I think the technology and ability to post and show photos has probably contributed to the craziness of over-parenting that now even extends to when kids are at camp hundreds of miles from home.



Audrey "Shine" Monke