



Camp Stephens Handbook:

Your Guide to Canoe Trips



Camp Stephens is owned & operated
by YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg

Welcome to Camp Stephens!

We're so excited to share this summer with your family.

At Camp Stephens, we believe camp is more than just fun—it's transformative. Every paddle stroke, portage, and campfire is an opportunity for your child to build resilience, independence, and leadership skills. Whether it's their first overnight trip or a 6-week expedition, campers will return home with stories abound, confidence, and a strong sense of accomplishment.

We know sending your child on a wilderness trip is a big step. Safety, care, and inclusion are at the heart of everything we do. From route planning to emergency procedures, our experienced staff follow best practices and maintain high standards to ensure every camper feels safe and supported.

We put this guide together to help you and your child prepare for their summer adventure. Please take the time to review it and reach out to our camp team at campregistrar@ymanitoba.ca if you have any questions.

Thanks for making Camp Stephens a part of your child's summer—we can't wait for their paddling adventure to begin!

See you at camp!

Sara MacArthur
General Manager, Camp, Youth and Program Equity

What's Inside

Wilderness at a Glance	4-5	Behaviour/Expectations	12-13
Packing Overview	6	Financial Information	14
Transportation	7	FAQs	15
Health & Safety	8-9	Packing List	16
Communication	10-11		

Wilderness Program

Our wilderness program is an important part of the Camp Stephens experience.

Campers learn practical outdoor skills like paddling, cooking, and setting up camp—but just as importantly, they learn how to work as a team, push through challenges, and take care of one another.

There's something powerful about being out in nature, away from distractions, where campers can build confidence, independence, and a strong sense of belonging.

Important Reminders:

- **Forms:** Complete Emergency & Health information via ePACT at least 30 days before arrival.
- **Packing List:** We've made the list, you should check it twice.
- **Payment & Refunds:** If you need to make changes, contact our office as soon as possible.
- **Financial Assistance:** If you have questions about camperships or barrier funding, please reach out.



Wilderness Trips at a Glance

Our wilderness program is designed to grow with campers as they build skills and confidence. Younger participants start with foundational skills and are introduced to teamwork in a wilderness setting. Older campers learn advanced technical skills and assume leadership roles on trail. This progression supports age-appropriate challenges and growth at every stage.

1-Week Paddlers (Ages 12–15): An introductory trip focused on building basic skills and getting comfortable on the water, close to Camp Stephens.

2-Week Explorers (Ages 12–15): Campers travel beyond Lake of the Woods to nearby lakes (like Shoal, Dryberry and Kakagi), building confidence, independence, and teamwork.

3-Week Pathfinders (Ages 15–16): An introduction to whitewater paddling, where trips paddle through the rivers of north-western Ontario, including the Turtle river, the English river and the Brightsand river.

4-Week Trailblazers (Ages 16–17): A longer expedition where campers travel to more remote northern rivers in Ontario and Manitoba (like the Allenwater and Bloodvein) to build endurance and teamwork.

6-Week Voyageur & Serendipity (Ages 17–18): Our most advanced trips, where trips paddle down one of three “corridors” along a series of rivers in northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Building leadership skills in the wilderness

Our programs weave leadership development into every trip.

- **Modeling leadership:** Our trippers are experienced staff who mentor participants and model responsible leadership.
- **Tripper-for-the-day:** On a rotating basis, campers are given some of the day-to-day trip responsibilities that are usually handled by trippers. With guidance and support from trippers, campers will lead the group through navigation, campsite set-up and delegation of responsibilities.

Life on Trail

Life on trail has a rhythm to it. Each day is a mix of paddling, teamwork, and time to relax and connect. On average, campers paddle about 20 km per day. Trippers adjust the pace based on weather, energy levels, and safety.

- **Morning:** Wake up, eat breakfast, pack up camp, load boats and start the day’s paddling
- **Midday :** Stop for a trail lunch (“TL”) – an assortment of nutrient-dense foods like mix of nuts, canned fruits, crackers etc.
- **Afternoon:** More paddling, skill-building, and sometimes a swim
- **Evening:** Set up camp, cook dinner together, and enjoy some downtime.
- **Night:** Campfire (if bugs aren’t too bad), journaling, and settling into tents for the night.

Sleeping Arrangements

Campers sleep in shared tents (typically 4–6 campers), while trippers sleep in their own tent nearby.

Being in the tent at the end of the day is a great place for reading and journaling and campers are encouraged to do these quieter activities before bed.

Cooking & Meal Prep

All meals are cooked as a group. Using existing firepits, or camping stoves on rainy days, campers participate in meal prep, cooking and cleanup.

Tried and true meal favourites are: burrito bowls, mac and cheese and sweet & sour chicken

All camper dietary needs and allergies are accommodated. This information is collected at the time of registration.

Group Roles & Responsibilities

Everyone plays a part on trip—whether it's gathering firewood, setting up tents, cooking meals, or keeping the campsite organized. These shared responsibilities are a big part of what makes the experience meaningful.

Leave No Trace Principles

Campers and staff are encouraged to interact with nature though the principles of “leave no trace”.

- Plan ahead - Trips travel pre-planned routes which include where they'll be staying everyday, how far they're expected to travel, and what they're expected to encounter (like portages and points of interest).
- Stay at established campsites - Trips stay at established campsites with existing fire pits, wherever possible.
- Dispose of waste properly - Litter is no joke, and campers are taught responsible practices for dealing with all kinds of waste produced on trips.
- Leave what you find - Campers are discouraged from removing objects from the nature as “souvenirs”. Campers are encouraged to take pictures of interesting things they see!

Packing for Camp

Packing well can make a big difference in your camper's experience. The goal is simple - bring what you need, but not more than you need. This section provides general guidance on packing for a canoe trip. A detailed packing list is found at the end of this handbook.

General Packing Tips

- Label everything possible!
- Involve your camper in the packing process so they can identify the clothing they'll wear.
- Waterproof Your Luggage: Pack items in a duffel bag with a garbage bag liner. Pack sleeping bags in a dry bag or in a stuff sack lined with a garbage bag.
- Leave electronics, jewelry and other high value or sentimental items at home.
- Avoid cotton clothing —it stays wet and cold. Instead, choose quick-drying materials like polyester.
- Divide your packing into three categories:
 - Camp clothes – to wear at camp
 - "Wet clothes" – to wear while paddling during the day
 - "Dry clothes" – to wear at the campsite
- Print off the packing list at the end of this handbook. Check items off the list as you go. Send the packing list with your camper to use when they're packing to come home.

The Duffel Shuffle

Before leaving the island, campers and trippers sit down for a "duffel shuffle". This is where campers lay out all of the clothes and equipment they brought to camp. With tripper guidance, campers sort through their gear and equipment to decide what goes on the trip and what stays at camp.

Camp Stephens provides the following gear for all wilderness trips:

- Canoes, paddles, and PFDs
- Tents
- Cooking equipment and stoves
- Food and food storage systems
- Safety and emergency equipment

Lost & Found

All found clothing and gear will be placed in the Lost & Found bin located in the dining hall. Campers will visit the Lost and Found at the end of their trip in hopes of uniting campers with wayward items. For labeled items, we'll do our best to return these items to campers promptly.

At the end of each session, all unclaimed items are bagged, tagged, and transported back to Winnipeg on the first departing bus. These items are laid out at the West Portage Y for parents to look at during camper pick-up. After this viewing period, any remaining items will be donated.

Transportation to and from Camp

Getting your camper safely to and from Camp Stephens is a top priority. Here's what you need to know about the first and last day of camp.

Leaving from Winnipeg

- Campers depart from the West Portage Community Hub (3550 Portage Avenue).
- Families will receive an email 5–7 business days before camp with their camper's bus departure time (typically between 7 – 9 am).
- Parents must sign in their camper with designated staff and hand in any medications (see Health & Safety section).
- Campers board highway coaches accompanied by staff for the trip to Kenora.

Arriving in Kenora and heading to camp

- Campers are brought to the Kenora Harbourfront dock where they'll board boats for the 15-minute boat ride to camp.
- All campers are fitted with life jackets for the boat ride.
- Our boat drivers are licensed under Transport Canada.
- We use Zag Fab boats and operate under Transport Canada's safety regulations.
- The boat is supervised by trained staff.

Returning to Winnipeg

Campers return to the West Portage Community Hub by bus. Families will receive an email with return details, but the buses will typically arrive early afternoon.

Kenora dock drop-off and pick-up option

If you choose to drop off and pick up your child in Kenora, please meet us at the Harbourfront Dock in Kenora at the designated pick-up and drop-off time. We will email you the approximate time to meet your camper beforehand.

Tips for sending your camper on the bus

- **Snacks:** A light snack for the bus ride is great, but NO nuts or products that contain nuts.
- **Dress for Comfort:** The bus is air conditioned and the boat ride can feel 15 degrees colder than the air temperature. Have a sweatshirt, jacket and rain gear on hand.
- **Label All Luggage:** Clearly mark all luggage with your camper's name.
- **Waterproof your stuff:** Pack your clothes, sleeping bag and pillow in heavy duty garbage bags before putting them in your luggage.
- **Medications:** Hand all medications directly to staff during sign-in (do not pack in luggage).
- **Stay Positive:** A quick, confident goodbye helps your camper start their adventure with excitement!

Health & Safety

Our Commitment to Safety

At Camp Stephens, your child's well-being is our highest priority. We maintain strict safety standards, provide trained staff for all activities, and have clear procedures for health care and emergencies. From daily wellness checks to emergency response, we're committed to creating a safe, supportive environment where campers can thrive.

Medical Care & Wellness Centre

Our Wellness Centre is staffed by trained personnel who handle daily health needs, minor injuries, and medication administration. Every camper receives a basic health check upon arrival. If a camper requires care beyond what we can provide, parents will be contacted immediately, and arrangements will be made for local medical services. The Camp Director or camp staff will accompany the camper until a parent arrives.

Prescription Medications at Camp

To ensure camper safety, all medications must follow these guidelines:

- **Packaging:** Medications must be in their original packaging with the medication name and dosage clearly identifiable.
- **Bubble Packing Option:** Medications can be taken to a pharmacy and bubble-packed for camp use.
- **Timing Matters:** Include written instructions for when and how doses should be given.
- **Drop-Off:** All medications must be hand-delivered by a parent/guardian at sign-in and not packed in luggage.
- **Unlabeled Medications:** For safety reasons, unlabeled medications will not be accepted.

Medication Process

1. **Sign-In:** Medications are dropped into the designated bin at the bus during sign-in.
2. **Secure Transport:** The bin is sealed and transported to camp by a staff member.
3. **Logging:** Upon arrival, the bin is unsealed by the Wellness Coordinator, and all medications are logged into camp records.
4. **Tracking:** A tracking sheet records the medication name, dosage, and administration times.
5. **Administration:** Medications are stored and administered by Trippers, unless otherwise approved.
6. **Emergency medications** (e.g., EpiPens, inhalers) are carried at all times.

If you have concerns about your child's medication, please email campregistrar@ymanitoba.ca before camp begins.

Trippler certifications

To be a member of wilderness staff, all Trippers must obtain the following certifications and trainings:

- Wilderness Advanced First Aid
- National Lifeguard
- CPR C
- Canoe instruction
- Risk management training

6-week Trippers have additional certifications in Wilderness First Responder and Whitewater Rescue.

Communication on Trip

- Trippers carry a satellite phone or emergency communication device
- All wilderness trips have daily check-ins with camp
- Parents will be contacted only if necessary or in the event of an emergency

Evacuation Procedures

Every trip has pre-planned evacuation procedures. Trippers are trained to:

- Stabilize medical situations
- Contact emergency services
- Coordinate evacuation if required

Wildlife Safety Guidelines

Staff and campers are taught safe food practices, like how to store food so that wildlife can't get to it and what to do with leftovers after meals. Campers are taught how to behave respectfully around wildlife, including how to observe and not interfere with their natural behaviours by feeding animals and maintaining a respectful distance.

Accessibility & Inclusion

Camp Stephens strives to create an inclusive environment for all campers. If your camper needs accommodations like mobility support, dietary needs, or other considerations, please contact us before camp so we can plan appropriately. We've successfully adapted facilities and programming so that all campers are included.

Communication

Staying connected while your child is at camp is important, and we want to make sure you know the best ways to reach us and send messages to your camper. Throughout their time at camp the campers will only be contactable by mail.

How to Contact Camp

If you need to reach us during your child's session:

- Email: campregistrar@ymanitoba.ca
- Phone: Contact the Winnipeg Office at 204-831-3157. Messages will be delivered to camp as soon as possible.

Please note: Camp Stephens Staff are seasonal workers. An on-island emergency contact number will be shared closer to the start of session.

Camper Mail

Everyone loves to get mail at camp! Campers will light up when they hear from friends and family back home. But sending mail by Canada Post has been unreliable, which leads to camper disappointment.



If you'd like your camper to receive a letter when they return to the island after their canoe trip, please drop it off at the "Camp Mailbox" at the same time you drop off your camper. The "Camp Mailbox" will be available in the Winnipeg and Kenora drop-off locations in a visible location. Using the "Camp Mailbox" will ensure that your camper receives their letter at the midway point of their session.

Remember to address the mail with your camper's full name and the session they're attending.

Don't drop off mail at the front desk of our Community Hubs in hopes of it being brought to camp.

To send mail via Canada Post, use the following address and allow 5-7 business days for delivery

<Camper Name & Camp Dates>
Camp Stephens
305 Main Street
Kenora, Ontario P9N 1T4

Care Packages

We will no longer accept large packages for campers due to challenges in getting them to the island in a timely manner and because of concerns about package contents and dietary restrictions.

- What's Allowed: Letters and small, flat items like photos or postcards.
- What's NOT Allowed: Food, large packages, or bulky items.

Social Media

Camp is fun and we want to share in the excitement with everyone! Every session we'll post an assortment of photos from the island – accomplishments, adventures, friendships and fun. We encourage you to follow us on Instagram, **@camp_stephens**, to check out all the fun we'll be having and see if you can spot your camper in action.

Protecting the privacy and safety of children is a responsibility we take seriously. We'll only share photos if your child if you consented to doing so through the YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg Social Media Photo/ Video Consent Policy through ePACT.

We don't permit camp staff to connect with campers on social media, and ask that parents discourage your children from attempting to contact staff outside the context of camp.

Technology Policy

To help campers fully engage in the camp experience:

- No Phones or devices: Cell phones, tablets, gaming devices, and other electronics aren't permitted at camp.
- Why? Camp is a time to unplug, connect with nature, and form friendships without distractions.
- If a camper brings a device, it will be stored securely and returned at the end of the session.

Behaviour & Expectations

Camp Stephens is a community. We believe camp is a place to grow, make friends, and have fun in a safe and respectful environment. To make this possible, we have clear expectations for all campers and a structured process for addressing behaviour concerns.

Camper Code of Conduct

All campers are expected to:

- Respect themselves, others, and the environment
- Follow directions from staff
- Keep hands, feet, and objects to themselves
- Use kind and appropriate language
- Stay with their group and prioritize safety
- Contribute positively to cabin and activity groups

Expectations are introduced at the start of each session and reinforced throughout camp life.

Bullying & Respect Policy

Camp Stephens has a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, aggression, or intimidation, be it physical, verbal, or social. We work proactively to build inclusion and kindness through cabin agreements, buddy systems, and team activities.

How We Handle Behaviour

We use a tiered approach called the **Traffic Light Framework**:

Green (Tier 1): Minor behaviours - Gentle reminders and positive reinforcement.

Yellow (Tier 2): Moderate behaviours - Private conversation, reflection sheet, and parent contact if behaviour continues.

Red (Tier 3): Serious behaviours - Immediate removal from activity, leadership involvement, and parent contact.

If a camper's behaviour poses a safety risk or can't be resolved, they may be sent home. Parents/guardians must arrange pick-up within 24 hours of this decision.

Our Communication Commitment

We believe in partnering with families to support campers. Here's what you can expect:

When We Call: Calls are made by a member of our Senior Staff. They are respectful, solution-focused, and centered on your child's well-being.

Why We Call:

- Repeated moderate behaviours (Yellow Tier)
- Any serious behaviour (Red Tier)
- Significant distress or safety concerns

Our Goal:

Every call is made with the same purpose—to work together so your camper can have a positive experience.

The Camp Director or Camp Manager reserves the right to send campers home if behaviour can't be resolved safely.

What Happens If We Call You:

- We'll explain what happened, what steps we've taken, and invite your input.
- We'll share next steps and collaborate on solutions.
- If leaving the island is necessary, we'll provide instructions and support for camper pick-up within 24 hours.

Financial Information (post-registration)

Refund & Cancellation Policy

- 30+ days before session start: Full refund minus a non-refundable 20% deposit.
- < 30 days before session start: No refund.
- Behavioral dismissal or illness after arrival: No refund.
- Returned payments: A service charge applies; unpaid accounts may lead to cancellation.

For questions about payments or cancellations, please contact campregistrar@ymanitoba.ca.

Contact Information

Winnipeg Office (3550 Portage Ave., Winnipeg) – Please contact our camp registrars for inquiries about registration, payment information and other general camp questions.

Office hours: Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Direct line: 204-831-3157

Email: campstephens@ymanitoba.ca

If you have questions and concerns about your camper while they're at camp, please contact the Winnipeg Office and your message will be delivered to camp the same day.

Most of our correspondence is done through email, so please ensure we have your current email address on file.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What if my child gets homesick?

Homesickness can happen, especially in the first few days. Our staff are experienced in supporting campers through it. Most campers adjust quickly and feel proud of working through it.

How do you handle bad weather?

Camp Stephens has detailed weather protocols. Trips adjust routes and timing based on weather. Canoe trips may be delayed or rerouted if necessary. Safety always comes first.

What happens if my child has food allergies or dietary restrictions?

All dietary needs are accommodated when this information is provided in advance through registration forms.

How do I contact camp in an emergency?

Call the Winnipeg Office at 204-831-3157. An on-island emergency number will be provided before camp begins. All wilderness trips check in with camp on a daily basis, so important messages will be able to reach your camper.

What's your policy on electronics?

Electronics are not allowed at camp. If brought, they'll be stored securely and returned at the end of the session.

What if my child needs to leave camp early?

Please notify the Camp Registrar as soon as possible. Parents/guardians must arrange camper transportation for early departures.

Are there refunds if my child leaves early or is dismissed?

Refunds aren't provided for early departures or behavioral dismissals. See Section 9 for our refund policy.

Packing List

Print this list and check off items as you pack them. Send this sheet for your camper to use as they pack for home.

Personal Gear	
Sleeping bag	1
Ensolite sleeping pad or thermarest	1
30L Dry bag (like Seal Line) or stuff sack lined w. garbage bag – 1 for sleeping bag, 1 for clothes	2
Headlamp or flashlight – with new batteries!	1
1-liter capacity water bottle	1
Thermal mug	1
Toiletries for trail (<i>toothbrush, toothpaste, hairbrush, SPF lip balm</i>)	1
Toiletries for camp (<i>travel-sized shampoo, conditioner, soap, deodorant, towel</i>)	1
Sunscreen – waterproof, SPF 30+ - for 3-week trips and longer, bring a second bottle	1+
Sunglasses	1
Wet Clothes	
Quick-dry t-shirts	2
Quick-dry shorts	2
Long-sleeved shirt	1
Light pants	1
Light fleece or sweater	1
Socks – <i>wool or wool blend</i>	3
Underwear	5
Rain Gear – <i>waterproof jacket and pants</i>	1
Hat – wide-brimmed	1
Bathing suit	1
Pack towel or quick-dry towel	1
Bandana or buff	1
Toque and mitts	1
Hi-top sneakers or hiking boots with ankle support – <i>needed for portaging</i>	1
Dry Clothes	
T-shirts	2
Long-sleeved shirt	1
Thicker fleece sweater	1
Pants	1
Warm socks	2
Pajamas or sleeping t-shirt and boxers	1
Dry shoes – <i>light cotton runners or sturdy sandals like Tevas or Chacos (no flip flops)</i>	1
Optional	
Journal and pen	--
Book	--
Camera and film in waterproof container	--
Small crafts (<i>embroidery, thread, seed beads</i>) or small packable games	--
Menstrual products	--
Mosquito repellent (<i>non-aerosol</i>) or bug shirt/ hat	--