Illinois Fire Safety Alliance
Camp “I Am Me”
Frequently Asked Questions

What is the history and reputation of the camp? Illinois Fire Safety Alliance’s Camp “I Am Me” is an accredited American Camp Association camp held for one-week annually—specifically for children and adolescents between the ages of 8-16 years old who have experienced significant burn injuries. Held at YMCA’s Camp Duncan, Camp “I Am Me” has been a special and unforgettable camping experience for over 1,500 young burn survivors since 1991, with an approximate 90% returning camper rate. Since its inception, Camp “I Am Me” has been able to provide a nearly one-to-one counselor to camper ratio thanks to the many volunteers, counselors, and healthcare professionals.

Will my camper’s medications and medical needs be taken care of while they are at camp and by whom? Camp “I Am Me” has a 24-hour staffed Health Center on site consisting of registered nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, and physical therapists, most of whom work for local burn centers and hospitals. A medical doctor is either at camp or on call 24-hours a day during camp.

All medications brought to camp are collected during check-in and administered only by certified Health Center staff. Burn survivors with special needs or restrictions are welcome at Camp “I Am Me.” Notification of restrictions or special accommodations is always recommended during the application process to accommodate the camper’s needs prior to arriving at camp.

Are the staff qualified and trained? All Camp “I Am Me” counselors/volunteer staff (many of which are medical professionals, certified firefighter/EMT’s, and adult burn survivors) undergo an annual Staff Professional Development training day that includes topics such as Risk Management, Health & Safety, Child Abuse Prevention, Behavior Management, Stranger Danger, etc., building upon the camp’s Mission and Goal of providing a safe, healthy, supervised environment that is non-judgmental for children and adolescents who have experienced significant burn injuries. Many of the Camp “I Am Me” counselors (approximately 30%) are burn survivors themselves that attended Camp “I Am Me” as campers, ultimately demonstrating the desire and ability to give back by being a counselor. All counselors/volunteers/staff and health professionals undergo a criminal history check certified by the Illinois State Police, or local police department of residence.

Will my camper be accepted and is it a positive experience? Camp “I Am Me” campers participate in a variety of adult-supervised, group, age-appropriate activities that provide fun and challenging opportunities for positive outcomes with other burn survivors. The goal of Camp “I Am Me” is to provide a non-judgmental atmosphere in which children and adolescents have the opportunity to build their self-esteem while establishing life-long friendships and positive memories. Campers participate in a variety of camp theme activities that encourage a healthy appreciation for the natural setting and environment. Camp “I Am Me” provides young burn survivors an opportunity to effectively talk to other survivors about their injuries to help them in their approach to life.

Is there adequate shelter, especially those with special needs? Camp “I Am Me” is held at the YMCA’s Camp Duncan in Ingleside, Illinois, a 400-acre resident camp facility. Since 1991, Camp “I Am Me” has utilized Camp Duncan and their accommodations providing all campers, medical staff, counselors, and volunteers a safe and secure environment to enjoy their camping experience. With 20 cabins available approximately 6-7 campers plus counselors occupy each cabin for the week. Camp “I Am Me” campers are welcome to private transportation to/from camp; 3-balanced meals each day, including beverages and snacks; shelter in one of the camps’ handicap-accessible cabins; and all supervised, age-appropriate activities thanks to the donations received throughout the year.

What is the phone policy? How hard is it to get in touch with my camper? Can I call them any time of the day? The Illinois Fire Safety Alliance provides daily updates on both the IFSA website and Facebook Page on all Camp “I Am Me” activities and events, including pictures. Parents/guardians wishing to talk with their camper may contact the IFSA administration during camp at any time to discuss their camper’s well-being. Campers are discouraged/prohibited from bringing cell phones in addition to a list of other items. Items that are prohibited will be confiscated upon the camper’s arrival at camp and given back prior to departure the last day of camp.
Will my camper be homesick? Occasionally new campers become homesick, especially if this is their first experience being away for a long period of time. Although we do not want to discourage anyone, we usually have more “child sick parents” than homesick campers. While homesickness usually subsides once the camper becomes more comfortable with their surroundings, our counselors and volunteers are prepared and trained to handle camper homesickness. Campers are kept busy with group, age-appropriate activities and programs allowing the campers to experience all that Camp “I Am Me” has to offer. Encourage your child to have fun and enjoy their camping experience, and explain that you look forward to hearing all about their week and the fun experiences they had while away.

What about severe weather and emergency situations? Will my camper be safe? It is not uncommon for the threat of severe weather to arise during the week of camp. Camp “I Am Me,” as well as YMCA Camp Duncan have procedures in place to handle both severe weather and emergency situations. Many counselors and volunteers of Camp “I Am Me” are trained professionals of the fire service and will lead all campers to proper safety should the need arise. In addition, in the event of an emergency of any type, communication will be relayed through the IFSA Facebook page for updates on the status of camp and camp activities.

How close is the nearest hospital? Centegra Northern Illinois Medical Center, McHenry, is approximately 7 miles (10 minutes by vehicle) from YMCA Camp Duncan. Medical treatment for campers/counselors/volunteers that requires transport to a hospital/emergency medical facility will be determined by the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance’s Camp “I Am Me” administration and Health Center staff. The Health Center Coordinator will accompany any individual requiring medical treatment beyond first aid to the hospital/emergency medical facility.

What activities do the campers participate in? What can I expect my child to do all day? Camp “I Am Me” campers are very busy and active most of the time while at camp. Participating in the varied age-appropriate activities pre-selected by the campers during the application process, activities/crafts include: archery; fishing; hiking; biking; horseback riding; therapy dogs; playground games; woodcrafts; pool swimming; campfires; climbing tower and high ropes course, just to name a few. Activities are held at multiple times throughout the week to allow all campers an opportunity to participate and to encourage them to meet other burn survivors in the process. One day of the week is specific for the Camp’s Fun Fair day, allowing campers several hours of playing carnival-type games and an opportunity to take home prizes to remember their camping experience.

Is Camp “I Am Me” a good fit for my child? Children and adolescents that have experienced burn injuries face the additional stress of trying to manage their day to day ability to fit in socially. Camp “I Am Me” is a great opportunity for children who have difficulties socializing or talking with others about their burn injury; have been teased or bullied about their burn/scar; have a hard time or refuse to wear clothing that shows their burn/scar; have never met anyone else with burns/scars, and/or are reluctant to discuss their stresses or challenges with their parents or others. Camp “I Am Me” provides a safe, healthy, supervised environment for young burn survivors to participate in varied age-appropriate activities with other burn survivors in a non-judgmental atmosphere. Campers learn skills to handle staring and teasing, develop social skills to handle the situations they face every day, build a social network with others that have similar experiences and, in addition, develop positive attitudes towards discussing their burn injuries with others.

How do I prepare my child for Camp “I Am Me”? What should my child bring to camp? Several months before camp, there will be an application process that will provide the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance with the necessary information and permissions to have your child at camp and for them to participate in the various activities offered. Any parent/guardian/family of a child or adolescent that has suffered a significant burn injury is encouraged to contact the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance at (847) 390-0911 to register them to attend Camp “I Am Me.”

During the application process your camper will select, with your permission, the activities they wish to participate in throughout the week of camp. This process would be an excellent time to spend in discussing camp and what your child may expect to experience during their week away. Once the deadline for application submittal has passed, additional documentation and information will be sent to each registered camper and their families/guardians outlining the camp’s policies as well as those items that your camper should plan on bringing to camp and those items that should be left at home. Note that Camp “I Am Me” has a zero tolerance for tobacco, weapons, drugs, sex, fireworks and alcohol. Any camper violating any of the rules as outlined in the materials will be sent home with transportation provided by the camper’s family/guardian.
How much will it cost to send my child to Camp “I Am Me”? Since 1991 Illinois Fire Safety Alliance has been able to provide Camp “I Am Me” to over 1,500 children and adolescents who have experienced significant burn injuries and come from all walks of life free of charge. Through the generosity of donors across the state and beyond, in addition to the support of countless volunteers, the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance has been able to provide additional support programs to burn survivors at no charge. The Young Adult Summit (ages 18-25); Family Day (ages 0 – 12); and scholarships to attend the Phoenix Society’s World Burn Congress are all programs currently available to burn survivors as well.

How will my child get to/from Camp “I Am Me”? In addition to the family or guardians transporting their camper to/from Camp “I Am Me,” the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance is able to provide private bus transportation for campers to get to/from the campgrounds. During the registration process parents/guardians are able to select from eleven (11) predetermined stops where a bus will stop to both pick up and return campers. Each bus includes adult chaperones who ride the bus with the children ensuring their safety the entire way.

Hired by the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance, a private bus service will pick up/take back campers (sorry family members/guardians, transportation is only for Camp “I Am Me” campers) the morning of the first /last day of camp.

The Illinois Fire Safety Alliance, a 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization, is able to provide young burn survivors a week of attending Camp “I Am Me” at no-cost thanks to the many volunteers and generous donors. Anyone with questions/concerns is encouraged to contact the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance at (847) 390-0911, or visit our website at www.IFSA.org.