

# FAMILY EXPERIENCES FOLLOWING PARTICIPATION IN AN ADAPTED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FAMILY CAMP

## Full Report Published At:

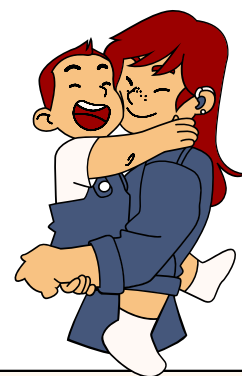
Youngblood, J. L., McDonough, M. H., Condliffe, E. G., Legg, D., & Emery, C. A. (2024). "We're stronger as a family": Family experiences and relationships in an adapted physical activity camp. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 71, 102570.

## Purpose

To examine family members' perspectives regarding their relationships within their family and how they were affected by their participation in an adapted summer camp for families with a child living with a disability.

## Study

- Qualitative collective case study guided by thematic analysis
- Family focus groups to understand how attending an adapted physical activity camp impacted family relationships
- Participants:
  - Five (3 females, 2 males) children living with a disability
  - Five mothers
  - Three male siblings



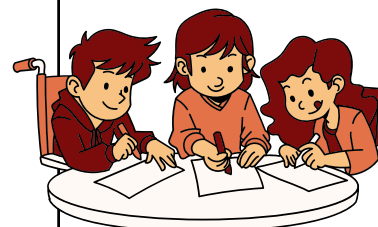
## Program

- Rocky Mountain Adaptive's week-long summer overnight Friends and Family Camp, where families participated in outdoor physical activities with their child living with a disability.
- The goal of this camp was to provide an opportunity for families to participate in physical activity programs together as a whole family
- Families participated in hiking, biking, and kayaking facilitated by camp staff during the day.

## What We Learned

Families reported:

- feeling supported and experienced less stress
- a better understanding of one another
- shared experiences among family members
- family and sibling bonding.





## Results



## Themes

### **Reducing isolation for mothers**

Most mothers discussed how attending the camp was supportive because they were around other families who have a child living with a disability. Raising a child living with a disability can be isolating. The camp brought families together making mothers feel like they were not alone.

One mother discussed being able to talk to other parents: “Definitely made me feel not alone in our situation and having talked with other families about how they deal with certain things or solve certain problems. Or how they planned for the future, it felt really supportive”

### **Alleviating stress and anxiety helped families bond**

Mothers expressed anxiety about their child participating in physical activity. The camp relieved some of this stress by providing a context where mothers knew their child would be taken care of and safe while participating in physical activity.

### **Shared experiences led to mutual understanding, communication, and support**

Families discussed how they are not typically able to participate in physical activities together because the accommodations needed for the child living with a disability to participate are often not available. The camp provided opportunities to participate together and allowed families to develop shared experiences. Siblings enjoyed being able to include the child living with a disability in activities

### **Improved independence and confidence in child living with a disability**

Most families discussed how participating in the camp increased the independence and confidence of the child living with a disability.

One mother who was excited about her child’s new independence discussed how her child now helps more around the house. “He gets so happy just being able to participate and so proud of himself. And even now if he is downstairs... if I call him to tell him the dishwasher is ready to unload, he’ll come upstairs right away.”

### **Sibling bonding made parents more comfortable giving siblings more responsibility**

As siblings spent more time with the child living with a disability and understood and communicated with them better, mothers recognized that their typically developing children were better equipped to support the child living with a disability.

### **Confidence to participate in family activities beyond the camp**

Families appreciated the opportunity to try new activities in a safe environment, which increased confidence in their collective abilities to engage in recreation activities outside of the camp. Several families now do more recreation as a family, which they enjoy: “It’s great that I can do other activities now”

## Take Home Message

The experiences family members had regarding, changes in feeling supported, decreased strength and anxiety, improved confidence and independence for child living with a disability and changes in sibling bonding. These findings draw attention to the value of creating opportunities for the child living with a disability to demonstrate and experience independence, as those experiences may have positive implications for family relationships.

