

# The Juvenile Boot Camp Debate

by Sarah Collinge

## What are juvenile boot camps?

Juvenile boot camps promise to correct the troubled behavior of young citizens. Boot camp is sometimes offered as an alternative to jail when a teen has committed a nonviolent crime. In addition, some parents choose to send their son or daughter to a boot camp, hoping that the environment of the camp will teach their child a lesson.

Typically, boot camps offer a military environment that focuses on discipline and physical exercise and labor. Camps typically are rustic, with youth sleeping in tents, in cabins, or outdoors. Access to food and water is often limited.

Consequences for misbehavior include physical exercise and loss of privileges such as food, water, and shelter.

## Juvenile boot camps are effective and helpful.

Some people believe that juvenile boot camps are both effective and helpful to troubled youth. Proponents of boot camps believe that through discipline, teens learn to replace bad habits with good habits. The structure of the camp teaches teens to respect adults, obey rules, and appreciate their lives. Proponents believe that the conditions of boot camps, though harsh, are far better than the conditions a teen would face in prison. The military-style training offered at boot camps often leads the young adults who attend them to pursue military careers once they are out of high school. In addition, boot camps that also teach academics encourage teens to stay in school.

## Juvenile boot camps are ineffective and harmful.

The National Mental Health Association argues that teen boot camps are ineffective and potentially harmful (2007). Reports show that many teens who attend juvenile boot camps return to their former behavior. The use of military discipline can also permanently harm teens. Reports of abuse are widespread (1993). In one case, a boy ate dirt because he was so dehydrated, and he eventually died. In another case, a 14-year-old girl died after being forced to run several miles without water (2001).

## References:

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