



Choosing the Right Residential Program for Your Adolescent

A practical guide for parents and guardians



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Understanding Your Child's Needs



A starting point for parents considering residential treatment

As a parent, witnessing your child struggle with emotional or behavioral challenges can be an incredibly challenging experience. When traditional interventions prove insufficient, residential treatment programs can offer a more intensive and structured environment for healing and growth.

Selecting the right residential treatment program for your child is a crucial decision that requires careful consideration. Each child is unique, and finding the right fit may take time. The goal of this guide is to help you consider the key factors that matter most as you evaluate whether a residential treatment program aligns with your child's needs.

Summit Achievement is a licensed residential treatment program for adolescents in the mountains of western Maine. Summit's model combines personalized clinical support, accredited academics, adventure therapy, and family involvement to help students and families move forward.

Choosing a residential treatment program is a significant decision. The right fit should support your child's needs, your family's goals, and the work ahead.

ASSESSING YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

Before delving into the world of residential treatment programs, take the time to thoroughly assess your child's needs. Consider their specific challenges and whether they are related to mental health, substance use, academic struggles, family conflict, or behavioral issues.

Identifying the root causes and underlying issues will help guide you toward a program that specializes in addressing those concerns.

Questions to consider:

- What challenges is my child currently facing?
- What interventions have we already tried?
- What has helped, even temporarily?
- What has not been enough?
- Are school, family relationships, friendships, or safety being affected?
- Does my child need more structure than outpatient care can provide?

Residential treatment may be appropriate when a young person needs a more consistent therapeutic environment than home, school, or outpatient treatment can provide.

Choosing the Right Residential Program



What to evaluate before making a decision

Residential treatment programs vary in their therapeutic approaches, and it is important to find one that aligns with your child's preferences and needs.

RESEARCHING TREATMENT APPROACHES

As you research programs, ask about the methods and therapies used. Some programs may use cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, experiential therapy, trauma-informed therapies, Internal Family Systems, Art therapy, Equine therapy, family systems work, or other evidence-based approaches. Understanding the methods used by each program can help you make a more informed decision.

At Summit Achievement, students participate in an integrated model that includes clinical support, academics, and adventure therapy. Outdoor adventure experiences are used to help students build confidence, resilience, and practical coping skills in a setting away from the distractions of smart-phones, social media, and daily peer pressure.

The best treatment approach is one that fits your child's needs and helps them practice new skills in real-life situations.

ACCREDITATION AND LICENSING

Ensure that any residential treatment program you are considering is accredited and licensed by relevant authorities. This helps confirm that the program meets specific standards of care and adheres to ethical guidelines.

Accreditation and licensure can also indicate that staff are trained professionals and that the program is accountable to outside standards.

Questions to ask:

- Is the program licensed by the state?
- Is the academic program accredited?
- Are clinicians licensed?
- Does the program have professional affiliations or third-party accreditations?
- How often are standards reviewed?

Summit Achievement is licensed by the State of Maine as a residential treatment center. Summit also maintains academic accreditation and outdoor behavioral healthcare accreditation, reflecting its commitment to quality care, education, and risk management.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING

The effectiveness of a residential treatment program often depends on the expertise and dedication of its staff. Look for programs with well-qualified, licensed, and experienced professionals, including therapists, counselors, teachers, outdoor staff, and medical staff.

It is also important to ask about staff training and ongoing professional development. Treatment practices evolve, and programs should be committed to keeping staff current with therapeutic, academic, and safety practices.

Helpful questions include:

- Who will be working directly with my child?
- What are the qualifications of the clinical team?
- How often will my child meet with a therapist?
- What training do direct-care staff receive?
- How do clinical, academic, and residential staff communicate?
- How does the program support staff development over time?

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

The involvement of the family in the treatment process is crucial for a successful outcome. Choose a program that emphasizes family therapy and provides opportunities for parents and guardians to actively participate in their child's recovery.

Family support can also extend beyond the residential phase, helping ease the transition back home.

At Summit, family involvement is a central part of the model. Families participate through weekly family therapy, parent coaching, in-person visits, and additional resources designed to help parents better support their teen with anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges.

How families may participate:

- Weekly family therapy by phone or video conference
- Parent coaching sessions
- Reflective assignments and parent education
- In-person visits during the program
- Transition planning for the return home or next step
- Bi-monthly webinars to interact with other parents going through similar experiences

Your child may be the one enrolled in treatment, but the whole family is part of the healing process.

DURATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

Consider the duration and structure of the residential treatment program. Some programs may be short-term and focus primarily on crisis intervention, while others offer longer-term solutions for more complex issues.

Before choosing a program, assess the daily schedule, therapeutic activities, academic expectations, outdoor or experiential programming, and level of supervision. These should align with your child's needs and your family's preferences.

Questions to ask:

- What is the typical length of stay?
- What does a typical day or week look like?
- How much structure and supervision are provided?
- How are academics handled?
- How is progress evaluated?
- How does the program determine readiness for discharge?

Summit Achievement is designed as a short-term, high-impact program for families who need more than outpatient therapy but are not necessarily seeking a long-term placement. Students participate in a consistent rhythm of therapy, school, adventure therapy, and family work.

SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT

The safety and well-being of your child should be a top priority. Investigate the safety measures in place, including supervision, emergency procedures, staff-to-student ratios, medical support, and risk management practices.

Also consider the physical environment. A welcoming, structured, and nurturing space can contribute significantly to a positive healing experience.

At Summit, students live and learn on a 55-acre campus in western Maine. The campus includes a main lodge, academic building, and heated cabins with attached bathrooms and showers. Students also participate in outdoor adventure experiences that are designed to be challenging, clinically purposeful, and supported by trained staff.

Safety questions to ask any program:

- What emergency procedures are in place?
- How are outdoor activities supervised?
- What medical support is available?
- How does the program manage medication?
- How are students supported when they are anxious, resistant, or overwhelmed?
- What is the communication plan with parents?

Getting Your Teen on Board With Treatment

For many families, one of the hardest parts of beginning treatment is helping their teen understand and accept the need for support.

Adolescents are among those heavily impacted by anxiety, depression, ADHD, learning differences, and related challenges. Talk therapy and residential treatment can be important parts of reclaiming mental health and stability, but a young person's willingness to engage matters.

UNDERSTAND THEIR STRUGGLE

As parents and caregivers, it can be hard to fully put ourselves in our children's shoes. To help them, it is important to try to see the world from their perspective.

Many families struggle to see each other's point of view. Parents may know their child is having a hard time, but the teen may not understand what is troubling them or may not agree that treatment is needed. Programs like Summit can help assess needs, clarify diagnoses when appropriate, and educate parents on a treatment plan.

FRAME IT DIFFERENTLY

There has long been a stigma around mental health treatment. Sometimes it helps to frame treatment as an opportunity for a young person to take ownership of their health and well-being, rather than as a punishment for being different, struggling at school, or struggling at home.

A helpful analogy may be that treatment is like practicing a sport or skill with a coach. The goal is to build skills through repetition, support, and feedback.

FOCUS ON THEIR PRIORITIES

For someone to truly "buy in" to treatment, motivation has to come from within. Parents can support this by connecting treatment to what matters to the teen.

For example:

- If anxiety has made school difficult, talk about how treatment can help them build tools to manage stress and academic demands.
- If friendships have become stressful, talk about how treatment can help with confidence and communication.
- If your teen wants more independence, connect treatment to the skills needed to earn and sustain that independence.

RECOGNIZE YOUR PART IN IT

It is almost always helpful for the whole family to engage in the treatment process. At Summit, staff work closely with both students and their families. Parent participation helps reinforce the work students are doing and prepares the family for what comes next.

DON'T GIVE UP

If your child says no the first time you talk about starting treatment, keep trying. Important things usually are not settled in one conversation. Continue listening to how your teen is feeling and what they think they need. Progress may come gradually.

Treatment should be framed as support, not punishment. The goal is to help your teen build ownership, confidence, and healthier ways forward.

“

We had the most exceptional experience through Summit Achievement.

There are so many kids that could benefit from this program. I could not be more impressed. The staff were skilled at connecting with the kids, the therapists also connected well and had great insight that allowed for substantial growth and healing.

When I asked what was liked most at Summit, the answer I received was “the people.” As a parent and professional, I can attest to the excellence of structure, clinical care and philosophy. Summit Achievement is truly transformative. We are so grateful.”



Understanding Adventure Therapy at Summit Achievement



Clinical support, academics, adventure therapy, and family involvement

Summit Achievement is first and foremost a State of Maine licensed residential treatment program. Since 1996, Summit has provided mental health and substance use treatment for adolescents through a model that includes campus life, academics, therapy, family work, and outdoor adventure therapy.

There can be confusion between what many wilderness therapy programs provide and what Summit Achievement provides through its outdoor adventure therapy segment. Understanding the difference can help families make a more informed decision.

ADVENTURE THERAPY AT SUMMIT

Summit Achievement uses outdoor adventure experiences, referred to as Adventure Therapy, to help young people build confidence and resilience as they address mental health challenges.

Adventure Therapy at Summit is rooted in an experiential tradition connected to Outward Bound. The approach encourages young people to see challenges as opportunities to grow, change, and experience the reward of accomplishment.

At Summit, students participate in outdoor experiences such as backpacking, snowshoeing, canoeing, ice climbing, and rock climbing. These experiences are designed to be challenging, but not beyond a student's ability to participate safely. Students build skills, reflect on their experiences, and return to campus to continue therapy, school, and daily life.

HOW ADVENTURE THERAPY DIFFERS FROM WILDERNESS THERAPY

Adventure Therapy and Wilderness Therapy both use the outdoors as a place for reflection and healing. Both can offer young people time away from smartphones, social media, and peer pressure.

Summit's model is different from many wilderness therapy models in several important ways:

- Students enroll voluntarily and are not brought to the program by transport, an industry term for physically taking a young person against their wishes.
- Outdoor experiences are not primitive-skills based. Students use appropriate modern gear, prepare meals in the field, and participate in expedition-style activities with trained staff support.
- Students participate in adventure therapy as part of a broader residential treatment program.
- Students return to campus for academics, therapy, family work, and residential life.
- Summit's model is relationship-based and includes regular family involvement.

Summit works with anxious, depressed, and other neurodivergent students who are struggling and want to learn better coping strategies. The program is not designed for every student, which is why fit is an important part of the admissions process.

Interested in learning more about the history of wilderness therapy and the Summit program? Read [*Adventure Therapy at Summit Achievement*](#).

Summit's outdoor experiences are meant to support treatment, not replace clinical care, academics, or family work.

Outcomes, Next Steps, and Questions to Ask



What Outcome Data Can Show

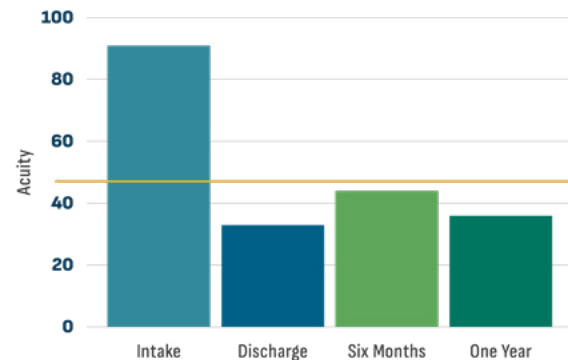
When researching residential treatment programs, outcome data can help families understand how a program measures student progress. While outcomes should not be the only factor in a decision, they can provide useful information about change during and after treatment.

Summit Achievement tracks student outcomes using the Youth Outcome Questionnaire, a 64-question tool completed by students and parents/caregivers. Data has been collected over ten years at intake, discharge, six months post-discharge, and one year post-discharge.

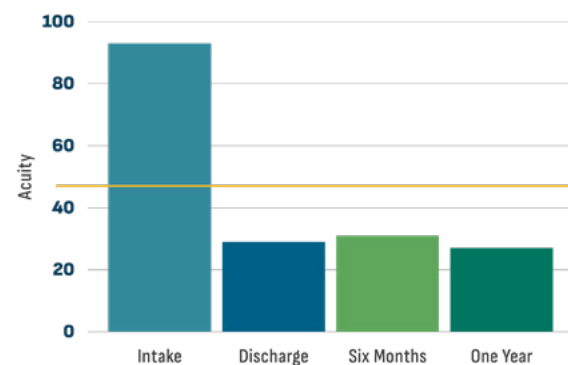
WHAT OUR DATA SHOWS

Summit's outcome data shows that students experience meaningful improvement during treatment and maintain significant change six months and one year after discharge.

OUTCOME DATA PHASE 1 (Venture Only)

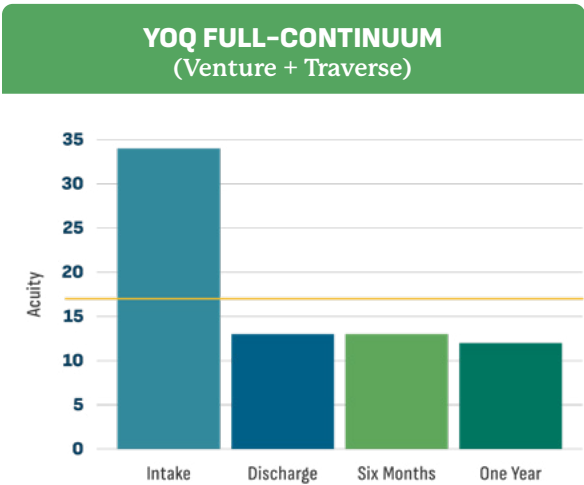
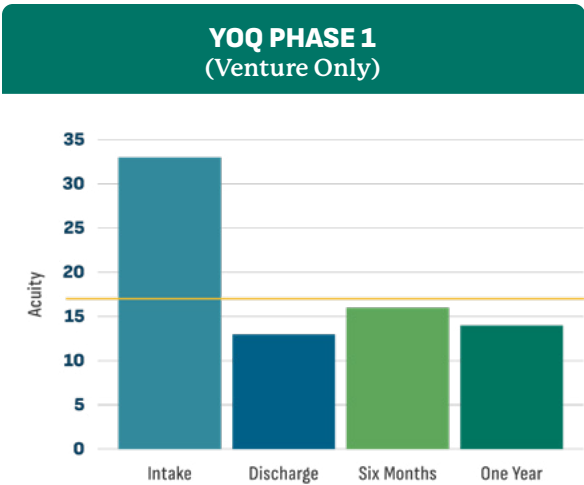


OUTCOME DATA FULL-CONTINUUM (Venture + Traverse)



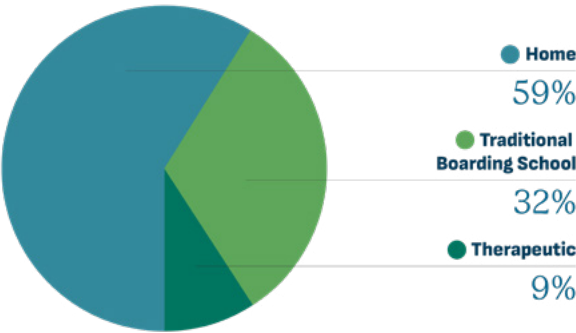
MENTAL HEALTH DISTRESS SCORES

The Y-OQ sub-category for Mental Health Distress measures depression, anxiety, and fearfulness. Summit’s student-reported scores move from the unhealthy range at intake into the healthy range at discharge and remain there one year later.



POST SUMMIT SUCCESS

More than 90% of Summit students transition to a lower level of care after completing treatment. This demonstrates that Summit effectively prepares students and families for the next chapter, whether that’s returning home with outpatient support, attending a therapeutic boarding school, or stepping back into their home community with the tools to thrive.





Insurance Billing Support at Summit

Summit Achievement partners with Bridgeway Billing, an insurance billing and advocacy firm, to help families explore possible reimbursement for treatment.

Using Bridgeway is completely optional. During the admissions process, families may submit a Verification of Benefits so they can better understand what reimbursement may be available through their insurance plan.

Bridgeway may be able to help families pursue reimbursement for:

- Summit's Venture phase at the residential level of care
- Summit's Traverse phase at the PHP or IOP level of care

Summit works closely with Bridgeway by providing the documentation needed to support the billing process, helping make treatment more accessible for families whenever possible.



Next Steps

Choosing a residential treatment program for your child is a significant decision that requires thoughtful consideration. By assessing your child's needs, researching treatment approaches, ensuring accreditation, evaluating staff qualifications, emphasizing family involvement, and considering program structure and safety, you can make an informed choice.

Remember that each child is unique. Finding the right fit may take time, but the investment in their well-being is invaluable.

Summit Achievement is a residential mental health program for adolescents in New England. The program offers an integrated model of clinical support, accredited academics, adventure therapy, and family involvement. Families who are considering Summit are encouraged to contact Admissions to talk through their child's needs, the admissions process, and whether Summit may be the right fit.

Before you speak with an admissions team, consider preparing:

- A brief summary of your child's current challenges
- Previous treatment history
- School concerns or transcripts
- Current medications or diagnoses
- Questions about safety, academics, therapy, family involvement, and cost
- Your hopes for what treatment can help your child and family achieve

**Ready to talk
through your
family's next step?**

Connect with Summit Achievement's Admissions Team.

Phone: (207) 447-9450

Email: admissions@summitachievement.com

Address: 69 Deer Hill Road, Stow, Maine 04037