

CABIN LEADERSHIP/BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.
If children live with pity, they learn to be sorry for themselves.
If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel guilty.
If children live with encouragement, they learn to be confident.
If children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient.
If children live with praise, they learn to be appreciative.
If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.
If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.
If children live with recognition, they learn to have goals.
If children live with fairness, they learn what justice is.
If children live with honesty, they learn what truth is.
If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves.
If children live with friendliness, they learn that the world is a nice place in which to live.

The job of a counselor is as straightforward as the basic desires of the children they will care for. It is naturally complicated by the fact that you are responsible for a group of children, each of whom has their own unique perceptions, needs, experiences, and feelings.

You will have specific, clear-cut responsibilities to carry out in order to provide for daily camper supervision and care. On the other hand, you will often need to rely on your own creativity and individual decision-making ability. This is because you will encounter a range of situations arising from the unpredictable nature of group life and individual children's personalities.

Behavior Management: A Preventative Approach (ST.30.1)

Be Aware - Be alert to injuries, illness, emotional feelings, and campers need for support.

Be Private - Your personal life (i.e. relationships, political philosophy, etc.) should be kept to yourself, and should not interfere with your job.

Be Well - Camp doesn't need exhausted heroes. Take good advantage of your off time.

Be Focused - Relate to people as a professional, and remember to have fun!

Get to know each camper.

How does each camper react in a given situation? What is their temperament? What are their talents, likes, and dislikes? How does each of them react to you? Treat them as individuals. Stereotypes have no place in camp. Introverts can shine. Extroverts can be down. The quicker you learn about your campers, the more successful you will be.

Set expectations and give children a sense of safe boundaries.

Set expectations and safe boundaries; let campers know what you expect of them up front. State them clearly and make sure campers understand. Set only necessary limits; too many will frustrate the camper and exhaust you. Campers are more likely to internalize rules they have helped to establish, so develop cabin rules together and post them in the cabin. Tell

campers through words and actions that you will do everything you can within limits to make sure you all make new friends, get along, and have fun. Emphasize that we are a community, and we need rules to keep each other safe—physically and emotionally. Concentrate on safety, respect, and responsibility. Remember every action you make sends a message to campers. It is good to be friendly, but you are the responsible adult. Be consistent and model all expectations you have set for campers.

Earn the respect of your campers and engage cooperation.

Listen to campers' feelings. Campers will never forget that for five minutes, a young adult sat down, shut up for a while, and listened to what they had to say. It is one of the most important things we do at camp. Use your listen first skills!

The mystique of the staff shirt is identifiable, but short-lived. When you open your mouth you begin to earn respect or lose it. When kids aren't doing what you ask them to do, it is frustrating. Barking orders is a great way to lose their respect. Here's how to earn it. First, remember that for campers, following your directions and the camp rules can be challenging. Then try the following:

State the problem/make an observation: "There's a wet towel on my bed." Save the energy and breath of an explanation.

Give information: "This towel is making my bunk wet." You don't have to get mad, or think they're brats.

State your own feelings: "I hate having a wet sleeping bag"

Offer choices- need to be two plausible choices: "When we hang up our towels you can hang yours on the porch railing or on the side of your bunk."

Turn things into a game: "Let's see if we can clean the cabin perfectly in under 10 minutes. If we can do it, I've got a cool story I can tell."

Respond thoughtfully when problems arise.

Before issues become full blown problems, it is important to remind campers of the expectations that have been set for them. You can always come back to the unit meeting rules or the cabin constitution and remind them of the behavior guidelines. If you stay on top of this, small issues are much less likely to escalate.

For example: The problem is stealing. You can 1) yell about it, 2) lecture about it, or 3) go into problem solving mode with your cabin. Number three is the correct answer in almost all scenarios. Sit down at a quiet time when there are no distractions, and make an observation with an "I" statement. "I've noticed that we have an issue/problem with stealing." Not, "I think you guys have a problem with stealing, and Bruce did it."

Then start generating solutions, and write them all down. Let the kids regulate themselves at this point. Make no judgments about how reasonable what they are saying may be. After the list is done, kids will be ready to talk about it. You can cross off some stuff with them very democratically, and some good suggestions will emerge. You can steer the conversation and help them solve the problem themselves.

Another method: ignore it. There are three kinds of behavior: 1) the kind you like, and want to see more of, 2) the kind you don't like, and don't want to see, and 3) behavior that is inappropriate, which is dealt with in other places. The most effective way to decrease behavior you don't like is to ignore it. The most effective kind of reinforcement is

incremental—i.e., you only mention it occasionally. At appropriate times, when campers are safe, ignoring it is definitely doing something about a problem. Ignoring works well for non-offensive behaviors that are designed to get a reaction. Ignoring does not work well when the behavior is mean-spirited, violent, or designed to put down another camper (racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, etc.).

Increase the frequency of behaviors you like.

It is easier to establish desirable behavioral patterns from the start than it is to alter problem behavior; look for opportunities to praise positive behavior from the start. Think positively, and campers will often react positively. Reward good behavior by describing the behavior specifically, labeling it, and affirming it.

Effective praise is...

True – It has to be believable to mean anything.

Immediate – You'll have to catch them being good, and doing good things. 95% of what they hear is "stop", "no", "quit it", etc., so be on the lookout.

Positive – Make it sincere in tone, not sarcastic.

Specific – Describe what you saw, label it with a positive quality, affirm it. For example, "You two are carrying that heavy tray together, that's teamwork, way to go!"

Effective praise is not...

Putting others down – praise should not be comparative or celebrate others' shortcomings. For example, "We're doing so much better than that cabin."

Making campers feel bad – remain positive and don't call out others' negative behavior to praise others. For example, "Riley is listening so much better than some of you right now"

A one-time thing – consistency is key in both praise and expectations. Campers should not be praised just because you've given them lots of reminders. Look for the good in all campers and be genuine.

Passive aggressive – passive aggression does not make others feel good or get campers on your side. For example, "Thank you for *finally* listening."

Choose Your Battles.

Don't give campers too many rules and restrictions. Tolerate some unacceptable behavior. Too much attention to annoying behavior may not only interfere with the activity at hand, but may actually reinforce undesirable actions. This is a very fine balance between holding a double standard and requires frequent and open communication with your co-leader.

Keep campers your top priority.

Camp is for the campers. It is up to you to make it all about them. Staying engaged throughout your day will make it more fun for you and them. Some activities require different levels of engagement than others. For instance, Saska is typically more low key and your engagement takes less energy than engagement at Tailgate. Knowing these different levels helps you save your energy for when it matters. You keep campers your top priority by leaving personal drama at home, your job is easier when you are focused on the present. Challenges within your cabin group or with coworkers should be addressed as soon as possible, letting them continue and fester degrades the quality of campers' experience. Sometimes you need to sacrifice the things you want to do in favor of the campers' desires.

To take care of campers, you must first take care of yourself. Putting campers' needs first and making sacrifices does not come above your personal health and wellbeing. Take your breaks and use them wisely. Make sure you are eating nutritious foods at meals and drinking lots of water. Ask for help when you need it, whenever you need it.

Every camper deserves your time.

In order to build trust, you'll need to spend time with every camper. The fun ones, the not-so-fun ones, all of them. You can't give everyone attention all the time, but every day, every camper needs time with you. There are campers who you will connect with very easily, and campers who you'll need to spend more time building a connection with. Failing to build relationships with every camper in your cabin will come across as favoritism. You'll instantly categorize campers, and do you think the campers will know who are the favorites? You bet they will. What message do you think campers who feel they are not the "favorite" get?

You are a role model.

Campers are everywhere, and they see and hear everything. Campers aren't impressed with double standards. They are impressed by the consistency in your standards. Double standards are unfair and frustrating, and campers will lose respect for you. A common double standard is to have different expectations for words or behavior inside and outside the cabin, or in and out of camp. Campers should know the rules will be the same everywhere, with every staff person. While campers are with you, and camp is in session, it's camp, no matter your location. Remember your integrity with all words and actions; campers will watch and copy your every move.

The campers look up to you. You need to set the standards. Your actions speak louder than your words. Try to live the values you teach. Be patient with campers, with staff, and in general. Things are not always smooth; you may need to be spontaneously creative. Think about the way you are speaking about the camp experience, including the food, the housing, other staff, and activities. Be kind to all campers and staff. Raids, pranks, exclusive staff relationships, scary stories, sex talk, derogatory nicknames, and other abusive activities have no place at camp.

Develop "The Look".

Before verbally responding to unacceptable behavior, try to eliminate it by silently indicating disapproval of the camper's actions. Eye contact, accompanied by a word or gesture, may control the behavior without embarrassing the camper in front of their peers. Additionally, "tagging" the behavior with "the look" or one cue word, like the camper's name, can let other campers see that that behavior is not okay and that adults at camp won't tolerate it.

Follow up.

Camp's schedule is packed – issues that arise in the morning may be forgotten or completely different by lunchtime. Following up with your co, the campers involved, and your supervisor are all vital parts of problem resolution. You should be writing down incidents or issues to follow up on in a notebook that is kept in a safe place away from campers and on your person when you leave the cabin. Meals and evening check-ins are a great time to return to earlier issues.

Keep them busy.

Many behavior problems result from dissatisfaction or boredom with activities. Keeping campers involved in activities is one of the best ways to avoid problem behavior. Work with campers to figure out a modification to the activity that they want to do. The most effective effort put forth by campers is when they attempt tasks that fall within the "range of challenge" - not too easy and not too hard - where success seems possible but not quite certain. Your campers will be as enthusiastic as you are about the day's activities. Your energy and enthusiasm directly effects the buy-in of campers.

Be yourself!

You were hired because of skills, talents, and a unique personality that you add to camp. We need you! Campers want to form connections with adults who are genuine and true to themselves. The diversity and unique experiences of our staff make the camp experience stronger. You are important at camp and you will make an impact in the lives of campers this summer!