

## BEHAVIOR AND DISCIPLINE GUIDELINES

Children’s behavior may have many roots. It is not expected that one week at summer camp will cure all behavioral problems. As a counselor, understand that children bring their past with them in their behavior. If you can determine the root of the behavioral problem, it will give you clues on how to deal with it.

Two things to keep in mind:

1. Your campers are not mini-adults. Expect them to want to have fun and be active.
2. Expect your campers to test their limits; they still, however, want and need limits.

Common reasons for surface behavior problems:

1. A desire for recognition/attention; it may be better to be infamous than unknown.
2. Frustration; unsatisfied needs or desires often cause children to “lash out”.
3. Illness, Exhaustion or Homesickness; being scared, tired or not feeling well can cause frustration.
4. Conflict with another camper/staff member; this often causes people to become defensive.
5. Outside conflicts; problems with family, friends, etc. can follow campers to camp.
6. Established behavior patterns; lessons learned at home won’t be forgotten at camp.

Some ways to provide structure without having to become a drill sergeant:

1. Establish clear expectations right away. Don’t assume something is common sense.
2. Balance structure with a reasonable amount of freedom.
3. Reinforce and encourage desirable behaviors.

Things to do about rule violations or refusal to cooperate:

1. Give camper one warning; in a calm voice on their level, make clear what they have done wrong.
2. Give your camper a chance to explain; they may have a good reason.
3. Be consistent and impartial.
4. Stay cool and calm; keep strong emotions in check. Never yell.
5. Avoid lecturing or embarrassing the camper; discipline in a visible, private conversation if possible.
6. Stress that the behavior is the problem, not the camper’s personality. Help the camper to identify acceptable alternatives to the problem behavior.
7. Once the disciplinary time is over, accept the camper as a part of the group again.
8. Follow the camp behavior-management policies for continuing discipline problems.

### Time-Tested Strategies

1. Be the kind of person you want your campers to become – obey the rules yourself!
2. Know campers as possible by name. Know something about them. Build relationships.
3. Be friendly. Always show interest in what individual campers are doing and their progress.
4. A sense of humor is extremely valuable. Maintain your poise don’t let the campers “get to you.”
5. Never take misbehavior personally. It is a choice the camper is making.
6. Remember that every child has needs; his behavior will give you clues as to what those needs are.
7. Keep in mind that misbehavior is seldom willful. Try to find the cause.
8. Try to see the camper’s side of the situation.
9. Distract, distract, distract! One of the best methods to control behavior is to keep them busy!
10. Show your disapproval of behavior through your speech, facial expression, and action.

11. Being close when you note a potential problem can keep it from actually occurring.
12. Allow natural consequences to occur if the results are NOT too severe.
13. Always use positive reinforcements first.
14. “Time out” allows time to cool down and think. It should always be age appropriate and monitored.
15. Have a group meeting to discuss and resolve generalized problems.
16. Remain with your campers during meals and free time.
17. Avoid getting campers over-tired, keyed-up, or tense.
18. Be willing to admit when you’re wrong, apologize and ask for forgiveness.

Sometimes it is best to simply ignore behaviors, rather than reward or punish, which may actually provide attention to encourage the behavior. Ignoring behaviors usually works best for campers who seek attention by clowning around. Sometimes, giving the child attention or affection, which has been lacking, may solve the problem. Giving the child some form of responsibility or encouraging a special interest or talent may result in improved behavior. Often the activity, if it is at his/her own physical, emotional, and intellectual level, is enough to correct the situation.

### **The Bully or Show Off**

To deal with these children, you first need the child’s confidence in you as a leader. To do this, you should not be dominating, overly critical, or too demanding on the child’s performance. To maintain this child’s confidence, praise good behavior – instead of only criticizing bad behavior. Discuss with the child the rights of others and courtesies due them. Let him/her know others will be more accepting if this behavior is turned more positive. Demonstrate compromise in your actions for the child to learn.

In group activity make a special effort to place this child in competition with others of equal or greater strength and ability.

Essentially, the bully or show off requires understanding and patience combined with placement of the child in groups that lend to his/her development of leadership traits in honest competition with other children.

### **Fighting**

Serious fighting often evolves from what starts out as just “fooling around.” Keep a close eye on such horseplay to keep it from getting out of hand. When a fight breaks out, separate the combatants AT ONCE. Let your voice show calm, mature authority. Attempt to give them time to cool down. Watch facial expressions to indicate less tension. Disallow any angry verbal exchanges, and physically remove combatants to a “safe distance” from each other if necessary. Fights that involve serious contact (hitting, kicking, biting, punching) require both combatants to visit the dean and nurse. An incident report should be completed.

Once combatants have regained composure, try one or more of the following:

1. Calmly discuss the situation separately with each individual. Emphasize resolving the problem, not placing blame. Aim for a mutual “shake hands and make up” plan.
2. Hold a face-to-face hearing where each participant describes his/her version without interruption from the other. Attempt to help each see the other side, then reconcile differences, make up, and forgive.
3. Invoke a logical consequence if clear provocation can be established or if this is a repeat offense.

## Stealing

Prevent stealing by establishing an atmosphere of trust within all members of the group. Discuss openly the need to respect each other's property. Always discourage campers from leaving valuables out in the open unnecessarily. If stealing still occurs:

1. Give the offender opportunity to return the article anonymously, without punishment.
2. Be sure that you may need to play detective if the item is not returned and the offender is still not identified. Be cautious in seeking group cooperation in order to avoid the offender being ostracized.
3. If you have evidence to identify an offender, deal with the camper privately. Give him/her a chance to make restitution and make a plan together to avoid repeat behaviors.
5. If the problem persists, follow camp procedures and inform the camp director.

## Behavior Management Policy

OUR CAMP advocates a positive guidance and discipline policy with an emphasis on positive reinforcement, redirection, prevention, and the development of self-discipline. Remind campers that camp rules are established for safety and to ensure that we have a common standard of behavior. As staff members, we need to show the campers that we see the need for following the rules ourselves. Please do not contradict the established guidelines!

Corrective discipline must be a creative, caring effort on the part of the counselor, and it must be seen as such by the camper. Always suggest positive alternatives to unacceptable behavior before it gets out of control.

1. Discuss rules with campers and identify out-of-bounds areas.
2. Discuss the possible consequences of breaking any rule:
  - Quiet time
  - Restriction from activity
  - Restriction to adult supervision
  - Extra duties
  - Conference with Dean
  - Conference with parent/director
  - Removal from the camp
3. Enforce all rules at all times, without malice, and be consistent in application.
4. Inform the camp director of all disciplinary measures.
5. **Never** allow discipline to include depriving a camper of sleep, food, or restroom privileges, placing a camper alone without supervision, or subjecting a camper to ridicule, shaming, threat, corporal punishment (striking, biting, kicking, squeezing), washing out the mouth, or physical exercise or restraint.
6. Conduct a periodic evaluation of the program/staff/camper groups to ensure that the camp environment is not contributing to behavior problems.