Camp Conduct

Know Who's At The Table

Camp Conduct from a small family run camp to a massive multinational corporate camp require similar standards for respect

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Principle: **Know who's at your table. Welcome them, include them, and be mindful of them.**

Challenge: Small family placer operations and large camps both want the same thing. They want shared spaces, especially the table, to be places where everyone feels welcome: kids, families, visitors, new hires and a varied crew. They also want the crew to feel free to be themselves. The hard part is keeping a clear standard of conduct without the standard turning into exclusion or policing. The kids shouldn't be sent away, and the crew shouldn't feel watched.

What makes this hard changes with size:

- **Small crews (3–6 people)** can rely on relationships and direct conversation. But there's no crowd to soften a callout, so correcting someone costs more socially. There's also a pull to let things slide to avoid awkwardness, and the standard depends heavily on the owner's own example.
- **Larger camps** can't count on everyone absorbing the culture just by being there. Rotating shifts, contractors, many supervisors and a more varied group of people mean the standard has to be written down, taught at orientation and enforced the same way everywhere. That has to happen without it feeling like a rulebook handed down from above.

The answer is the same at both sizes:

- Set clear expectations from day one.
- Make the standard specific.
- Have leaders model it.
- Give people a light way to correct themselves.
- Deal with problems early and privately.

Small Operations

For family-run placer operations — keeping the crew close to the family without losing the family

Placer operations have a real advantage here that big camps don't: the crew is small enough that this can be handled through relationship and direct conversation rather than policy documents and HR processes. Here's how to build that without losing the family-integration that makes these operations special in the first place.

Set the expectation before day one, not after a problem

The single biggest lever in a 3–6 person crew is **who you hire and what you tell them upfront.** In an interview or first conversation, say plainly: "This is a family operation — my kids are around, they eat with us, and language and conversation at the table need to reflect that." This does two things: it filters for people who are genuinely comfortable with it (most placer miners who've worked family operations before will nod immediately — they've seen it work elsewhere), and it means nobody can later say they didn't know the standard existed.

Make the standard specific, not vague

"Watch your language" is easy to forget mid-story. What holds up better:

- **No swearing at the table, period** — not "tone it down," a clean line that's easy to self-monitor.
- **Work talk and camp talk are fine; adult-content talk (relationships, partying, graphic stories) waits until the kids aren't around** — a specific category, not a vague "appropriateness" standard people interpret differently.
- **If you wouldn't say it in front of your own grandmother, don't say it at this table** — some crews respond well to a simple, memorable rule of thumb like this rather than a list.

Give the crew a way to self-correct without embarrassment

This is the part that's genuinely different from a big-camp culture code — in a crew this small, a heavy-handed callout is much more socially costly, because there's no crowd to diffuse it into. A few things that work well at this scale:

- **A house code word or gesture** — something light, like "table's hot" or just a raised eyebrow from whoever's closest to the kids — that signals "shift gears" without a lecture. Crews that adopt something like this often end up finding it a little funny, which helps it stick without feeling punitive.
- **Model it yourself, consistently.** If you're the owner/operator and you swear at the table yourself, the standard doesn't exist no matter what you say in the interview. Crews take their actual cue from what the boss does, not what the boss says.
- **Thank people when they catch themselves.** If someone stops mid-sentence and redirects, a genuine "appreciate that" normalizes the self-correction as a positive thing crew members do for each other, not a rule being enforced on them.

Build in flexibility rather than a hard separation

Instead of an all-or-nothing "kids eat with us / kids eat separately" choice, a lot of small operations land on something more like:

- **Default is everyone eats together.** That's the norm, and it's what keeps the relationship-building that makes family operations work.
- **A simple, known off-ramp exists for specific conversations** — "give us five minutes, this one's not for little ears" — that lets the crew have an adult conversation without it meaning the kids are excluded generally. This preserves the relationship while still giving the crew room to be themselves sometimes.
- **Kids' presence isn't punishment for the crew, and the crew's honesty isn't punished by exile.** The moment it becomes either, you lose the thing that made this special in the first place.

Handle repeat issues privately and early

In a crew this size, letting something slide because a private conversation feels awkward is usually what turns a one-off slip into a pattern. A short, kind, direct word — "hey, I need you to watch that around the kids" — the

first time it happens, said privately rather than at the table in front of everyone, keeps it from ever needing to become a bigger conversation.

Write it down anyway, even briefly

Even for a 3-person crew, a short, one-page "how things work around here" document — covering this alongside basic safety and work expectations — is worth having, mostly because it makes the standard feel like *how the operation runs*, not one person's personal preference that can be argued with. It doesn't need to be formal; even a handwritten page pinned in the cook tent works, as long as it's shared with every new hire from day one.

Draft Outline

[Operation Name] is a family operation. That's not a footnote — it's part of how we work, and it's something we want new crew to understand from day one. Kids are around. They eat with us. We want that to keep happening, which means we need everyone on the same page about how we act at the table.

The Standard

- **No swearing at the table, period.** Not "tone it down" — a clean line that's easy to keep.
- **Save the adult conversations.** Work talk and camp talk are fine. Adult-content talk (relationships, partying, graphic stories) waits until the kids aren't around.
- **Simple gut-check:** If it's the kind of thing you wouldn't say in front of your grandmother, it waits.

How We Handle It

- **Default:** Everyone eats together — that's the norm, and it's what makes this crew feel like family, not just a job site.
- **The off-ramp:** Sometimes a conversation just isn't for little ears. "Give us five" is all it takes — no big deal, no exclusion, just a beat.

> *"Table's hot" — our house signal to shift gears. Anyone can say it, no explanation needed.*

- **Self-correction is a good thing.** If you catch yourself and redirect, that's appreciated, not awkward. We're all figuring this out together.

What This Isn't

- Kids being at the table isn't a punishment for the crew, and the crew being honest with each other isn't punished by being sent away. If it starts feeling like either, come talk to [Owner/Operator Name] directly.

Talking Points for New Hires (Before Day One)

Use this in the hiring conversation — said plainly, not as a warning:

> *"This is a family operation. My kids are around; they eat with us, and language and conversation at the table need to reflect that. Most folks who've worked family camps before know exactly what I mean — if that's not a fit for you, better we know now than three weeks in."*

For the Owner/Operator

- **Model it first.** If you swear at the table yourself, the standard doesn't exist no matter what you said in the interview. Crew take their cue from what you do, not what you say.
- **Handle slips early and privately.** A quiet word the first time something slips — "hey, watch that around the kids" — keeps a one-off from becoming a pattern. Said privately, not at the table.
- **Keep this page visible.** Even a handwritten page pinned in the cook tent makes this feel like how the operation runs, not one person's personal preference.

Scaled Up Operations

Same table, same standard — from a family crew of five to a camp of three thousand

Making the standard hold at scale

A larger camp doesn't have what a 3–6 person placer operation has—a crew small enough that everything can be handled through relationships and direct conversation. With rotating shifts, contractors, new hires every few weeks and a dining hall instead of a single table, you can't count on everyone picking up the standard by watching the owner. It has to be clear, written down and applied the same way across every crew and shift. Here's how to get there without losing the welcoming, family-style feel that makes a camp a good place to live and work.

Set the expectation before day one, at every entry point

When a camp is small, the hiring conversation does most of the work. When it's larger, people arrive through many doors: direct hires, contractors, short-term help, or visitors. The standard has to reach all of them.

- **Put it in the hiring and contractor paperwork.** One plain sentence is enough: "This camp is shared with families, visitors and a mixed crew, and conduct in common areas needs to reflect that."
- **Cover it at orientation, next to safety.** Treat it as part of how the camp runs, not an add-on. If it gets the same airtime as PPE and the radio protocol, people take it just as seriously.
- **Brief contractors and their supervisors directly.** Don't assume a contractor's own crew culture matches yours. Tell their lead what the standard is and that they're expected to hold their people to it.

Make the standard specific, not vague

The more people there are, the more ways "be respectful" gets interpreted. Clear lines work better:

- **No swearing in common areas when kids or visitors are present.** That includes the dining hall, the cook tent and shared lounges. It's a clean line people can check themselves against.
- **Adult-content talk waits for private spaces.** That means relationships, partying and graphic stories. Work talk and camp talk are always fine.
- **No jokes or comments that put down anyone at the table.** At a larger camp, the table is more likely to include women, First Nations community members, young or first-season workers, and people from very different backgrounds. Know who's there.
- **If you wouldn't say it in front of someone's grandmother, don't say it in the dining hall.** A memorable rule of thumb still helps, but at this size it should back up the specific lines rather than replace them.

Give people a way to self-correct without embarrassment

A friendly culture of self-correction still matters at a large camp. It's what stops every slip from becoming a formal issue.

- **Keep a light, shared signal.** A phrase like "table's hot" or a raised eyebrow can still work. Introduce it at orientation so everyone knows it, not just the long-timers.
- **Leaders model it, all of them.** At a small operation, the boss sets the tone. At a large one, every supervisor, foreman, cook and camp manager does. One supervisor who swears freely at dinner undoes what the rest are building.
- **Thank people when they catch themselves.** A quick "appreciate that" still makes self-correction something crew members do for each other rather than a rule enforced on them.

Build in flexibility rather than hard separation

- **By default, everyone shares the common spaces.** That's what builds community across crews and shifts.
- **Designate spaces for adult conversation.** That could be a crew lounge, the shop after hours or a fire pit away from family housing. Then the crew has somewhere to be themselves without it spilling into shared areas.
- **Families and visitors aren't a punishment for the crew, and the crew isn't exiled for being honest.** If the standard starts to feel like either, people resent it and stop following it.

Handle issues early, privately and consistently

At a larger camp, consistency matters as much as kindness. If one supervisor lets things slide and another doesn't, the standard falls apart.

- **First slip: a short, private word from the person's direct supervisor.** For example: "Hey, I need you to watch that in the dining hall." Don't do it at the table in front of everyone.
- **If it happens again, escalate in a known way.** A documented conversation, then a formal step if needed. Everyone should know the steps exist before they're ever used.
- **Give people a clear, low-barrier way to raise concerns.** Not everyone will feel comfortable going to their own supervisor, especially if that supervisor is part of the problem. Name a second contact, such as the camp manager or someone off-site.

Write it down, and keep it short

At this size, a written code of conduct isn't optional. It still doesn't need to read like an HR manual. One or two pages titled "how things work around here," covering conduct, common spaces, safety basics and who to talk to, does the job if it is:

- shared with every new arrival, including contractors, at orientation
- posted where people actually see it, like the dining hall or the cook tent door
- backed by leaders who follow it themselves

The goal is the same as at a small operation—the standard should feel like how the camp runs, not one person's preference that can be argued with.

Draft Outline

On a family crew, you know exactly who's at the table. In a big camp, you don't. The table gets longer and the faces get less familiar, but the standard doesn't shrink or loosen with the headcount. Wherever you sit, be aware of who is around you and carry yourself accordingly. If you've worked a family operation, you already have this instinct. A larger camp just asks you to use it on purpose.

The Same Standard, Scaled Up

- **You can't always tell who's at your table.** It might be someone's first rotation, the only woman or Indigenous worker in the room, a young worker just out of school, a visiting community member or Elder, or someone carrying experiences you'd never guess. Assume you're in mixed company, because you are.
- **The gut-check still works.** Family version: would I say this in front of my kids or my grandmother? Camp version: would I say this if the person it's about were sitting next to me, or if my own family were listening?
- **Quiet isn't comfortable.** People who are outnumbered often stay silent. They're a long way from home, and their next contract may depend on getting along. Silence at the table isn't agreement.
- **It's a home, not just a worksite.** For weeks at a time, the mess hall and common areas are where people eat, sleep, and unwind. The standard doesn't clock out at the end of the shift.

What Everyone Can Do

- **Read the room first.** A two-second look at who's around you is the habit that carries from the family table to the biggest mess hall.
- **Redirect when you catch yourself.** Same as "table's hot" — a beat, not a big deal. Correcting course is respected, not awkward.
- **Make room.** Someone eating alone may be new, shy, or being frozen out. Ask to join, or wave them over.
- **Don't leave it to someone else.** You don't have to start a confrontation. Change the subject, check in with the person afterward, bring in a colleague or supervisor, or report it. The bystander training from the forum (Mine Shift's DIGGER framework) walks through each option.

For Camp Leaders and Supervisors

- **Say it out loud at orientation.** Use real scenarios rather than a read-and-sign sheet, a recommendation from the forum's working group.
- **Make reporting easy before anyone needs it.** Offer more than one route, including an anonymous option such as a hotline or QR code.
- **Hold contractors to the same standard.** The table doesn't sort people by employer. Put the standard in every contract and every orientation.
- **Be visible, and act early.** People notice where leadership eats and what leadership walks past. A quiet, direct word the first time something slips, with a clear path up if it repeats, works at 3,000 people the same way it does at five.

Talking point for orientation:

“Everyone in this camp is somebody’s kid, somebody’s parent, somebody’s coworker — and this is where they live for the next few weeks. Wherever you sit, assume the person next to you matters as much as you do, and talk and act like it.”

[Camp / Company Name] — Reviewed [Month/Year]