Gender integration policy & FAQ

The Camp Quest community strives to overcome stereotypes, encourage self expression, and provide maximum opportunity for growth. We want to reinforce the idea in our campers that all of them can be bolder, stronger, and more confident.

As a camp community, we make an effort to be ever more welcoming of campers of all gender identities. Our activities are already split by either dorm groups or gender neutral teams. We try to build an inclusive camp environment through language and practice, and we have plans to continually expand our inclusive practices. As part of this, we want to provide an inclusive facility where all campers feel welcome. Since 2021, we have offered only gender-neutral sleeping arrangements. Please find below answers to common questions, and feel free to reach out to cqsmokymountains@gmail.com if you have questions or concerns that aren't addressed below.

How will campers be supervised?

Camp Quest Smoky Mountains has a strict rule-of-three policy, which means that no camper is ever left alone with just one other camper or staff member. We maintain staff supervision of campers throughout the day. At night, we have staff members strategically positioned throughout all areas of the dorm, particularly near exit points. We also have a "night watch" for the first hour after lights out, during which staff monitor exits and bathrooms while quietly ensuring campers are settled in for the night.

How will campers' privacy be maintained in the cabins?

Our staff supports camper privacy through clear communication of expectations regarding changing of clothing to be done in private areas (such as needing to use a curtained off area or a private bathroom stall for changes that uncover "bathing suit areas"). Campers will be encouraged to participate in group boundary setting on the first afternoon of camp, which we expect will allow campers to voice their needs and set appropriate boundaries. Staff will pipe in afterwards if there are any important additions needed and will work to ensure boundaries are respected throughout the week.

What about showers and bathrooms?

Both sides of the dorms have private toilet and shower stalls. Campers are permitted to use the bathroom on the other side of the dorm if they prefer (during non-down time, waking hours). However, we do not typically have significant difficulties among campers using the same bathrooms.

Who will be assigned as my child's cabin counselor?

Cabin staff are assigned to a group of campers that they work closely with and accompany to most activities throughout the week (the dorm group). Staff are selected and assigned to groups not according to sex or gender, but according to those best equipped to ensure their campers have a successful week of camp. The Camp Director and Assistant Director choose staff

through careful consideration and interviews. The staff selection process includes an annual background check on all staff prior to camp.

How is my camper assigned to a cabin group?

Our dorm groups are grouped primarily by age, though we take into account maturity, relationships with other campers, and occasionally other factors into account. Many of our activities are not segregated by dorm group, and there will be ample opportunity for each camper to spend time with their friends even if they are not in the same group.

What is Camp Quest's approach to camper relationships and romance?

Camp Quest aims to provide campers with a safe, supervised environment supportive of their families' humanist values. As youth development professionals, we are tasked with utilizing proper supervision, communication, and reasoned judgment to ensure that their camp experiences are productive and appropriate. According to the rule of three, campers are never left unsupervised with another camper. As such, campers will generally only engage in behavior that is comfortable for them while being observed. In nearly every case, the behaviors campers will choose will be entirely age-appropriate and limited to things like spending time together, flirting, hand holding, dancing, hugging and perhaps (if they are brave) brief kissing. Camp Quest views such behaviors as normal, healthy milestones in the growth and development of campers. On the rare occasion that camper romantic behavior rises to a level that might make others uncomfortable, is generally inappropriate, or where campers break the rule of three, staff intervene with campers. Such intervention is careful not to shame campers, but does emphasize the necessity of the rule of three and recognizing contexts where such behavior becomes inappropriate (like camp). In severe cases, intervention might also include behavior contracts, separation of campers, extra monitoring, or as a last resort, sending a camper home.

My camper has never stayed in a gender inclusive setting. How can I prepare them for camp?

In most cases, we've found campers adjust quickly and easily to the gender inclusive settings. When we first implemented it, it's safe to say we were more worried than most of our campers. Much like homesickness, try not to make a big deal of it or share any anxiety you have about sleeping arrangements. Be sure to mention to your camper that the dorms will be gender integrated– don't hide it from them. If they are concerned, try focusing on solutions rather than worries, for instance: bringing extra sheets to drape around their bed, changing in bathroom stalls, etc.

What if I still have concerns about gender inclusive dorm arrangements?

Please reach out to us at cqsmokymountains@gmail.com. Our director and/or assistant director may reach out to speak to you and/or your camper to discuss how we can best provide a welcoming space for all campers.