Managing the Camp Environment

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****Note: This information will be supplemented by our Psychology team at the staff orientation meeting.**

Setting the Stage - Be a Good Role Model

When working with children and youth, being a good role model in your actions and behaviour is essential. Campers will look up to you, and will feed off of your emotions and energy.

This starts with modeling the behaviour we want to see from our campers. This includes listening while other leaders or campers are talking, practicing safe play, being respectful of others, the equipment and space, etc.

Please use your best judgment at camp. Building relationships also means that campers must respect you as a leader. Setting expectations early, and being consistent with what is ok and not ok will go a long way in ensuring camp is a success. Do not be afraid to intervene if an activity starts to get out of hand, campers get off task, etc.

Small incidents can lead to bigger situations if not handled appropriately and immediately. It is also important to remember that even though a child acts or tells you that everything is ok, it may in fact not be. This is why we need to reduce potential challenging situations to make sure all campers feel comfortable, safe and respected at camp.

Here are some great articles for supporting children in a physical activity environment.

How to Help Kids Gain Confidence Through Physical Activity

Creating a Positive Environment

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Keys to Success

1. **Build meaningful relationships with campers**
    - Trust and rapport are keys to ensuring campers feel safe at camp
    - Learn more about who they are, what they enjoy, etc.
    - Always have their best interests at heart and display it through joy, actively listening to what they're saying, and being reliable
        - Kids pick up right away on body language. Have an open, kind approach to every camper (be present, no arms crossed, etc).

    Relationships First - Creating Connections that Help Young People Thrive
    Developmental Relationships Framework

    Please review these Touchstones that can help create a trusting environment. Reflect on which touchstones you may want to improve upon.

    Courage & Renewal Touchstones

2. **Empathy**
    - Understand and connect with campers' experiences and perspectives
        - What they feel, need, desire from a situation
    - Respecting struggles
    - No judgment

    The difference between empathy & sympathy

3. **Focus on a strength-based approach**
    - Using a campers strengths to overcome their weaknesses will help empower them
    - Affirming strengths and feelings will help the camper feel validated, and more open to addressing the weakness
    - Use affirmations to reframe negative statements, situations or experiences
    - Sandwich metaphor: say something good-weakness-good

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What youth want you to know: five key themes

1. Be supportive. Guide, don't dictate. Youth want information so they can make their own decisions
2. Be patient and available. Don't be discouraged if your first offer of support is turned down as youth will often come around when they feel up to it and the time is right
3. Be open. When they come to you, listen, listen, listen!
4. Be understanding. Youth learn and grow through failure and mistakes—the important issue is how youth and their support systems respond to setbacks
5. Be empathetic. Don't belittle the feelings of youth or be patronizing—"my feelings are real and important, even if whatever I'm going through doesn't seem like a big deal to you, it is to me right now"

In your involvement with youth—direct or indirect—be deliberate and purposeful in your actions. Every interaction with youth provides an opportunity to support their development. Supporting positive development doesn't necessarily require its own program or agenda. It's about what we do everyday—make every interaction matter.

Source: Stepping Stones

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Behavioural & Bullying Issues at Camp

Many kids struggle with behaviour regulation, however for kids at CHAMPS these issues may stem from potentially traumatic medical situations. We do ask parents/guardians to share this information with us prior to camp, however many do not. Unfortunately this is another on-the-fly situation that you may encounter. Some children may have anxiety trying new things, act out, have bursts of anger, meltdowns, etc.

The Zones of Regulation is a helpful tool in understanding behaviours children may exhibit.



Tools to help children regulate emotions

Zones of Regulation and Self Regulation Activities

Regulation - Online Resources

It is important to try to meet the camper where they're at and find ways to help them succeed. We don't expect you to be behavioural experts, and this doesn't mean we don't intervene if there are inappropriate actions or activities occurring at camp. However we do ask that you try to support the child in the best way you can. We also want to try to help them integrate with the other campers if possible. Asking the child lots of questions to help them feel heard is very important. You may need to find a

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different activity for the child, ask the parent what strategies work best, etc. If you have questions or concerns about this, please contact the Camp Coordinator. A reminder to please report any significant incidents on the Incident Reporting Form.

We have a zero tolerance policy for bullying at camp. We have never had this issue and we hope that continues. If you see bullying at camp, please intervene. Camp is meant to be a safe place and we want to be careful not to jeopardize that. **A reminder - you are the adult in the room and need to discipline immediately if you see inappropriate behaviour towards other campers OR staff.** If there is an incident, report it to the Camp Coordinator and we will discuss how to move forward.

If you are struggling to resolve issues at camp, consider taking a closer look at the activities and sessions you are providing.
(Source: Calgary AfterSchool)

1. **What percentage of the program is spent in lecture format?**
    - The lecture format should be considered a warm-up or starting point for the activity - not the activity itself. If the warm-up is taking too long, get into the activity sooner, as this is where most of the learning is going to take place

2. **Programs are well-managed, participatory and hold high expectations for all those who attend**
    - Activities will nearly always require cooperative moments. Your activities need to generate experiences where each member of the group is essential for individual and group success.
    - Learning to contribute to group success is a critical social skill and experiencing group success is a key emotional learning tool

3. **Participants are involved in and have ownership in the creation of the programs' code of conduct** (see "Tips for Navigating Challenging Situations")

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- Learning is better when you need to teach something.
- Having participants lead or present not only provides a unique learning opportunity - it will provide program leaders with an invaluable feedback loop to see how much the participants have absorbed and where they are with various social and emotional skill development.

4. **Do participants have a role in selecting or planning the activities?**
    - One of the goals of active learning is learner empowerment. The learners in your program need to feel engaged with a sense that they are teaching themselves.
    - You need their buy-in early - and one of the best ways to do this is to give them a meaningful role in the selection or planning of activities (when possible).



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Tips for Navigating Challenging Situations

Setting up a camp contract (charter, rules, promises, etc)

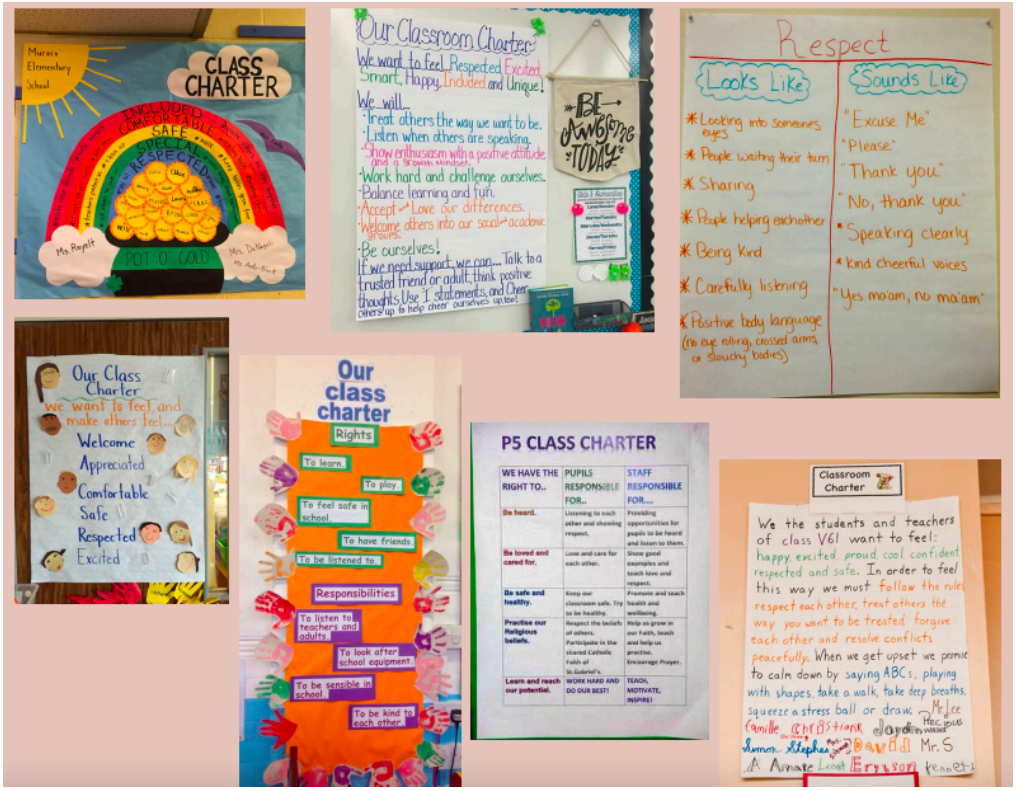
This strategy can help mitigate challenging situations before they appear. We recommend you incorporate this into your first camp session.

Supplies needed: big piece of paper/poster, markers, tape

How to: Gather the campers in a circle, and prompt them to tell you some rules or promises they would like to agree on to help everyone enjoy camp. Engage campers in a discussion, provide suggestions, and write the agreed upon rules on the paper (we also recommend clearly stating what those words look, sound and feel like - see below). Then, have each of the campers (including leaders!) sign the poster as a commitment to what they have created.

Ongoing: Bring the poster to each camp and hang it where it is visible. You can choose to briefly review it before you start each camp, and use it as a reminder tool when a child may be acting out, breaking the contract, etc.

Examples:



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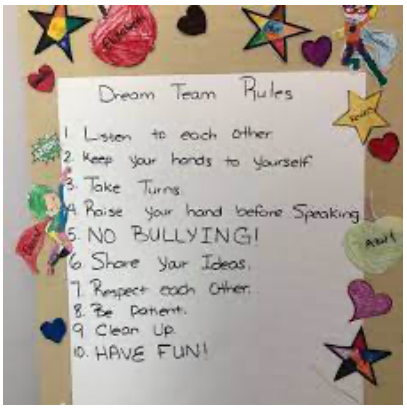



Proactive Restorative Guiding Practice

Use these questions to help de-escalate a situation and guide you through gathering more information, as well as determining next steps.

- What happened?
- What were you thinking of at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- What impact has this had on you and others (e.g. other campers)?
- What needs to happen to make things right?

We highly recommend you browse the helpful external learning sites & resources listed in this document to learn more about supporting children's development at camp, in addition to reading Module 7: Social Emotional Learning.

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