

CAMP ADMINISTRATION 101

CAMPER CONFLICT





Regardless of how much time you put into acclimating your campers to life at camp, there will always be incidents with kids not getting along the way they should. Examples can range from minor name calling and kids putting hands on each other all the way up to severe bullying, fighting, or inappropriate language.

Although you will see commonalities in the type of things that will come up regularly, each incident should be handled case by case with a process in place that is fair and can handle any scenario. Here are some tips on how to handle conflict amongst campers:

1. SEPARATE THE KIDS AND HEAR BOTH SIDES OF THE STORY INDIVIDUALLY

It is important to hear both sides, regardless of the campers history or what other campers are telling you happened. All kids deserve to be heard and tell both sides of the story. Usually the truth will lie somewhere in between.

2. TALK TO THEIR COUNSELOR OR ANY WITNESSES INDIVIDUALLY

Hopefully a counselor saw or heard something, which makes this process a lot easier. Sometimes with a lot of kids in an area this is not always possible, even with the best supervision. In these cases find out what kids around them saw it so you can hopefully get an unbiased side of the story.

3. BRING THE KIDS BACK TOGETHER TO DISCUSS AS A GROUP

Discuss the incident and if there is someone at fault make sure they apologize to the other camper. A lot of times both campers had a part to play in the incident so apologies from both and a handshake will go a long way.

4. REITERATE THE CAMP RULES AND HOW WE MOVE FORWARD

Set clear and concise expectations of the camp rules and set guidelines for the campers such as not to be in each other's space if they cannot get along. Make sure they are aware of the repercussions for a 2nd incident. Also, make sure it is on their counselor's radar to monitor the kids closer as we move on to avoid another incident.

5. DISCIPLINE IF NEEDED AND REPORT THE INCIDENT TO PARENTS

Make sure that the punishment is fair and fits the incident based on the circumstances and information you have available. Whether you discipline or not, always document and report the incident to parents to ensure if something happens again there are no surprises.

To prevent conflict amongst campers, there are several things you can do to curtail some of the things that may come up:

- 1. Use icebreakers and team building activities regularly.** At the very least, start off the week with these but if you can incorporate them each day and it can make your group comradery even better.
- 2. When coordinating activities, have campers group or pair up with different kids each time.** This will allow them to interact and connect with more kids that they may not on a regular basis.
- 3. Review camp rules regularly and set clear and concise expectations.** Just as you would with your staff, you need to do this with campers as well. Regardless if you have the same kids all summer or a different group each week, start each week off with a rules review to set expectations. Make sure they know there is a process in place for discipline that would cause them to miss activities if they cannot behave.
- 4. Use engaging and educational activities that promote social and emotional skills.** Talk to your campers on how they are supposed to act and how they feel if someone does not treat them well.
- 5. Look out for bullying.** Things like name calling, hands on each other, non-inclusion in activities, starting rumors, etc. should be shut down immediately before they escalate. Sometimes the more passive aggressive type of psychological bullying can be hard to identify to keep an eye on your campers behaviors to get ahead of this!
- 6. Focus on inclusion.** Make sure all kids feel welcome and are participating. Even if they don't enjoy a certain type of activity either find an alternative or find something within that activity or area that they can help with to feel included. If you have several campers that are always non-participants it may mean your group is having some issues with inclusion.
- 7. Keep the mood light and fun.** Your campers want to feel like you are one of them, not the camp dictator. Being too strict, yelling all the time, and not connecting with your campers will cause them to check out and not listen or behave the way you need them to. There will be a time and place when you have no choice to raise your voice or discipline but if it is a constant, every day thing then it may be something within your way of operating that could be causing it.

We shouldn't expect all the kids to be best friends as they all have different interests and will click with different kids, but they all do need to get along. Regardless of the severity of the incident doing your due diligence, documenting, communicating, and setting expectations to both the campers and the parents will help you resolve any conflict and prevent repeat incidents. Focus on





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