

CAMP ADMINISTRATION 101

DISCIPLINE





Disciplining your campers is never a fun task, but is necessary when all other options have been exhausted. Discipline can range from a simple time out to suspension or expulsion. When disciplining a camper make sure to consider the following:

1. Have a process in place and set clear expectations. Include discipline procedures in your camp manual for parents but also review this with your campers at the start of camp. They need to know what the process is and what the repercussions are if they cannot behave properly.

2. Have a tiered progressive system where the punishments increase in severity if the camper continues misbehave. Progressive discipline is common and works well for those campers that may take a little longer to get on the right path. Give campers plenty of chances to improve within the progression but severe incidents like fighting can make them progress faster to more severe penalties.

3. Thoroughly investigate and document all incidents. You should have a discipline sheet for every camper to keep track of their record. Regardless of the severity of the incident they should all be looked into, documented, and reported to parents. Even if it ended up being minor, was resolved, and did not require discipline, let the parents know so if it does happen again they have already gotten a documented warning.

4. Communicate with the parent and camper throughout the process. Make sure the parent and camper understand what happened, why they are being disciplined, and what will happen next if it continues. Put all of this in writing and add it to their individual behavior record so there are no surprises if something else happens down the line and now the penalties are more severe.

5. Make sure the punishment fits the incident and look for teachable moments. What you really want to get out of your discipline procedures is finding the root cause of the issue and teaching the camper how to handle it so they improve. It is not to continuously send kids to time out or suspend them and ruin their summer. A lot of times when kids continue to misbehave it is a lot of little things that add up. Find appropriate punishments and make sure they are learning from their actions to really fix the problem.

Here are some ways you can get ahead of misbehaving campers and reduce the chance you have to discipline. Reducing your camper conflict will in turn reduce the need to discipline so these things are important to consider and go hand and hand to ensure you have a cohesive and engaged group of kids!



- 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 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. There are many SEL activities you can incorporate into your program that promote this type of behavior.
- 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 so keep a close eye on your campers behaviors and social interactions 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.

The goal of your discipline process should be trying to resolve the root cause of the issue, finding those teachable moments and improve the campers behavior. Engage with your campers while keeping the mood light and fun as much as possible so you and your participants can continue to enjoy camp each and every day.



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