

CAMP ADMINISTRATION 101

INTERACTING WITH CAMPERS



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Interacting and engaging with a large group of kids in a camp environment can be a challenging task. Kids are excited and there is more space and less control than a teacher may face in a classroom setting. Here are some guidelines with engaging and interacting with your campers:



1. Talk to them at eye level when possible. Sitting with them at the lunch table, sitting on the ground with the group in a circle, and bending over or going on one knee to talk to them will go a long way in making your campers more comfortable around you.

2. Don't be a screamer. You are an adult authority figure but you don't have to constantly yell at them or over them to get their attention. There are many tactics you can use to get their attention that we outline below, but overall talk to them with respect and be stern when needed.

3. Give attention to everyone and connect with them. Many kids crave attention. They want to talk to you and tell you things and enjoy when you have conversations with them as an individual or group. Do your best to give all your campers your fullest attention and they will start to see you as one of their own, but still give you the respect as an authority figure.

4. Set expectations. Giving your campers clear rules and expectations right off the bat will guide them throughout their time at camp. They will know what they can and cannot do as well as what the consequences are. This will help you manage your group and keep your campers more attentive, especially if they start to misbehave.

5. Ask questions. Kids love to be asked questions and will always give you an answer, especially the younger age groups. Constantly telling kids what to do over and over again will start to get mundane for them and will eventually go in one ear and out the other. Put it back on the campers on what they are supposed to be doing or what the rules of an activity are supposed to be to engage with them and put the ball in their court.

6. Focus on teambuilding, ice breakers, and SEL. The group and camp environment can be difficult for kids at first. Everything and everyone is new and overwhelming at times. Using teambuilding activities, ice breakers and social and emotional learning tools will help your kids get comfortable with you and their group members and will go a long way in making their camp experience the best it can be.

7. Stay calm, be positive, and have high energy. Kids will feed off your attitude. If you are upset all the time and negative, it will eventually rub off on your campers. Keeping a calm mantra and staying positive at all times will lift your kids up, rather than put them down.

8. Manage your time well and don't allow down time. Down time will force your kids to keep themselves busy on their own and eventually start doing things they aren't supposed to because they are not engaged. You will have more disciplinary issues and it will be harder to manage the kids because they will check out and not want to be there. While managing your group, have a plan and the activities coming one after another to keep your kids engaged and on their toes.

9. Communicate effectively. Communicating to your camp group regularly throughout the day will keep your kids in the loop on what they can expect throughout the day. Not only will this keep their attention, it will reduce the endless amount of questions you receive from campers to make your job easier and allow you to focus on coordinating your camp day.

10. Let the kids help. Most campers love to help their counselors with anything they can. Holding the ball bag, holding the door, getting equipment, etc. are way to get kids involved. Even turn cleaning into a game or contest to turn those not so fun mundane tasks into another activity. These tactics will keep your kids engaged and take more off your plate now that you have a whole pack of helpers!

While managing your group or the entire camp, getting a large group of campers attention can be the hardest thing you deal with throughout the course of the week. Here are some ways to get campers attention to they are quiet and attentive when a counselor needs to talk:

1. Use whistles effectively to where each whistle means something to the kids when they hear it and the stop to pay attention.
2. Use a camp chant or clap to direct the kids attention to repeat it and be quiet.
3. Use hand signals so when the kids see a counselor signaling, they mirror the signal and then get quiet.
4. Use the silent treatment. Sometimes when kids are responding, all you have to do is stand up front, stare, and don't say a word. It won't take long for the kids to understand you are up there waiting on them and will respond accordingly.
5. Start a dance or quick game. If the campers aren't responding, pull the few who are aside and get a dance going or start throwing a ball to start a game. It won't take long for the kids to find out what's going on and gravitate towards you with their full attention so they can participate.
6. Use music. Playing some music will get their attention, maybe even start a singalong, and then stop it when you are ready so they focus on you.
7. Silently give out rewards. Walking around throughout the chaos of a loud group of kids and giving something as small as a Skittle or M&M to the campers that are paying attention will catch on quick amongst the group. Soon enough they will all be at attention hoping to get one too.

Yelling and screaming to get the kids attention is ineffective and eventually will cause a camper to tune it out altogether. Use these tactics to engage the kids when you need their attention so your campers will always be ready to listen when you need them to. From there continue to manage your group, give attention to connect with them, and stay engaged to make your job a breeze.





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