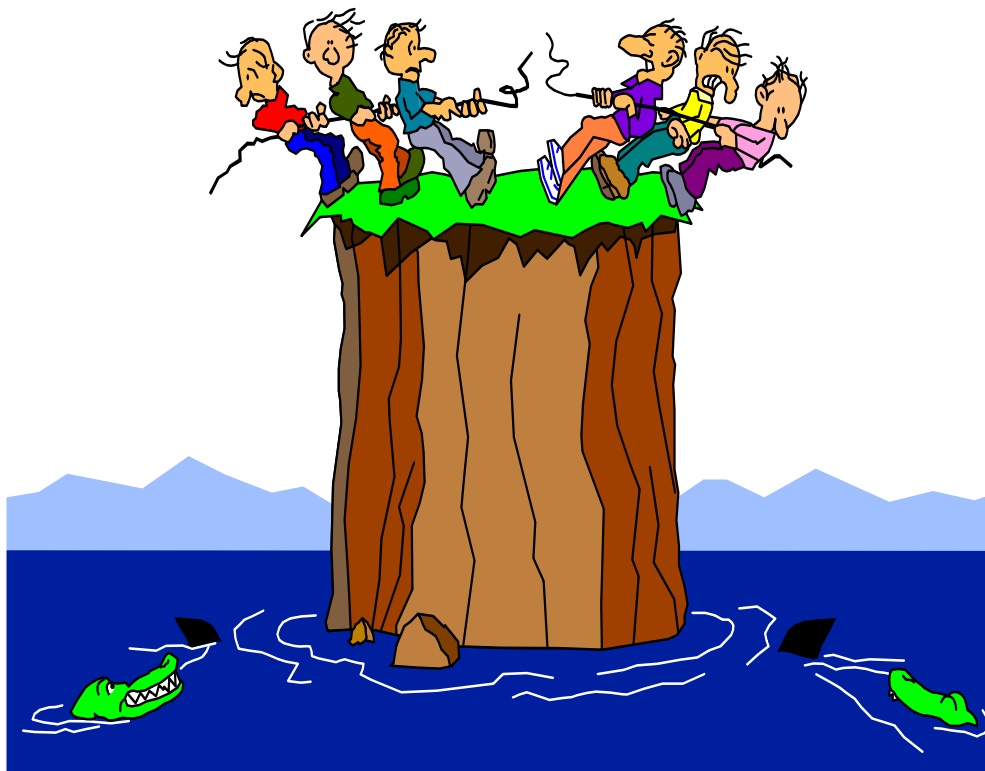




Camp Counselor's Guide

Revised: 5/19/2005

- **Helping your campers enter the “Zone”**
- **Handling common camper challenges**
- **Making the most of your experiences as a counselor**



Camp Counselor's Guide

Congratulations on being chosen as a camp counselor! You are about to enter one of the most rewarding challenges that a human can have; that of working in the lives of young people. Although this challenge may seem a little overwhelming at first glance, it is not only doable, but can be a great deal of fun! Summer camp has been proven to be a valuable tool to help young people grow in character and in the ability to form and maintain healthy relationships with others. With a little guidance and a lot of support and encouragement, the summer camp experience can greatly influence their lives in a positive manner. Your relationship with each camper and with your group as a whole will set the tone for the experience these young people will have.

You were chosen for this role because you have exhibited traits of leadership and character which will be beneficial in the lives of these young people. Thank you for taking time out from your busy summer to give of yourself to help these youths whom God has entrusted to us!

The following guide was created to help you, the camp counselor and assistant counselor, more fully understand your role as a counselor, and to guide you through the steps that will help campers understand and enter the "Zone", picturing the World Tomorrow.

Primary material for this guide was taken from the book **How to Be a Great Camp Counselor**, by David Burrow, McElroy Publishing, 1992. Please read this guide before coming to camp, and bring it with you to camp, as you will find it a valuable source of information during your experience as a camp counselor. Your camp director may also have copies of Burrow's book available for your use or reference during camp.

Getting Off To A Good Start

It is very important to start camp on a positive note. What you do on the first day of camp will set the tone for the rest of the camp. Before your campers arrive, take the time to focus on these key points:

- What you do at camp may make the difference between a good and bad camp experience
- You are here to give campers a powerful learning experience
- You are here to serve the campers
- Don't focus on your shortcomings
- Follow the plan
- Work with everyone else on the camp staff

If you take the time to focus on these key points at the beginning of camp and the beginning of each day, you will discover that your camp experience will be a positive one in which there will be harmony and unity for everyone. Remember, the goal is to help each camper have the best camp ever!

The First Day

The first day of camp can be a little intimidating for some campers, as well as for their parents. In order to help get the campers involved in camp right from the start, and to help their parents see that their child is going to be well cared for, there are a few important steps to take:

1. Greet each camper as soon as he arrives. Tell him your name, and **learn his name right away**. Greet his family and introduce yourself. When the camper's parents are comfortable with the camp and you, he will feel more comfortable, also. Help him put his things away right away to help him feel settled.
2. Send each "new" camper off with an experienced one to learn his way around camp.
3. Get the whole group together as soon as possible so that they will feel part of the group. Set a positive tone of "togetherness"
4. Enforce the rules right from the start. Don't yell or nag, just remind campers of the rules of camp.



Communicate right from the start that each camper is important, accepted, secure and going to have the best week of his life. Your goal is to help each camper to realize that every individual is different from, but not better than, each other camper. Athletic ability may make an individual better at a given sport, but not a better person. The dorm should feel that it faces every challenge as a group, and not as individuals. Stress the value of sportsmanship and cooperation as often as possible. Challenge your dorm to be the best at everything they do as a unit.

Above all, this first day of camp should be a positive one, emphasizing unity and cooperation.

Goals for Campers

Each camper should be growing in character during camp. How this is accomplished is largely up to you. How can you help? First, remember that the goal of camp is to help each camper understand the “Zone” concept, which is a type of the World Tomorrow. Camp should be a place where this is practiced by the staff and by the campers. The environment should be one of loving concern, exciting challenges, and respect for each other. The United Church of God has established youth camps under the United Youth Camp program to help young people learn about God’s way and practice it with friends of their own ages. There are things that you can do to help each camper in your care enter into the “Zone”.

As a counselor, you are really giving each camper a counseling service. Build a relationship with each one. Socialize with them, and NOT with your own peer group. Play with them. Try to understand them. Remember that there is significance behind every behavior. Make a point of having at least one “one-on-one” conversation with each camper during the week. Make it a private talk out of hearing distance of other campers. This may be the most significant part of the week for the camper. Give undivided attention. Use the following guidelines to become a counselor/friend to each camper:

1. Be ready to listen. Ask leading questions. Don’t come across as the foundation of all knowledge.
2. Use language on each camper’s level.
3. Have a positive attitude, avoiding being argumentative, judgmental, or a “know-it-all”.
4. Stay neutral. Everything you hear should be received with confidence and calmness. Don’t let yourself show shock or horror at what you may hear. Don’t give any approval to a wrong attitude.
5. Be honest and sincere. Admit when you don’t know something. Send a camper to someone with more skill if needed. Be very slow to give advice. You are here to help the camper gain insight into himself. You want him to change himself when needed.

6. Don't get yourself in too deep. Stay within your own ability. Don't let pride get you into a bad situation.

Counselor Challenges

Your dorm will have quite a mixture of personalities in it. Handling those campers who pose a challenge is an art. There are some approaches that you should take, and some that you should avoid, when dealing with difficult campers.

There are three things that you should NEVER EVER do with a problem in your dorm:

1. **Never give up control to a camper.** Do not give into their demands just to keep peace. This never works. Self-centered campers will never be satisfied.
2. **Never spend all your time on problem kids.** The other kids won't have a counselor this week. Let other staff members help.
3. **Never react. You act first.** Some kids try to control the counselor by making him aggravated or angry. Don't react to the few. Control the situation before it controls you.

What can you do when you have a problem camper or two?

1. **Find out what the problem really is.** Define it clearly by listening and observing. Ask selected, careful questions, such as "Did you do something to cause Billy to turn against you?"
2. **Discover the real cause of the problem.** Every problem has a cause that is not the problem itself. Selfishness, a spoiled child, a neglected home, immaturity, etc., are usually the real problem.
3. **Show the camper the right solution.** This may take some explaining. You may simply need to send the camper to someone else, such as camp director or supervisor. Do this whenever needed. Don't bog yourself down with a problem camper.
4. **Make sure that the campers are eating, sleeping and exercising enough.**
5. **Be sure that the emotional needs of the camper is met.** Pay attention to each of them, don't let anyone pick on someone else. Use their real names.
6. **Ignore as much of a problem behavior as you can unless** it affects the camp experience for him or others. Use private counseling (out of hearing distance of others but where you are still visible unless another staff member is present) to help him see where he is hurting himself.
7. **Always be fair,** particularly with any form of discipline. Remember, a child who is always being blamed may be "set up" by other, more crafty campers.
8. **Make sure directions and rules are clear.**

9. **Don't sink to the level of "might makes right"**. Fighting or bullying won't ever help.
10. **Look for successes for each camper.**
11. **Separate a problem child.** If a camper is a problem during dinner, make him sit next to you off by yourselves. Tell him clearly what is happening and why. Always be for him, and never against. Discipline is for him, not against him.
12. **ALWAYS BE THERE.**
13. **Don't ridicule or use sarcasm.** Don't destroy anyone's self-image.
14. **Never take one side of the story.**

Your path with a difficult camper is to help him take responsibility, admit guilt, ask forgiveness, and become right with the others.



Preventing Trouble

Campers come to camp to have a good time, not to be bawled out, yelled at, scolded, threatened or tortured. In order for them to have a good experience, you need to take positive steps to prevent trouble whenever possible.

- **Make camp rules and expectations clear from the beginning**
- **Make each one for the benefit of the entire group**
- **Give them with humor and kindness**
- **Make as few as possible**

How can you get respect from your campers?

- **Make your expectations clear**
- **Earn respect**
- **Assume that you are the leader and authority in the dorm.** That will keep another camper from doing so
- **Give each of them the respect they deserve.**
- **Always be where the action is.** Always be one step ahead of the group. Second guess them. You probably know what they are up to!

Discipline

Why do we need to have any type of discipline at all? There are four main reasons why appropriate discipline is necessary:

1. Discipline is for the camper. He is missing out on the fun and hear of camp by being out of step with the others.
2. Discipline is for the camp. One person can't be allowed to spoil it for the others.
3. Discipline is maintained for the sake of all others. Each camper has the right for security, safety, food, rest, and the help he needs.
4. Discipline is for the counselor. You need to maintain your leadership and authority. Never take revenge, however. Let someone else deal with such a problem camper.

When a situation arises where discipline is needed, use the best methods to handle the situation:

1. **Do the easiest things first.** Usually, all that is needed is for you to say something. For instance, "That's enough. Please stop" usually does the trick.
2. **Don't use the "I'm bigger than you" approach,** because when you aren't around there is little respect.
3. **Be careful about making threats.** If you must, be prepared to carry them out. Don't threaten with cruel or radical punishment, or threaten beyond your power. The only type of threat that does work is one where you warn the camper that his behavior will cause him to miss out on the fun (i.e., "Johnny, if you can't stop shoving Tim, you and I will sit together during swimming while the others go in the pool".)
4. If someone is causing a disturbance during Christian Living, or mealtime, **separate him from the group** and sit with him in the front row, or off by yourselves. Let him know that his behavior is causing him to be isolated from the fun.
5. **Use counselor/camper talks liberally,** person to person.
6. **Ignore irresponsible behavior when possible.** This doesn't mean behavior which is potentially dangerous or destructive, but behavior which is annoying and based on the "show off" motivation.
7. **Cause a diversion.** If you see a problem beginning to brew, distract the attention of the entire group to something else. Start a song, point out something you see or hear, anything to get the focus moved to something positive.

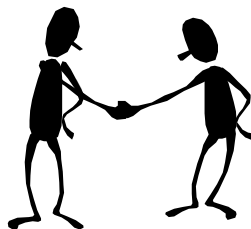


What types of discipline should you **NEVER** use?

1. **Ridicule, shaming, and sarcasm**
2. **Cruelty**
3. **Hitting or striking**

There are six basic principles to discipline that you should always remember:

1. **Discipline should immediately follow the offense.** Don't put it off, as the camper might think he has gotten away with it, or forget entirely what the offense was.
2. **Relate the punishment to the offense.** If she throws food, she eats next to you. If she disobeys the lifeguard, she sits out during swimming.
3. **Discipline for willful offenses,** not for carelessness or immaturity. Usually an appropriate word works better for this type of offense.
4. **Discipline to the point of regret.** The camper must realize that his behavior caused a consequence that he does not want, and that will prevent him from the same behavior in the future.
5. **After disciplining, talk to the camper.** Let him know that you care, and that your actions are for him, and not against him.
6. **Use teamwork.** Counselors and assistant counselors are a team with the same goals. You must be unified in your approach. Let others help when needed.



Camper Challenges **Homesickness**

Homesickness is a problem which you may never have to face at all. It most often occurs when younger campers are away from home for the first time, and feel they are losing their emotional support. The problem is a very real one, with very real pain, for these younger campers. But be confident that there are very real steps to take to solve this problem!

For starters, don't use the word "homesick" in front of the camper. There is something psychological about this term that heightens the problem. Your positive,

straightforward approach to the situation will be a major factor in combating it. Your job is to help the camper establish a new emotional support framework and develop some independence. The following steps will help you get the camper on the right track and keep moving in the direction the entire dorm should go.



1. Make the camper feel welcome and never let her be lost in the shuffle. Know her name, accept her, and show her that you really care.
2. When darkness begins to fall, and you see the signs of fear, panic and loneliness overcome her, just walk up beside her, put your arm around her shoulders, and put her mind in neutral with conversation centering around what you are going to do next.
3. Tell her exactly what is going to happen to her. Reassure her that you will be with her all week, think of something funny to talk about, or about what will be happening tomorrow. Keep the conversation going, but **do not talk about home**.
4. When the lights go out, step over to her bed and reassure her again that you are there. Again, don't mention anything about home. Keep her focused on camp. If the tears begin, let them flow until sleep comes. Usually, when she survives the night, the problem is solved.
5. The next morning, the camper might continue with the problem, even insisting on calling home. Now is the time for a firm, loving approach which rarely fails. Look the camper straight in the eye, and tell her firmly "For your benefit, you CANNOT call home and you are not going home. Dry your eyes, and get back with your dorm. You are staying. Is that clear? Let's get going." Do not use a sympathetic, motherly approach. Cut the ties to home, firmly but lovingly.
6. Guide the camper back to helping others to take the focus off of herself. Find a reason why this camper is needed by another one.

If this else fails, and the camper insists on being a problem, take her to the Camp Director or counselor supervisor. This is now a discipline problem, and must be treated as such. You are there to be a counselor to all the campers, not just the one who is demanding the most attention. You have too much to do to be tied to this type of discipline problem, and should feel free to call on someone else to take over.

The Bully

Should you find yourself in the position of having a camper who feels it is his right to bully other campers, you will need to be sure that you recognize first of all if he is

all talk, or if he really does carry out his threats. When you discern his true intent, be mindful of the following:

- Be sure that you are not “against” the camper, but rather that you are the protector of the others. Be sure that he gets this message loud and clear.
- Never leave this camper alone. Alert the rest of the staff to this situation.
- When you have a clear case of this camper abusing others, take him aside and let him know the camp rules, and the consequences of his actions.
- Give him a 24 hour chance to prove he has stopped his destructive behavior. If he violates it, take him to the camp director.

If a camper is disrespectful or abusive to either the counselor or assistant counselor, take him to the camp director or counselor supervisor. Use teamwork. Don’t talk about the camper behind his back in a derogatory manner, but enlist the aid or activity staff and all other staff to help the camper get what he needs, not what he deserves!

The Bedtime Stall

Make sure that the campers know when lights out really is, and that at that time all of them are expected to be in bed and quiet. Since most dorms have the rest rooms inside, there should be no problem with campers wandering outside of the dorm after they have gone to the dorm for the night. For those who will have to walk to the bath house, the counselor and assistant should walk with them, and one of you should stay until the last camper has returned. Once campers are in bed, they stay there! For many counselors, this can be the best part of the day. Especially for girls, going to bed is a time to reflect on the triumphs and trials of the day and try to sort them out. It is great if a counselor and assistant counselor has had the time during each day to notice one success, whether big or small, for each camper. Tell her! Give her the chance to fall asleep with a positive achievement on her mind. But when the time to go to sleep has arrived, that’s it! No more stalling. Simply say, “Time to fall asleep. No more talking. Good night!” Don’t answer any more questions. If you have one camper who insists on keeping the conversation going, go to him and speak to him by name, telling him to stop immediately. Then, stand in the middle of the room, waiting for the quiet.

One thing to remember - most counselors fall asleep before the campers all do. Don’t fall into this trap! Never leave your dorm without a counselor or assistant, or other adult, present. Sit down on your bed and wait for the even, regular breathing of sleep from your campers. Don’t lie down until you are sure it is safe! Once you lie down and close your eyes, the party is over for you, and may just begin for a couple of your campers.

Bed Wetting

Bed wetting is an embarrassing problem for a camper, but it happens. When you have a camper with such a problem, the most important thing to do is be sure that he is not ridiculed by anyone else. Take steps to help the camper each night before bed. Remind him to limit fluid intake after dinner. If necessary, wake him up after an hour of sleep to use the rest room. If a problem does occur, have some method for him to ask you for help without alerting the entire cabin to the situation. There are laundry facilities at camp, and someone will be there to help with laundry when needed. Whatever happens, keep the situation confidential and quiet, as much as you can.

The End of Camp

As camp draws to a close, campers may try to find one last chance to play practical jokes, etc. They also may realize that that “special someone” they have come to know during camp is going to leave them soon, and may attempt a last chance rendezvous before camp ends. Whatever the scenario, this is an important time for you to be on guard. Campers are becoming emotional about the end of camp, and may let down their own guard. You cannot afford to do so. Keep a watchful eye for problems before they develop. By this time, you know your campers well, and know which ones are more likely to get into a bad situation. You must also be on guard yourself for the same feelings. Keep the campers, and yourself, under control.

Help your campers learn to say goodbye to one another. Help them find all their belongings, including the ones at the pool, softball diamond, etc. Be sure they all have a ride home, and know where to meet the person who will take them home. Help them get the dorm into shape by making sure that all the papers, trash, etc., is cleaned up. Check the rest rooms for personal belongings. Help them carry their belongings to where they will be picked up. Be there to say good-bye to them, and let them know that you enjoyed having them in your dorm. Tell them you hope to see them again next year. Don't dwell on anything negative that may have happened during the week, but accent the positive.

Counselor Pointers

Following are seven tips to help you be a more effective counselor:

- 1. The camp is for the camper. His social life comes first, yours is second.**
- 2. Feed the campers first, and yourself last.**
- 3. When campers line up, you are last in line.**
- 4. When there is a fun activity, see that your campers have a blast.**

5. **When there is any game, campers go first.**
6. **During a contest, let the campers compete. Step aside.**
7. **Stay with your kids always, especially after meals.**

Preventing Burn-out

Counselor burn-out is a problem which can be avoided. We will have adults on hand who will take over for you any time you feel you are overworked, overtired, or just plain need a break. Additionally, a special lounge has been provided for you to use whenever you feel you need a break. **USE IT.** Use the time to talk to other counselors for advice and encouragement. We are all in this together. Here are a few other suggestions to avoid burn-out:

1. Rest when you can. Utilize your assistant or other staff personnel when you are needed a break.
2. Sleep at night. Don't try to use the time to socialize.
3. Counsel with others when needed. You can't do it all. Many others are there to assist you. Use them!
4. Eat well. Drink plenty of fluids. If you normally take vitamins or other medication, don't forget it.

Above all, remember this: you were chosen to be a counselor because it is something you can do and do well. You have something to give to help others. It isn't a punishment or penance. It should and can be a lot of fun. If all the rules and points to remember get you down, remember that they are meant to make your job easier, not more difficult. Have a good time as a camp counselor!

