

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN DEALING WITH DISCIPLINE AT SUMMER CAMP

The first priorities at camp are always to encourage the growth of our campers and make sure that they are having as much fun as possible, so discipline can be a tricky thing to handle. Most of our efforts at maintaining good behavior are directed at prevention. Counselors who use best practices are typically able to help limit misbehavior. These best practices include:

1. Leading from up close
2. Establishing rules early
3. Building individual relationships
4. Offering plenty of positive feedback

No matter how good the counselor, though, at some point in a three week term boundaries are going to be pushed, feelings are going to get hurt, and rules are going to be broken. Those things are a part of the process of growing up.

We want to share our process for training our counselors how to address these situations, so that you can be confident that they are being handled appropriately, whether or not your child is involved.

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE FOR CHILDREN

The Approach

An unskilled young adult who is overwhelmed by a difficult camper situation is most likely to rely on the use of size and authority to wield punitive discipline. Therefore, the first thing we do is to name this crutch and tell our counselors that they are better than that.

At Camp Champions, discipline is not something that we do TO a child, it is something we do FOR a child. It is the process by which we teach campers better alternative behaviors to the ones that got them into a fight, argument, or other negative situation.

Why Children Misbehave

The most important starting point is to understand why children misbehave in the first place. **There are two primary reasons.**

1. Skills deficit

The first is a skills deficit—the camper simply has not yet learned the best way to handle a challenging social situation. This makes sense when we consider that we cannot expect an 8-year old to show the same level of social dexterity that an 18-year old does, or that a 38-year old does. It is our job to help them develop the skill that we would like for them to show.

2. Needs not met

The second reason for misbehavior is that one of the camper's needs is not being met. Maybe they are tired, hungry, or dehydrated. Maybe they are feeling left out by their friends. Maybe they are not

feeling enough recognition or affection from the counselor, who has been called to help with something else. To be clear, our daily systems are built to proactively meet these needs, but what if a camper doesn't sleep well one night? The counselor must be attuned to recognizing these needs so that the root cause of a misbehavior can be understood.

Posted by Erec Hillis

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