

Tips for Handling Campers

Camper's Personal Money

Here are some suggestions for safeguarding campers' personal spending money if you feel such steps are necessary:

1. Collect all of the camper's money and put it in the camp bank.
2. Explain that this is so campers will neither lose nor have their money stolen.
3. Explain that campers can use their money during the week.
4. Do not keep money in your cabin at any time. The camp bank should be in a designated area and open during a specified time each day.
5. Give campers their money to spend for one day at a time. Mark immediately on each camper's envelope/record how much you give out each day. Keep accurate accounts.
6. At the end of camp, return the remainder of the money to the campers.

Handling Homesickness

For many children, camp is their first opportunity to "be out on their own." This can be a frightening experience if the child is not properly prepared. It is important to train counselors how to deal with homesickness.

What is homesickness?

1. Homesickness is physical upset brought out by the anxiety of being in unfamiliar circumstances.
2. Homesickness can cause serious physical discomfort, including nausea and vomiting.
3. If homesickness is not dealt with promptly, the anxiety deepens.
4. The anxiety associated with homesickness is lessened when the child is busy with something that interests him or her.
5. The anxiety associated with homesickness is lessened when the child feels accepted by those at camp and has established a comfortable routine.

Strategies for Preventing Homesickness

1. Group campers with other campers they know. Since homesickness is caused by anxiety brought about by unfamiliar settings, try to surround the camper with familiar people. Keep children from the same church in one cabin or "family group." Introduce campers to people in their cabins they may not know. Use the "buddy system" to ensure that every camper has at least one friend.
2. Build routine into the schedule. Routine makes camp life predictable, and therefore feels less anxiety-producing.
3. Train counselors to assume the role of parent. Campers experience less homesickness if their counselors quickly establish caring, supportive relationships with them.
4. Limit outside contact. Children may want to call home or parents may want to visit their child. Such contacts only renew the anxiety the camper feels. Controlling the phones is

easier than restricting parental access to their children during the camp. This is particularly true now that many organizations suggest unannounced parental visits as a way to protect against child abuse. If parents do arrive unexpectedly, encourage them to observe the campers at enough distance to assure themselves that their children are fine, while minimizing the possibility that the child will see his or her parents. Parents can become quite “homesick” for their children. If this happens, the probability is high that the child will end up going home early.

5. Design an active schedule. Keeping the child involved in interesting, enjoyable activities can reduce the time he or she has to think about home. Free time, rest time, and excessive waiting time in group activities are all occasions for children to become anxious.
6. Plan to deal with homesickness when it is first evidenced. Like any anxiety attack, homesickness worsens if it is not dealt with. Counselors should be aware that it is more likely to strike around mealtime, bedtime, or playtime if the child is alone.

Strategies for Dealing with Homesickness:

There are some children who are sent to camp before they are mature enough to deal with the anxiety. This maturity has very little to do with the child’s age. It is most highly associated with the degree of independence the child has experienced at home. Although there are some children who should be sent home, others should be given the opportunity to “recover” from their homesickness and enjoy their stay at camp. Here are some strategies for dealing with homesickness in the early stages:

1. When the child reports that he or she is ill, take the report seriously. Visit the camp nurse or doctor for diagnosis. Only medical personnel are qualified to rule out any serious illness. The camp medic may have his or her own proven homesick “medicine.”
2. Comfort and reassure the child that his or her feelings are valid ones. Do not deny the child’s feelings. Help the child work through them instead. Encourage the child to talk about the feelings. Point out that many campers feel homesick for a while, but they usually feel better after they make friends.
3. Direct the child to activities that will be interesting. If possible, allow the child to make choices as to what he or she wants to do. For example, the child may want to go home, but you can ask, “Would you rather play ‘Chutes and Ladders’ or go swimming?”
4. Praise the child sincerely for his or her accomplishments. Help the camper realize that camp is a place where he or she can succeed individually.

Camp Discipline

Discipline Tips

For camp to be an enjoyable time, you must maintain order and discipline. Here are some ideas that have worked for other counselors:

1. Be in your cabin before the first camper arrives. Take charge from the very first moment. If you lose control at the beginning, you will probably never fully regain it.

2. Learn your campers' names. Know your campers by name before supper the first night of camp. This makes camp more personal, reduces homesickness in young campers, increases the effectiveness of your ministry, and allows you to correct a rule breaker by name.
3. Explain the camp's rules. Make sure your campers understand what is expected of them and the consequences if they disobey.
4. Establish additional rules for your cabin. Let your campers suggest rules that can make cabin life easier for everyone. Vote on each suggestion. Post the rules accepted by the campers in the cabin. Whenever possible, state the rules in positive terms. Your rules should tell what you want your campers to do rather than what they should not do.
5. Let campers help you set consequences for breaking cabin rules. Deciding what should be done if a rule is broken lets each camper know ahead of time what to expect and makes enforcement easier. Set a range of punishment options for each rule so you are not unduly restricted.
6. Enforce all the rules consistently! This is the most difficult, but also the most important, aspect of camp discipline.
7. Go to the Camp Director if a problem begins to get out of hand. No one likes to admit that he or she can't handle a situation. However, it is much better to recognize and correct a problem while it is a small one, rather than wait until it becomes totally unmanageable.
8. Build strong cabin morale. Good cabin morale can go a long way to prevent discipline problems. This does not mean abandoning your responsibilities for leadership and discipline to become a "buddy." Instead it means helping your campers see you as a leader who can be trusted to be fair. Help your campers develop a cabin identity. Make up a camp cheer using your group name. Designing a cabin banner or flag and carrying it wherever you go also builds unity and identity.
9. Know where your campers are at all times. Discipline problems are less likely to occur under your watchful eye.
10. When a problem does arise, be fair. Children, particularly juniors, have a strong sense of fair play. Be impartial. Be fair. Be firm. Be willing to accept the rule breaker back into the cabin once the disciplinary action is completed.

Appropriate Disciplinary Actions

No matter how well prepared you are, you will have to take corrective measures with your campers. They do not know you and need to be shown that you will enforce the rules. However, the actions you take should be appropriate to the child's misbehavior. The disciplinary actions listed here are in approximate order of severity. Begin with simple responses and move to the more severe ones as needed. Never make a threat you are not willing to carry out.

1. Begin with a glance in the misbehaving child's direction. Make eye contact long enough to let the child know you are aware of what is happening.
2. Move closer to the offending child. Often being close physically is enough to restore the camper to acceptable behavior.
3. Touch the misbehaving child on the shoulder. The touch should be firm but not uncomfortable.

4. Tell the child what he or she should be doing. If a child is whispering in chapel, a simple "Listen" or "Pay attention" may be all that is needed.
5. If Steps 1 through 4 have not corrected the problem, remind the camper of the consequences of his or her action. Don't threaten. Simply remind the child that a rule is being broken and consequences will follow if it does not cease immediately.
6. Invoke the consequences. This should be the last resort. However, do not hesitate to administer punishment if it is warranted.

Punishment Ideas

What kinds of consequences are appropriate for breaking a rule? Here are some guidelines:

1. The saying "Let the punishment fit the crime" is still applicable. Littering may result in extra ground clean up duty. Food fights can result in KP duty. Whenever possible, select a consequence for breaking a rule that "undoes" the wrong that was done.
2. Restrict privileges. Stealing money can result in the loss of "snack shack" privileges. Fights in the pool can mean losing the use of the pool for the rest of the day. Note, however, that it is not appropriate to withhold a regular meal from a child.
3. Remove the offender from the group for a limited amount of time. This tactic is sometimes called "Time Out." If a child constantly misbehaves, require him or her to sit in a specific location (usually at the very back of the group where they can see what is going on, but others cannot see the offender) until the camper promises to behave appropriately. If the promise is broken, insist that the child sit in the "Time Out" spot for at least one minute for each year of the child's age. Increase the time as needed.
4. Send the offender to the camp director. The camp director may have some alternative punishments to use. He or she is the only one who can make the decision to send a chronically misbehaving child home.
5. Never use the following forms of punishment at camp:
 - o spanking
 - o slapping
 - o washing a child's mouth out with soap
 - o standing a child in a corner for a lengthy period of time
 - o locking a child in a closet or small room
 - o forcing the child to stand and be ridiculed by his peers
 - o pinching a child's neck
 - o verbally humiliating a child
 - o forcing a child to march around camp less than fully clothed
 - o yelling

It is wise to avoid all types of corporal punishment.

Painless Discipline

Correcting misbehavior can be a pain for both camper and camp director. However, there are some ideas that can reduce the pain, at least for the director. We asked camp directors how they handled discipline problems. Almost everyone recommended avoiding them in the first place by having an interesting, activityfilled camp. But when correction is needed, here are some ways to

handle it.

“Counselor, Director, Coordinator is our discipline chain of command. The counselor is closest to the boy or girl and almost always can get the best results.”

“I ask the counselors to handle these problems; but, at any time, they have my assistance. We have a counselors’ workshop before camp and deal with some of the more common issues. When a problem arises, privileges are taken away, like swimming. If a problem persists, the child is brought to me.”

“We handle discipline carefully. We want to maintain discipline but, at the same time, not lose the child. We always start with a counselor/camper relationship. The counselor knows that camper better than anyone else. Hopefully, the counselor and camper can talk things out. We use timeout from activities for the child if it goes beyond talk. If worse comes to worse, it comes to my attention; and I talk to and counsel the child. Prayer does many things we cannot do.”

“We eliminate potential problems by firmly reviewing camp rules with the children during orientation on the first day of camp. Question and answer time follows this, with a tour of the campground. Being consistent with rules is extremely important. Don’t back down on the punishment! Taking away privileges is very effective. Also, we try to see that the punishment fits the crime.

For example, if a child is throwing food, they have K.P. duty for extra meals. We only send a child home as a last resort. Camp staff prays with each child that needs help and lets them know we are on their side and are there to love them and guide them. Lots of praise is essential—catch them being good! Reward with a sticker, a note, a hug, and a smile! Also, we never leave the children alone on the playground, dorm, or cafeteria. Supervision is a great way to keep order.”

Camper Follow-Up Ideas

We send a letter to each church who sends children to camp. This letter is intended to be read to the whole congregation, encouraging them to nurture and help these children to grow.

--Betty Patton

We have pastors and parents that sit in on an assigned service to observe and participate in the altar times. In the dorm devotional time in the evening, the counselors allow a sharing time to talk about any spiritual commitments made during that day's services. We share with the pastors about their responsibilities to monitor after camp the children's decisions made during the week.

--Ken Beatty

We used the new Basic Bible Studies for Children. A full packet was mailed to each pastor as preparation. Then, at camp, each child who accepted Christ received Session #1, and certain staff were assigned to go over it with them the following day. The rest of their packet was then mailed or given to their pastor for follow-up.

--Barry Beverage

We encourage counselors to get all the children's addresses before leaving camp. We tell them it is a big encouragement for the children to hear from their counselors.

--Janet Ritter