

Helpful Ideas

Directors Share Their Favorite Camp Ideas

What would it be like if we could gather all the camp directors in one place to share insights with one another? “Fantastic!” is the only word I can think of that even comes close. It doesn’t look like that will happen, but that should not stop the exciting exchange of ideas that would occur at such a meeting. Camp directors were asked to share their favorite idea. Here are some of the best!

One director found a way to prevent lost and stolen snack money, bellyaches from too much candy, and spoiled appetites at mealtimes. He recommends including the drink stand cost with registration fee so that all campers receive “free” refreshments at designated times.

Another director recommends limiting snack time to no more than twice daily. He has also found that pastors on the district make very good camp chaplains. Finally, he says exercise is an effective discipline technique. Chronic offenders join the camp director in jumping jacks, pushups, jogging, etc., which is also good for the director!

Pay Phones on campgrounds have been the bane of many camp directors. One creative director found a way to prevent homesick campers from calling home. Place “Out of Order” signs on the camp’s public telephones, and tape the coin slots closed to keep campers’ attention on camp.

Another camping team designed and distributed t-shirts bearing their camp theme (corresponding to the theme from Children’s Ministries). Counselors measure campers for shirts on Monday. Completed t-shirts are distributed on Friday when the whole camp wears them to breakfast. To keep that identity going even after camp, they give every counselor a computer-generated set of mailing labels for the campers in their cabin and instruct them to send follow-up letters inviting them back for the next year. A list of older campers is given to youth camp directors.

Teen workers are no headache for one on-the-ball director. “I appointed another couple to be in charge of my teen workers. It really helped me keep my mind and energy focused on the children, my main priority,” she said.

Need more time with staff to talk about problems of the day, and make plans for the next? This director just may have a solution. She says, “After children are in bed, we spend maybe 30 minutes or more with the counselors doing crafts or having refreshments. This gives us time to discuss problems, promote cooperation, and pray for campers’ needs.”

Other experienced directors shared the following ideas:

“I make bringing a friend to camp really pay. I offer discounts for campers who recruit friends to come to camp. I also try to build staff morale by providing special treats they like. I remember each camp with a camp photo album, complete with captions for the snapshots. Finally, competition is with oneself, because campers receive awards for individual achievement instead of ‘best this’ or ‘best that.’”

“The most effective thing we have done to improve the camp is to get the chaplain, Bible teacher, director, assistant director and quiz leader together prior to camp, about 45 months ahead, to do planning for the theme and implementation. Normally we do some discussion of this issue at the close of the prior year’s camp as well. That gives me some time to work over the fall and winter prior to our meeting in the very early spring.”

“I have considered a teen worker to watch counselors’ preschool children so I can have adult counselors. The preschoolers have a schedule all their own, including playground, free play, handwork, snack, story time, and nap time, with meals and swim time with parents.”

“Establish after-dinner activity groups to satisfy special interests. Include gospel magic, first-aid, Red Cross lifesaving and CPR, archery, bicycle safety, physical fitness, and special speakers such as EMT’s, firemen, K9 dog patrol, and state police underwater diving teams. Most groups will bring equipment and give a demonstration of some type.”

“If your camp is suffering from the DULLS, have one giant feature or program each year and be willing to spend the dollars to do it up BIG. One example is hot air balloon rides. What we lost in expense, we gained in excitement and free advertising for the next year.”

“‘You can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em!’ is my motto. Allow kids to have things, such as shaving cream battles, as a special camp activity. This lets the adults remain in control, deciding when and where this will happen, and ensuring it is done safely.”

“Put a different twist on the familiar, such as - World’s Records’ theme. Anyone can set one. If you’re the first to hop all the way from your cabin to the dining hall, it’s a world record. Counselors can write the record on a 3 x 5 card and give it to the director to be read aloud to campers around a campfire or whenever a filler is needed.”

“We have experimented with several different activities. This year we took a field trip to a nearby lake. There we had a fishing derby (trophy for the largest and most fish caught), grilled hamburgers, and then created a sixty-foot banana split. The banana split was made in a rain-gutter lined with aluminum foil. We used 18 gallons of ice cream! It was pure delight. The

largest fish was caught on a pole made from a tree branch and fishing line.”

“Knowing their Bible should pay big dividends at camp! Make Bible trivia questions part of the fun. The first person to answer each question correctly gets a discount at the snack shack.”

“Mission education received high priority. Encourage campers to donate leftover snack shack funds for mission offering. Mission awareness should be stressed in all camps. You can make wise use of the mission education material prepared by Children’s Ministries.”

“Do crafts sometimes appear to be more trouble than they are worth? Eliminate crafts if the expense is an issue, which it can be if you are trying to provide quality craft ideas and materials for 250 or more campers. Instead of crafts, we have creative dramatics. Children participate by acting out or pantomiming stories, complete with simple props, costumes, and sound effects. Everyone is involved in a presentation in some way. The drama activity is followed by games and songs that reinforce the truth or concept of the story.”

“Here is a novel way to teach Bible verses. Put memory verses on poster board, then nail them on trees throughout the camp. Below the verse, put instructions, such as ‘Circle the tree three times saying the verse, hop around the tree on one foot while saying the verse, etc.’ Then sometime during the camp, I will tell campers they can’t line up for supper until they have gone around all the memory verse trees.”

“I have appointed a fulltime chaplain (in addition to the camp evangelist) to meet with children, hold daily devotions for staff, and support the speaker. This has made a noticeable difference in the spiritual atmosphere at camp.”

Money-Saving Tips

With camp costs going ever upward, camp is at risk of becoming a ministry to the wealthy. We asked camp directors for their best money saving ideas. Here are some you can bank on!

Save Money on Equipment

“We use used equipment for our sports activities. We borrow items from churches. We also ask for, and often receive, donations from places that carry the equipment.”

“See that everything is packed away immediately at the end of camp. Then store equipment carefully during the winter. This reduces loss and unnecessary wear.”

Save Money on Food

“Keeping food costs down makes a big difference. We use a local food bank for some items. We are also on our state list that makes us eligible to receive government commodities. If you want to be placed on your state’s list, contact your State House.

“The last two years I staffed our kitchen with ladies that are school cooks. They know how to make tasty, nutritious, low cost, and low waste meals.”

“I let my food director plan what to have for snack time. Then I give him or her a budget. He or she buys snacks that will keep across the whole year to get a good price.”

“Shop at a club membership warehouse.”

Save Money on Crafts

“Our craft director was appointed at the end of camp last year. This let him buy craft supplies on sale all through the year.”

“Purchase camp supplies (craft, etc.) through discount mail-order businesses.”

“This year we reduced our craft cost by only working on them two days. Many children are not interested in crafts and can be given an alternate activity, such as going on a field trip.”

“With our beautiful campground facilities, we have done away with crafts. We have many outdoor activities available: swimming, ropes course, trails, sports field. We feel keeping the children indoors goes against what our camp has to offer. Children can have crafts at home or during VBS. But they can’t enjoy the activities unique to camp, especially if they live in the cities.”

Save Money on Staff

“We ask people to give their time as a ministry. We give few reimbursements.”

“Try asking laypersons and pastors to serve as camp speakers. Use volunteer dining hall staff.”

“Use volunteers who do not bring small children or other family member to camp. Those extra people are more mouths to feed.”

Miscellaneous Money Saving Tips

“A camp budget from Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries International helps subsidize

our camp. This keeps the cost for the child low, and lets us provide a quality camping experience.”

“We put together our packets of camp material and distribute them at District Assembly. This saves on postage.”

“You can sometimes reduce the cost per camper by increasing the size of your camp.”

“Ask individual churches for donations. They may give prizes, Kool-Aid, snacks, or even loan vans (and driver for insurance purposes) and provide gasoline. Every donation helps keep costs down.”

Creating a Theme for Camp

Creating a theme for your camp will give your activities and decorations direction. It will also create a fun and energyfilled environment that the kids will be excited about.

When planning your camp, get creative! Form a committee of creative people to help you brainstorm ways to go allout with the theme for camp. The theme should be woven into every aspect of the camp, including decorations, sports, crafts, menus, dorms, and chapel services. Games and activities can also be creatively molded to fit your theme by giving conventional camp games a twist to fit the theme or by making up your own themecentered games and relays.

Theme Ideas

At NazJam 2002, a camp hosted by Children’s Ministries in July 2002, the theme was outer space. The chapel was decorated with black lights, a puppet stage disguised as a spaceship, twofoottall alien characters representing each of the teams the campers were assigned to, and a giant space mural. A disco ball hanging from the ceiling cast eerie beams of light to complete the chapel set.

To further reinforce the theme, the camp menu was posted before each meal and listed common foods renamed with space terms, such as Fruitoid Plasma (jello) and Meteorites (rice krispie treats). The kids had no idea what was actually for dinner until they got there.

All the traditional locations were also assigned space names. For example, the dining hall was the “Refueling Station,” the chapel was the “Launch Pad,” the nurse’s station was “Sick Bay,” and the pool was the “Aquadeck.” In addition, all games and activities were given spacerelated names.

Here are some theme ideas to get you thinking about what you want to do with your camp this year.

Space theme	Zoo theme	Sports theme
Western theme	Underwater theme	50's/60's theme
Prehistoric/Dinosaur theme	Jungle theme	Archaeology theme
Superhero theme	Beach party theme	Crocodile hunter/Safari theme

What's In a Cabin Name?

You name it, and it has probably been used as a cabin name somewhere in a children's camp. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination. Here are some principles which can help you create your own cabin names.

1. Should the cabin names correlate with the theme? Many camp directors think so. The advantage is that the correlation gives the entire camp unity. If the names are drawn from biblical characters or events, the children will more likely be interested in learning about them. Other camp directors choose names because they are fun or intrinsically attractive to children. Your selection will depend upon what you are trying to accomplish with the cabin names.
2. Names are powerful. Children tend to live up to the names they are given. If you name a cabin 'Incredible Hulk' or 'She-Ra,' expect the campers to act out the roles of the characters after whom they have been named. That same principle applies for Bible characters.
3. Names must be personal. Select cabin names that the campers can identify with and make their own. Watch out for 'star' names that make every other cabin wish it was their cabin name. It is often wise to field test your names. Ask several children the age of your campers what cabin they think they would like to be in and then read the names. If everyone, or almost everyone, picks the same name, then you have potential for conflict.
4. Names should not be offensive. Children often have their own private language. It is intended to be something that adults cannot understand easily. Make sure the names you are choosing don't hold a different meaning for the children.

Here are some names camp directors have indicated they have used, or are planning to use:

Western theme: Bar-X, Eagles, Broken Arrow, Texans, Lazy-K, Circle-O, Double-R, Flying-W.
Baseball Theme: Reds, Cubs, Orioles, Tigers, Yankees, Dodgers, Cardinals, Astros. --Bill Hanes

"Growing God's Way": Use names of plants, seeds, or flowers such as Daisies, Roses, Tulips, Petunias (for girls' camps). --Debbie Brewer

Biblical Tribes: Davidites, Ruthites, Samuelites, etc.

Burger names: Whoppers, Big Macs, Bacon & Cheese, etc.