

## Group Management

- **Be clear with your expectations to campers from the start.** Go over the rules. Tell them the limits. They will test you right away and you must be ready to show them that you are in control. It is much easier to take a firm stance at the beginning of the week, and relax later when things are going smoothly, than it is to try and regain control after you have lost it.
- **Establish routines for transition, cleanup, and dismissal.** If you put procedures in place the first day it will help make the entire session, and in fact, the entire summer go smoother for everyone.
- **Be sure the Counselors and Support Staff are in agreement on things** before you tell your campers. There is nothing worse for the relationship than to have two different sets of rules within the same group. When in doubt tell them, "I'll have to check with – before I answer that."
- **Stay on top of things.** Know your service task the day before. Know if your group has morning songs or has signed up for an activity the day before. Stay in touch with your campers and know their favorite activities. Know what the afternoon programs are for the next few days. A clipboard or a notebook will help you stay organized.
- **Enforce the camp Code of Conduct and follow it yourself.** If staff does not follow the Code of Conduct, campers won't. This goes for things that you may *think* have exceptions for staff, but they do not! (e.g. No gum, no bare feet, no ipods, no swearing.) Think how angry *you* get when you observe a double standard in operation!
- **Be particularly vigilant during meals.** The assistant must sit where s/he can see the whole group. Make sure food is passed and that campers use manners. Initiate and manage cleanup. Save cheers and frivolity until cleanup has started. Watch for the person in charge to approach the group and warn campers to get ready to put their hands up. Keep your kids quiet during announcements.
- **Spend time thinking about the dynamics of your group.** Is there a friendship "clique" that is excluding others? Who is left out? Who is homesick? Who is picking on others? Who is getting picked on? If you talk with your counselor or Support Staff about what you observe, you can make a plan and attack the problems together. This is perhaps the most rewarding aspect of working as a counselor.
- **Deal with behavior problems yourself first.** There should be enough steps in the process so that by the time a camper sees the Camp Director, the camper knows he or she is *really in trouble*. This does not mean that you should not mention problems to the support Staff and Assistant Camp Director. They really do want to know about the problems you are dealing with. All it means is that you do not send a camper to the Camp Director right away. When a parent calls, it is helpful if the Support Staff have already heard about a potential problem, even if they have not yet dealt with it. Support Staff is your first source for advice or assistance. *Exception:* Any camper who is making life miserable for other campers must be dealt with immediately. Report the problem to the ACD ASAP. Bullies need to know we are serious about, and have zero tolerance for, this behavior.
- **Plan ahead and ask questions.** These are perhaps the most important keys to having a good experience as a group counselor. You cannot manage a group unless you have confidence and you are organized. The campers will sense it when you do not know what is going on, and they will take advantage of the situation. Remember, you are the adult! Take charge.