



Time Off Policy

We are a children's' summer camp. As such we are legally, morally and ethically responsible for the health, safety, and well-being of the children entrusted to us. The staff, whose job requires that they live at our facility, have a unique responsibility to the campers, the parents of the campers, and the other staff and leadership of the program. Because the staff live at camp, they are always responsible for campers and their behavior is always being observed by the campers. This condition of employment requires the staff to be able to react quickly, safely and appropriately at all times and especially in an emergency situation. It also requires the staff to model behavior to the campers that falls within the parameters of the camp's ethical and moral standards. Whenever staff are on the camp property or representing the CHMK program, they are required to act in a manner that will protect the campers' safety and physical and emotional well-being. The staff member's behavior must also live up to the reasonable standard of careful supervision and guidance expected by the campers' parents. Specifically, when a staff member returns to the camp location from time off, (s)he must be able to immediately act in the aforementioned manner. Camp Ho Mita Koda is always happy and willing to provide information to assist our staff in making healthy choices in their role at camp.

BREAKS / TIME OFF

Breaks consist of time provided for staff to rest and relax, make phone calls, do laundry, etc. Staff is generally allotted a daily break for no more than one session, and only with the approval of the co-instructor and leadership staff.

TIME OFF FREQUENCY

- All **Field Staff** (Instructors, Interns, and Activity Specialists) will have one consecutive 3-hour *scheduled* period off from job duties each week, onsite, though remaining "on the clock". Field Staff are also given opportunities to take breaks and personal time each day at the approval of the camp leadership.
- All **Support/Leadership** positions (Healthcare, Custodial, Dining, and Operations), must have weekly time off approved prior to use through the appropriate manger (Director of Dining Services, Healthcare Director, or Camp Director).
- **All Staff/Volunteers** will have a 1-Day period "off the clock" at the end of each session, which may occur offsite, with departure/arrival times decided upon by the Camp Director. All staff are required to sign out at the Camp Office prior to departing camp premises and sign back in upon return from time off. Failure to return on time will result in disciplinary action up to termination. Staff must be back at camp by a pre-determined time the following day, Sunday. An adequate amount of staff will be retained as necessary to supervise campers who are in session over the weekend. During time off, staff may use the staff lounges and camp facilities when it does not interfere with the campers' activity.

- **Extended Time Off** is possible with prior notification. In addition to scheduled time off, all offsite requests (graduation, wedding, funeral, etc.) must be requested in writing and approved no later than 2-weeks prior to the requested dates. Approval is at the discretion of the Camp Director. If you make travel arrangements prior to approval, you may lose out if your request is not granted. Come to us early!

Staff members are expected to use their best judgment in regards to the use of alcohol/tobacco/federally illegal drugs on their “day off” break from camp. **If a staff member returns to camp from any break or time off not 100% ready to fulfill their job expectations to the highest level, then immediate action will likely be taken.** At the discretion of the Camp Director, staff may need to take a breathalyzer/drug test at any time. ***PLEASE REVIEW THE SUBSTANCE USE POLICY IN ITS ENTIRETY.*** In our experience, best practice is completely refraining from alcohol or drug use within twenty-four hours of camper, parent, or staff interaction, however we entrust each staff’s judgement to ensure the best outcomes personally and professionally.

Wise Use of Time Off

Christopher Thurber, PhD, ABPP

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Last Night

Phil Bader did everything wrong on his last night off except give his keys to a sober colleague. He'd left camp ten minutes early, bought alcohol with a fake ID, indulged in binge drinking, stumbled back into his cabin thirty minutes late, and urinated in a child's footlocker before collapsing in his own bed.

Had a camper needed his assistance later that night — for an asthma attack, a nightmare, or an upset stomach — Phil would have been useless. But Phil would not have been alone. Many other camp counselors, at all different kinds of day and resident camps, spent their time in a similar fashion that night.

In the morning, when a certain hapless child attempted to get dressed and discovered Phil's incontinent indiscretion, the child complained to the unit leader. The unit leader did the right thing by confronting Phil, listening to the parts of the story that Phil remembered, and then escorting Phil to the camp director. In turn, the camp director did the right thing by terminating Phil's employment and contacting the child's parents after laundering his clothes and having a new footlocker sent to the camp at Phil's expense.

It was, as noted above, Phil's last night off. But Phil was an outlier. Not in a behavioral sense, but in a statistical sense. He was one of the few camp staff to be fired for spending his time off poorly. Most of the young men and women who had engaged in similarly unwise recreation simply got up the next morning, splashed their faces with cold water, and got back to taking care of other people's children. Which is a sobering thought.

Partying Is Fun

Lest you fear that I'm about to lapse into a condescending lecture, let me state two undeniable truths:

1. Many unhealthy ways of spending time off are fun, just as many kinds of junk food are delicious.
2. Many unhealthy ways of spending time off are bonding experiences, just as hazing rituals and fighting together on a battlefield are.

But who would say that junk food and war are healthy choices?

I do understand that getting drunk and doing crazy things can be a blast. I also understand that an activity's fun quotient and bonding power are not the best ways to judge that activity's appropriateness for the camp setting. Youth development professionals must use another litmus test: How does this activity affect my ability to lead and care for campers? If an activity helps you lead and care, please continue; if it hampers your efforts, please stop. And if you're not sure, please talk with a more experienced staff member who can bring clarity to your judgment.

The Time-Off Test

For any staff member who is unsure about whether a time-off activity enhances or diminishes his or her ability to lead and care for young people, there is another easy assessment: the Time-Off Test. Simply ask yourself upon returning to camp, "Do I feel relaxed, refreshed, and ready to go?" (Remember, whether you work at a day camp, overnight camp, or another youthserving organization, you'll need energy and patience all season long.)

Your honest answer to that single question will help you plan for the next time off. If your answer is "Yes," then you're probably doing what you need to be doing. If, on the other hand, your answer is: "No. I feel worse than when I left," then you should revise your plans for the next night or day off. Most of you reading this are not parents, but you can all ask yourself a second, hypothetical question: If your campers were your own children, would you be proud — honestly — of the kind of shape you are in?

Poor Use of Time Off

Binge drinking may be the most common unhealthy time-off choice for camp staff worldwide, but there are other poor uses of time off that deserve mention. Like drinking, each is motivated by good intentions, such as having fun and bonding, but each is blind to the bigger picture of professional responsibility. Examples include:

- Driving outrageous distances. “Road trip!” may sound fun when it’s shouted at the start of time off, but long drives are exhausting. As a rule of thumb, staff should spend no more than 25 percent of their time off in the car. For example, a staff member at a resident camp with a twenty-four-hour day off should spend no more than three hours driving to a day-off destination.
- Staying up most of the night. Surrounded by friends and a festive atmosphere, it’s easy to watch movies or play games all night, but sleep deprivation has dangerous consequences. A drowsy lifeguard, belayer, van driver, trip leader, or boat driver could neglect duties or experience slowed reaction time . . . with lethal consequences.
- Using or abusing drugs. Alcohol is not the only recreational drug that staff abuse at camp. Prescription painkillers, stimulant medications, sleeping pills, and anti-anxiety medications can all have illicit uses, in addition to their helpful, legitimate uses. Just as staff must be abstinent from illegal drugs such as marijuana, they must also abstain from medications not prescribed to them.
- Participating in dangerous activities. Staff at day and resident camps spend a great deal of time designing and supervising healthy risks for young people, as well as ensuring that they are wearing properly fitting helmets, life preservers, and footwear. Ironically, these are the same staff who go cliff jumping, drag racing, have unprotected sex, or drive drunk during time off. Staff would be wise to maintain safe practices all season long, both during time on and time off. Healthy behaviors benefit individual staff members, the young people they serve, and the reputation of the camp.

Healthier Options

Time off spent wisely is a bonding experience that is both fun and restorative. But it does take planning. Without preparation, partying becomes the default plan. Therefore, the most successful camps have spent years building a three-ring binder full of healthy time-off choices. These binders typically include local points of interest, the best neighborhood restaurants, addresses of alums happy to host nights and days off, and recreation options (camp sites, shopping malls, movie theaters, national parks, etc.) within striking distance.

The value of a time-off binder is twofold: First, staff are more likely to spend their time off wisely because a multitude of healthy options — vetted by previous staff members — are at their fingertips. Second, staff are less likely to engage in unhealthy risk taking, such as binge drinking, because they experience the easy value of spending time off in fun and wholesome ways. Best of all, the staff themselves revise and contribute to the binder. As old venues close or fall out of favor and new venues open or rise in popularity, the binder’s content evolves.

Examples of healthy time-off choices include:

- Camping out
- Seeing a movie
- Climbing a mountain
- Eating at a restaurant
- Sleeping later than usual
- Visiting nearby camp alums
- Cooking together, indoors or out
- Relaxing at a public beach, pool, or lake
- Chilling out with good friends, good food, and good music

Shifting Your Mindset

Working at camp involves a paradigm shift. Youth leaders are transitioning from college, university, or a vocational setting, where the work is mostly self-focused, to camp, where the work is expressly other-focused. During the academic year, you may have completed some phenomenal volunteer or service work, but you are primarily working toward earning grades, stuffing your resume, or making money. For yourself.

At camp, you are working for others. And not just any others. You are caring for other people's children. There can be no greater responsibility. This means that more than your mindset needs to shift. You also need to shift your behavior as you consider what the consequences of your actions are for others. Ask yourself, "How will this choice affect the young people I serve?"

Fail Like Phil? You Decide.

My compliments to any staff member who has read this far. Many staff are dismissive of health advice. I was, between the ages of sixteen and twentysix. Even with a strong family history of malignant melanoma (a deadly form of skin cancer), I dismissed my mother's advice to put on sunscreen in favor of cultivating my summer tan. I changed my mind about sunscreen when I first noticed permanent wrinkles on my face and a few scary-looking freckles on my back that my dermatologist had to burn off with a laser. But my dermatologist was clear: The bulk of sun damage had already been done. Lesson learned. Only time will tell if my learning was too late.

These days, I'm happily surprised to see young staff putting sunscreen on themselves and their campers. What caused this behavior change? It was nothing I said. It was two other factors: availability and example. When I was a young leader, sunscreen was an optional, personal toiletry. In the last decade, most camps have strategically placed one-gallon sunscreen pumps throughout camp. That's availability. Just like time-off binders, giant sunscreen pumps make healthy choices abundantly available. That's one factor.

The other factor — example — came in the form of experienced staff publicly showcasing their use of sunscreen. The rest of the staff (and campers) followed suit. It's simply what was done. And it's the same for time off. When a few experienced staff showcase their healthy choices — by talking about their great camping trip or pinning photos of their mountain climb on the camp's bulletin board — they are setting a great example for other staff to follow.

You've read to the end of this article, which I hope indicates your willingness to set that great example. Following in Phil Bader's footsteps is one option; choosing to spend your time off wisely is the other.