

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING CAMPER BEHAVIOR

Working with children and helping them manage their behavior is not an easy task. Working with children away from home in a strange environment is even more challenging. There are no formulas or magic tricks to make this job easier, but there are some strategies that you can keep in mind when handling camper behavior.

1. Reinforce desired behavior. Think and act positively and your campers will often react positively. Positive reinforcement helps a camper learn appropriate behavior. It is much easier to establish good behavior than to change disruptive behavior after it has started.
2. Clearly state privileges and rules. All programs have rules and procedures for safety and efficiency, but too many “don’ts” violates rule #1. Let campers know what they “may” do. If they understand what is acceptable, they will be less likely to test the rules.
3. Tolerate some unacceptable behavior. Too much attention given to annoying behavior may cause the behavior to increase. Remember that some annoying behavior may be characteristic of a certain age group.
4. Use non-verbal cues. Some undesirable behavior should not be ignored or tolerated. Before responding verbally, you can show disapproval and disappointment through eye contact, a frown, or gesture. Standing near or in front of a camper may also help him or her be aware of his or her unacceptable behavior and will soon stop.
5. Redirect or change the behavior. Sometimes campers misbehave because they are bored or frustrated with the activity. Keep your campers involved in the activities. Be alert to your group’s interests and allow them to make choices about activities whenever possible.
6. When in doubt, seek help. This strategy should be used any time you are unsure of the action you need to take or if you are having trouble with a particular camper or situation. The camp director, head counselor and activities director are available to you. Call on them if you need them!