

Behavior Management

Preventative Methods/Positive Behavior Support Methods

1. Discuss with campers the basic ground rules of camp and why they are important. (Also discuss consequences of breaking those rules, and get feedback from campers.)
2. Set cabin/group rules together. If possible, let the campers come up with their own rules. Make sure to cover all the areas you want covered. In larger groups we have them sign a covenant page.
3. Remind them of camp-wide rules such as rules around the waterfront area.
4. Let the group and individuals know when they are doing a great job.
5. Always point out great behavior.
6. In a quick, semi-private way, let individuals know how much you appreciate them (i.e., on a walk from Point A to Point B).
7. Reward that behavior with sincere gratitude from you.
8. Single out campers for good behavior in a group setting.
9. Make good behavior something to strive for because the group can gain more privileges.
10. When it comes to safety make sure you set the rules and behavior you expect to keep everyone safe.

When Misbehavior Occurs

- Be consistent and uniform with all campers.
- Check with Dean or Mechuwana's executive director if you have any questions.

Acceptable Consequences

- Quiet time for (group or individual)
- Restriction from activity (group or individual)
- Restriction of interaction with certain individuals
- Clean appropriate facilities
- Conference with Mechuwana's executive director or Dean
- Conference with Mechuwana's executive director and parents/guardians

Do Not

- Deprive a camper of food or sleep
- Place a camper alone—they can be separated but still within observation range
- Subject a camper to hazing, ridicule, or threats
- Use any form of corporal punishment
- Use excessive physical exercise
- Restrain

Keep Mechuwana's executive director informed of all disciplinary actions.

Strategies to Stop Negative Behavior

- Stop the activity or behavior when you see behavior first take place. Using a stern voice let them know behavior is wrong and needs to change.
- If behavior continues, stop activity, pull individuals involved aside and:
 - Clearly identify the behavior.
 - Put the responsibility on them to change.
 - Let them know the consequences if behavior continues.
 - Let them know this is the last warning.
- If behavior persists, do not hesitate to carry through with consequences.
- If behavior continues after that — get assistance/help.
- Bring in Mechuwana’s executive director for conference.

Administrative Observations Can Help

- May watch from a distance to see if they can catch something you are missing.
- Make recommendations for changes.
- Be another set of eyes and witness if a conference with parents/guardians is needed.

Do not take it personally – Be open to change and feedback.

- We are in this together and want to make your life easier.
- We want success for the camper and you.
- We want to hold campers accountable for their behavior.
- We want to make sure the entire group is not negatively affected.
- We want to make sure the camper is getting the help they need.
- We are not here to blame but to make it better.
- We are a team.

Age-appropriate Behavior Management

Although almost all the above can be used for campers of all ages who come to Mechuwana, here are a few things to remember when dealing with younger campers:

- Set rules that everyone understands.
- Younger campers need to be reminded of rules more frequently.
- Consequences can seem more serious to young campers than they do for older campers.
- Make sure to make eye contact when stopping behavior.
- Speaking to campers outside the group is very effective with younger campers.
- When making group rules, have a list of suggestions.
- Give campers a chance to rejoin activities and end the day on a positive note.
- Taking time at the end of each day to recognize positive behavior is very important to younger campers.
- Make sure the bulk of that recognition is for the group and not an individual.

Bullying (SV19 ST.30.1)

Bullying is when one or more people exclude, tease, taunt, gossip, hit, kick, or put down another person with the intent to hurt them. Bullying happens when a person or group of people want to have power over another and use their power to get their way, at the expense of someone else. Bullying can also happen through cyberspace: through emails, text messaging, instant messaging, and other less direct methods. This type of bullying can also lead to persons being hurt during or between the camp sessions and be especially hurtful when persons are targeted with meanness and exclusion.

At Mechuwana, bullying is inexcusable, and we have a firm policy against all types of bullying. Our camp philosophy is based on our mission statement, which ensures every camper has the opportunity to build relationships, further develop their self-esteem, and create a meaningful community. We work together as a team to ensure that campers gain self-confidence, make new friends, and go home with great memories.

Further Training

Most kids, most of the time, are totally doing the right thing. They are listening to you, being respectful to each other, playing and having fun in activities (they may not have chosen for themselves), and following directions and instructions without incident. Of course, we would all like to have more of that kind of behavior at camp, but almost all our discussions about camper behavior revolve around what to do when campers are breaking down, falling apart, or having a hard time. While that stuff is important, we also need to do a good job at supporting, guiding, and facilitating all the great behavior we see.

There are so many benefits to encouraging positive behavior. Let's break down those benefits in terms of adults versus kids.

The adult benefits are obvious to anyone who has ever worked with groups of kids. It's easier to do things and more fun to engage with them. Plus, the things you have planned will go more smoothly.

However, none of that really matters. Well, it does, but that's not what camp is all about. Camp is about kids. It's about what they get out of it and how we as adults can set up a community where relationships matter and where everyone is important.

So, the real question is, how does good behavior benefit kids?

For kids there are external benefits, like increased positive attention (praise) from adults; internal benefits like developing a positive self-concept because it feels good to be successful; and social benefits because more people want to be around you. Our job as camp counselors should be to help campers maximize these benefits by supporting their positive behavior and creating opportunities for more of the same.

Praise

Praise is an overused term in youth development. We talk about it a lot. Unfortunately, we typically just talk about how to give campers praise. For every technique and tip you have heard about how to praise, it really comes down to two things: being genuine and specific. Skip the script and catchy acronyms; just be real and reference something that actually happened. The untold story about praise is more about when, where, and why.

Why do we praise good behavior? Most people would say, “So we can get more of the same behavior.” Of course, we want good behavior from the campers with whom we work, but camp, and working with kids, is not about us. Camp is about them. It is more important to praise kids, so they learn how to make great choices and decisions for themselves. Some of you are probably thinking that those two things don’t sound that different. Don’t both happen if we praise kids’ behavior? Maybe, but when we are thinking in terms of campers learning how to make great choices based on our feedback, it forces us to think more about when, where, and how we praise them.

The conventional wisdom about when to praise a good behavior is to praise it immediately or as close to the behavior as possible. Why? Well, it is easier for campers to connect their behavior to the positive attention of the adult if you praise them immediately, which may be important, but again, seems to be more about the adult than the kid. If we work a little harder at getting to know our individual campers, their skill set, and their internal motivation for making whatever choice they made, maybe immediately isn’t the best option. Kids need to practice making choices to understand that when they do something there are consequences (negative and positive). It’s difficult for some kids to understand because often they come from environments where they have little to no control or power. So, it isn’t always intuitive to the youth that making good choices equals getting what they want.

Try to notice what happens (consequences) when a camper does something great, such as being inclusive, being super friendly, or following directions the first time you ask. Instead of jumping right in on the praise, wait to see if you can connect some reaction to their action. Then speak up with something like, “Wow, that was pretty sweet. I noticed that you included everyone in that game at rest hour. Being inclusive like that really seemed to make everyone listen to you and follow your lead.”

Along with specificity (I noticed that . . .) and being genuine (I’m assuming you do think it is pretty sweet when everyone is included), thinking about when you praise will help the camper learn how their positive actions help them get what they want, or at least that they have some positive outcome.

Where you praise kids is important, too. Not everyone likes to be called out in front of the group, even for good things. Some campers would eat it up; others would be mortified. We tend to want to praise out loud and in front of others so everyone else hears the praise and starts to learn how to get the same positive attention from the adults. That may happen, but again, who’s that about? Not necessarily the camper. Get to know your campers’ personalities and preferences. Try out some different ways to praise based on what you learn, such as:

- Out loud and in front of others
- One-on-one
- At nighttime or pick-up
- In a small group
- During an unrelated activity where you are seeing a similar behavior
- With a quick glance and smile, followed up later with a specific comment
- In a note you write to them at rest hour

This brings us back to how you praise. **Be genuine, specific, and connect what they did with what happened because of it.** You can really teach kids a valuable lesson about how to be successful in almost every environment. Praise should be about helping them understand that they have power and control, not just about following the rules.

Success and Positive Self-concept

It feels good to be successful. Whether it is a small success like winning a game or a huge success like graduating at the top of your class, success drives feelings of confidence, competence, mastery, and much more. Those feelings help us build a positive self-concept. We feel good about who we are and what we can do, which makes us happier, and more people want to be around us (more on that later).

Being successful is a combination of having skills (for which you praise them) and using them appropriately. For as athletic and amazing as Michael Jordan was at basketball, he wasn't so great when he tried to play baseball. You have to know the "rules of the game" to be successful at it, no matter how good you are. Campers that show you all the best behavior have managed to figure that out. They have the skills — listening, following instructions, being respectful, creative problem solving, etc. — and they know how to apply them at camp. They listen to you when you are asking the group to do something. They follow your instructions the first time you ask. They include each other and go out of their way to pull in other campers. They are being good kids! Let's unpack what they have really figured out so we can support more of their great behavior.

Camp is a system with rules and procedures that are unlike their home, school, or community systems. Camp is a living, breathing, evolving thing. Just like any system, you must be flexible, patient, agile, and smart to be successful.

How do you get meals at your camp? How do pick-up and drop-off go? Who is in charge of which areas? When is it OK to scream at the top of your lungs? These are just a few examples of how your camp is a unique system, with its own set of rules and expectations, and its own culture. As a camp counselor, you can support all the best behavior from your campers by explicitly teaching them the rules of the game they are playing.

Rules of the Game

Be Consistent

One of the reasons that campers make bad or more challenging choices is because they don't know what to expect from the adults around them. They are testing the boundaries to see if they are real. By that logic, the more consistent you can be, the easier it is for them to trust you and their environment. Be consistent with:

1. Rules and consequences — if it's not OK today, it shouldn't be OK tomorrow. If one camper can't do it, then neither can another camper. There actually aren't that many rules, and there are even fewer consequences, so the object here is to apply them consistently across people, situations, times, etc.
2. Giving attention — we all know you will have a few campers that you get along with better than others. That's okay. In fact, it's how personalities work. However, your behavior is what is important. Notice who is easier to hang out with and who is more challenging, and then change things up. Think about who you talk to and when. Sit with someone different today.

Clear Routines

Camp is one of the most unique places that many kids will experience. From the way the adults act to singing at dinner and the sheer amount of face paint, camp is a different environment and culture than just about anywhere. To support the best behavior, you have to be clear about what you expect from campers and their behavior. Beyond explaining the ground rules, try to explain the various camp routines. What do you do as a camp or unit that happens every day consistently? Those camp routines often become second nature to people, but we have to get good at teaching them. Whether you are talking about meals, singing, going to sleep, preparing for an activity, etc., think about what the routine is and how you can explicitly explain it.

The best way to be clear about your routines and effectively teach them is to pre-plan and answer these five questions for each routine.

- Who is doing what and when (staff and campers)?
- Which staff member takes the lead?
- What is the goal?
- What do you want campers to know?
- What happens if the plan is messed up?

When you are clear with the routines at camp, you're giving kids the playbook to be successful.

Be Inclusive

The more inclusive you can be as an adult, the easier it is for each camper to fit into your program and culture. When campers (or anyone) feel a sense of belonging, they tend to identify with and adhere to the rules. You see this happen at camp all the time. Things like the random

fanny pack that never sold from the camp store five years ago became all the rage when a counselor sported it loud and proud. They made it cool by doing something different. It's more than fashion and inside jokes. The same thing happens to campers' behavior when we create a space where we strive to include everyone and where campers have a lot of options.

Here are some things you can do to create a more inclusive environment for your campers:

- Show openness and acceptance — it's OK to be different; in fact, being different and unique should be celebrated.
- Get uncomfortable yourself — doing something outside of your comfort zone will help you accept every camper's unique take.
- Leave labels behind — it is ultimately not that helpful to take a label like "ADHD" or "autism" and apply it to a camper. Those labels come with a lot of baggage. In fact, as you read those words, a bunch of images and ideas probably popped into your head. Those assumptions tend to lower your expectations of the campers' behavior. Instead, leave the labels behind, and discover the campers' behaviors on your own. You'll be much better at working with them.
- Check yourself — we are all a bit exclusive, and we just have to admit it. Be honest with yourself and realize those feelings when they happen. You can then change your behavior based on those feelings to be more inclusive.

There are so many more ideas that can help campers to be successful at your camp. Take the time to think about what it means to be successful as a camper at your camp, then develop ways to explicitly teach those ideas. You'll be amazed at what happens.

More People Want to Be Around You

Finally, there are social benefits of good behavior, which just boil down to the fact that other people (both kids and adults) want to spend more time with you. You can support this benefit with some good, old-fashioned time management skills.

- **Quality versus quantity** — it doesn't necessarily matter how much time you spend with someone if the gift of your time is spent in a meaningful way. Work to get to know each camper individually, and you will start to see patterns in how your campers like to spend time and what they like to do.
- **Be interested in them** — this can be hard because of your age difference, but work to have them lead the conversation, game, or activity. Your interest in their ideas and them is the best indicator to them that they are important and doing something worth noticing.
- **Stay present** — work to minimize mental distractions. We want you to review what has happened and, of course, we want you to be prepared for what will happen. However, when you are spending quality time with a camper, stay in the moment; your presence will be noticed.

When it comes to campers' good behavior, we have a tremendous opportunity to help teach them life skills that will serve them (and the people around them) in every environment and situation they will encounter.

Discussion Questions

1. Name a camper behavior you might praise and explain why you feel it is important to provide positive reinforcement for that specific behavior.
2. What are two things you can do that will foster success in your campers?
3. What are some consequences of being inconsistent in explaining and/or implementing rules at camp?
4. If you are short on time, what are some activities that promote the concept of quality over quantity?
5. How will you work to diminish distractions so you can stay present with your campers?