

Behavioral Issues

This section is intended as an overview of behavioral issues. There is a Quick Reference for dealing with behavior issues included at the end of this document, but it is by no means complete. Please read the section entitled Behavior Management Techniques for more detailed material.

The majority of campers will easily adapt to being at camp and follow the rules established through a group covenant, but there will also be some whose behavior will require you to provide an effective intervention. When handled properly, a behavior issue and disciplinary action can provide an opportunity for growth; something that forces a change from bad habits and evokes new, better responses to times of conflict. During a period of upset, a child is more susceptible to the influence of others than in periods of relative calm. An astute counselor can help a child learn different and more effective ways to cope with frustration, and disappointment that are a normal, and expected part of everyday life.

Reasons Behind the Behavior

It is helpful to be aware of potential reasons for behavior problems. Any of the following could be a cause of behavior problems:

- Established behavior patterns/habit.
- Frustration, unsatisfied needs or desires often cause children to "lash out."
- Illness or exhaustion.
- A desire for recognition/attention.
- Conflict with another camper/staff member.
- Outside conflicts; problems with family, friends, or others can follow campers to camp.
- Homesickness.

There are also some more serious issues that may surface at camp including, but not limited to:

- Childhood Anger and Aggression
- Childhood and Teenage Depression
- Anxiety Disorders
- Attention Deficit/Hyper Activity Disorder (ADD/ADHD)

Attention Deficit/Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder (ADHD) is a term used to describe children who experience behavioral difficulties with distractibility, inattention, impulsivity, or hyperactivity. ADHD affects a child's ability to concentrate, learn, and maintain a normal level of activity. Children with ADHD can also develop emotional, social, and family problems because of the frustrations and difficulties they experience on a daily basis.

Understanding ADD/ADHD

- 4% - 7% of the childhood population in the United States have ADD/ADHD
- An ADD/ADHD child is, on average 30% behind in age, and the ability to exercise self control. In concrete terms, this means that a 7-year old may exhibit behavioral characteristics of a 5 year old, a 10 year old may behave as a 7 ½ year old, 13 = 9 ½ and a 16 year old as a 12 year old.
- Behavior as a result of ADHD is not willful and can be variable. In other words, children with ADHD can concentrate or pay attention sometimes and not others.
- If the child takes medication such as Ritalin, be sure that they take it as scheduled.

Problems Associated with ADHD

- **Attention Difficulties** - The ADHD Child has difficulty paying attention to what he or she is to be focusing on at any given moment. The child may gaze elsewhere, shoot rubber bands, play with materials such as pencils or other supplies provided for an activity. Concentration is not maintained for very long. These children are easily bored and distracted.
- **Impulsivity** - ADHD children tend to act without thinking. They may blurt out statements that may not have anything to do with the subject at hand, or answer a question before the leader has finished asking it. They may switch from one activity to the next frequently, oftentimes without finishing the first task. Impulsivity can lead to potentially dangerous behavior such as climbing unsafe objects, or moving into a potentially dangerous area without warning. The child does not plan or think ahead. They may also push, grab, shove, or hit other children.
- **Hyperactivity** - The ADHD child has difficulty regulating his or her activity level to match the demands of the environment. The child may be in constant motion; sitting is difficult, perhaps impossible, and they may fidget, wiggle, squirm, or play with any available object. Hyper-Activity is hap-hazard, poorly organized, and not goal-directed.
- **Learning and Emotional Problems** - Children with ADHD may have specific learning problems such as anger, or aggression. Depression or anxiety may also coexist.

Childhood Anger and Aggression

Many children will have tantrums, act defiantly, and even bully from time to time. But when these behaviors occur more frequently, it can be a sign of a more serious disorder. If a child regularly exhibits several of these behaviors, help should be consulted:

- Loses temper frequently, swears, breaks/throws things when angry
- Gets in trouble a lot
- Steals, lies
- Gets into fights
- Often becomes involved in disputes with other children
- Threatens or hurts other children.
- Sets fires or willfully destroys property
- Has damaged property
- Exhibits no guilt for actions
- Behavior frightens others
- Behaves in a sexually aggressive fashion
- Involved in drugs, alcohol, sniffs glue
- Has run away

Childhood and Teenage Depression

Depression and suicide are the third leading cause of death among teens ages 15-24 and the sixth leading cause of death in children ages 5-14. 1 out of 8 teenagers may suffer from depression. Many children and teenagers experience a continuing, overwhelming feeling of sadness and helplessness and cannot function well with regular activities. Some of the symptoms include:

- Changes in sleep patterns (*)
- Changes in appetite (*)
- Withdrawal from friends/families/school activities (*)
- Mention of suicide
- Crying
- Excessive guilt
- Perception of being ugly
- Using alcohol or other drugs
- Inability to concentrate
- Neglecting personal appearance
- Lack of energy or interest in activities.

() Difficult, even impossible to notice at camp.*

Other Behavior & Emotional Disorders

Anxiety Disorders: Anxiety is expected to some degree and is normal at specific times in development. When anxieties become severe and begin to interfere with the daily activities of childhood, they may develop into severe anxiety disorders, such as bi-polar disorders, panic attacks, phobias, or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Quick-Reference

Tips For Handling Challenging Behavior

In General

- **First and Foremost, patience, patience, patience!**
- Be friendly; know as many campers as possible by name. Build relationships!
- Model the behavior you want your campers to exhibit - i.e. obey the rules yourself.
- Praise good qualities and actions.
- Separate the action from the person.
- Keep a sense of humor!
- Don't take misbehavior personally. Keep your poise/don't let them see that they get to you.
- Each child has needs; their behavior will give you clues as to what they are.
- Keeping campers busy is one of the best control methods. (Distract! Distract! Distract!)
- Show disapproval of behavior through your speech, facial expressions, and actions.
- Remain with your campers during meals and free-time
- Avoid getting campers over-tired, keyed-up, or tense.
- Don't let yourself get over-tired, keyed-up, or tense.

Dealing with ADD/ADHD:

- They can be very forgetful but are not stupid. They want to do well, and can try hard to understand, comprehend and remember what you have said. They don't always feel comfortable asking for help, please be patient and offer help. Asking the same question or many questions is just their way to get a clear picture.
- They need structure and guidance. Step by step instructions are very helpful. They can become overwhelmed with too many details at once and struggle to see the big picture. They react poorly to surprises and unscheduled changes. If plans change in the middle of an activity, they need patience and help to adjust.
- They need high doses of positive reinforcement and feedback. In other words, they want/need to be right. To them, being wrong can be taken to mean "I'm bad." When disciplining them be sure to emphasize that their behavior was wrong, not that they are bad.
- Eye contact is very important when communicating.

- They can be strongly drawn toward emotionally charged behavior and will act from emotions before thinking through their actions.
- Remember; they have feelings, needs and goals. These are important to them as yours are to you.

What can you do if you think a child/teen may have depression?

- Let him/her know there is someone to talk to; talk to him/her in a quiet setting.
- Listen to the child – don't lecture, criticize or dismiss his/her concerns.
- Trust your instincts; if you suspect a problem, don't rely on the child/teen's reassurances or your hope that the problem will go away by itself.
- Explain that needing and seeking help are positive, rational courses of action, not signs of weakness, and nothing to be ashamed of.
- Discuss with parents/family members and encourage them to seek professional help.
- Document symptoms, behavior and discussion; consult with someone else on staff.

What can you do if you think a child has a disruptive disorder?

- Avoid any physical discipline. It will worsen, not improve, the child's behavior. Best consequence may be a 3-6 minute time-out sitting. Ask the child to sit down, regain control and calm down after an outburst.
- Spend several minutes processing the episode with the child after the time-out. Ask why he/she lost control; find out how the outburst occurred. Then work with the child on developing coping strategies for the future such as counting to ten, walking away from an argument or opting to take a time-out.
- Have the child offer restitution after hurting someone or damaging another's property. Restitution can be in the form of active work or chores that benefit the person affected by the misbehavior. Restitution should take no more than 15 minutes and not required for more than 3 days in a row.
- Provide praise and attention when the child exhibits good behavior. Increase the amount of individual time with the child; recruit other persons (campers, counselors, CITs) as positive role models.

Source: Adapted from materials from the Psychiatric Institute of Washington, D.C. Deborah Haskins, M.A., C.P.C. Permission to use.

Behavior Management Techniques

As behavioral issues arise and require your attention at camp, keep the following in mind:

- Behavior management techniques are not, in and of themselves, problem solving techniques. They are methods to stop disruptive behaviors and help a child or group of children regain control. Only after the behavior has been stopped can problem solving techniques be used to teach alternative ways of handling stressful situations.
- Be clear about what you expect - the rules you establish should be simple and easy to follow. Your campers are not mini-adults. You should expect that they will want to have fun and be active, and furthermore strive to meet them on their level. Remember that they need, even sub-consciously *want* limits, but they will test them. Do not be afraid to set reasonable limits, and follow through with appropriate consequences *right away*.
- Above all, be patient! You are a role model for young Christians and your actions can directly affect their faith journey.

Structuring the Environment to Prevent Bad Behavior

Creating structure will go a long way to preventing behavior problems, but it is important to strike exactly the right balance between structure and freedom. As a counselor, you do not want to be perceived as a drill sergeant by over-structuring, nor do you want to be so lax that a disorganized environment emerges. Begin by getting to know as much about your campers as soon as possible - use initiative games and ice-breakers to learn and observe individual personalities, and create a covenant.

Creating a Covenant

Creating a covenant is an effective way to establish group guidelines that will guide the community during the time at camp. The rules are developed collaboratively with campers and written down on a poster. The campers and counselors should sign it, and if possible, display the poster in a central place for the remainder of the week. If your group is not in a place where the covenant can be easily displayed, it can be just as effective to carry the covenant to all activities during the week.

It is important to develop the covenant as a group. If campers are given a sense of ownership in the development of the rules, they are more likely to respond positively and abide by them.

When developing the covenant, avoid creating a list of "Do's and Don'ts. Negative words create a negative atmosphere, so set positive rules. For example, avoid using the word "not" and emphasize that which campers can do, instead of what they can't do.

A logical, and simple beginning involves two guidelines which serve as a foundation for all issues, infractions, and other rules:

Be kind to the people you are with ~ Be kind to the place where you are.

What Do You Do If Rules Are Broken?

If your covenant of conduct or group rules are broken you will want to have a process in place to deal with the problem. Keep in mind that refusal to cooperate can also be considered in your covenant. The following are some suggestions for you to think about as you set up your rules for camp.

Set up a "step" process with consequences at each step. That way if it's a continual problem you have a structure to go back to.	Stress that the behavior is the problem, not the camper's personality. Help the camper to identify acceptable alternatives to the problem behavior.
Give camper one warning; make it clear that he or she has done wrong	Give your camper a chance to explain; he or she may have a good reason
Be consistent and impartial	Stay cool and calm; keep strong emotions in check
Avoid lecturing or embarrassing the camper; i.e. do not discipline in front of other campers.	After the disciplinary time is over, accept the camper as a part of the group again
Follow the camp behavior management policies for continuing discipline problems	Remember that forgiveness is a key Christian value. There may be a good place for a "teachable moment." Forgiveness doesn't change the past, but it does broaden the future.

The Question Technique

The question technique is intended as a tool for guiding a discussion with a camper concerning his or her behavior after the fact. It works best if you remain calm. As the camper gets louder and more defensive, you get softer and calmer.

If you observe a camper behaving poorly and feel a discussion is necessary,

- 1) Calmly ask, "What were/are you doing?" Even though they may not say it, the negative behavior will come to their mind.
- 2) Calmly ask, "Are you supposed to (identify behavior) here at camp?" Your camper then must make a value judgment on their behavior.
- 3) Calmly ask, "What happens when you (negative behavior) here at camp?" Your camper now brings the consequence to mind. This consequence is either based on the camper-defined rules or your camp's non-negotiable rules.
- 4) Present a choice to your camper. "You have a choice to make. You can (negative behavior) PAUSE and what will happen is (consequence) or you can (desired behavior) and (positive outcome)." Your camper will have to choose how to act and accept the consequences.

Strategies for Behavior Management

There are no set rules in behavior management; however, the following is a list of techniques and strategies that have been successful in the past. Try to incorporate some of these tips into your strategy for your events' behavior management.

- Every child has needs; their behavior can give you clues as to what those needs are.
- Sometimes it is best to simply ignore behaviors, rather than reward or punish, which may actually provide attention to encourage the behavior. Ignoring behaviors usually works best for campers who seek attention by clowning around.
- Giving the child attention or affection, which has been lacking, may solve the problem. Giving the child some form of responsibility or encouraging a special interest or talent may result in improved behavior. Often the activity, if it is at his/her own physical, emotional, and intellectual level, is enough to correct the situation.
- Praise good qualities and actions. Positive reinforcement is far more effective than negative reinforcement. Giving campers praise for what they do well provides a model for others to follow and can set the tone for the entire week. "One pat on the back is worth two slaps in the face."
- Sending a child to "time out" allows time to cool down and think about behavior change. Withholding privileges or taking away something a camper likes is usually effective.
- Allow natural consequences to occur if the results are NOT too severe - i.e. does not endanger anyone.
- Have a group meeting to discuss and resolve generalized problems. Enlist other leaders (peers or staff) to provide role models.
- Discuss issues at length in an attempt to see the camper's side of the situation as well as to get the camper to understand your position.

Specific Behavioral Issues

Fighting

Serious fighting often evolves from what starts out as just "fooling around." Keep a close eye on such horseplay to keep it from getting out of hand. When a fight breaks out, separate the combatants immediately. Let your voice show calm, mature authority. Attempt to give them time to cool down. Use facial expressions to indicate less tension. Disallow any angry verbal exchanges, and physically remove combatants to a "safe distance" from each other if necessary.

Fights that involve serious contact (hitting, kicking, biting, punching) require both combatants to visit the nurse, who will check for bruising and internal injuries.

Once combatants have regained composure, try one or more of the following:

1. Calmly discuss the situation separately with each individual. Emphasize resolving the problem,

not placing blame. Aim for a mutual "shake hands and make up" plan.

2. Hold a face-to-face hearing where each participant describes his/her version without interruption from the other. Attempt to help each see the other side, reconcile differences, make up, and forgive.
3. Allow the individuals to discuss the situation privately if you are sure the anger has dissipated. You can help mediate if they wish.
4. Invoke a logical consequence if clear provocation can be established or if this is a repeat offense. (See the Camp Discipline Policy)

Stealing

To minimize the possibility of theft, campers are discouraged from bringing valuables to camp with them, and are to deposit money into the camp store account. If stealing still occurs:

1. Give the offender opportunity to return the article anonymously.
2. You may need to play detective if the item is not returned and the offender is still not identified. Be cautious in seeking group cooperation in order to avoid the offender being ostracized.
3. If you have evidence to identify an offender, deal with the camper privately. Give him or her a chance to make restitution and make a plan together to avoid repeat behaviors.
4. If evidence is lacking as to the offender's identity, try handing out sheets of paper to each member of the group. Have them write either "I did not take it," or "I did take it and I'm sorry," and sign their name. Give them the opportunity to secretly place the papers in your custody. Deal with the offender privately later.
5. If the problem persists, follow camp procedures and inform the camp director.

Specific Traits and Associated Behaviors

The Bully or Show Off

Essentially, the bully or show off requires understanding and patience. To deal with these children, you first need the child's confidence in you as a leader; you should not be dominating, overly critical, or too demanding on the child's performance. To maintain this child's confidence, praise good behavior instead of only criticizing bad behavior. Discuss with the child the rights of others and courtesies due them. Let him/her know others will be more accepting if this behavior is turned more positive. Demonstrate compromise in your actions for the child to learn. During group activity make a special effort to place this child in competition with others of equal or greater strength and ability.

See additional notes on Bullying below.

The Quiet Type

Relating to silent members is always a concern among leadership. Be careful that you do not assume that just because they are silent means that they are accepting or agreeing with the rest of the group.

Avoid assuming that they are not interested in the group or the events that are happening around them. It is unfair for us to label them as disinterested. Do not avoid their silence. Sometimes the deepest feelings show themselves in silence.

Respect is the key to ministry with the "silent member" in your group. Respect their right to be quiet. It may be their God-given nature. Shyness is a really beautiful quality. Help the member to open-up and share; even if it is in a few words. They can participate without talking.

Silent members are often processing information, feelings, etc., and simply can't verbalize all of that on the spot. Be sure to give a chance at the next small group session for further reflection on the previous topic - you will find more expression among your quiet ones.

A Very Talkative Child

The youth who is the loudest is often times the one who has the largest need. Try to deal with the problem covertly rather than overtly. It is important that you realize the uniqueness that this youth has. Look beyond the dominating personality and see the real motive behind the power.

Involve the other members of the group more fully. Statements like, "That's good. Let's hear from some of the others as to how they feel", are less threatening than, "Hey, you've talked enough, let someone else get a word in." Encourage the other members to participate in the discussion thus limiting the opportunity of the dominator.

You may have to confront someone who continually dominates the discussion. If it becomes necessary to do so, take them aside and explain to them that you are glad they have so much to share, but the purpose of the group is to allow everyone a chance to share. Ask them to please help the group be more open to discussion by not talking so much. Stress to them how they can help you, not how they are hindering you.

Understand that "Talkers" often process life by verbalizing - if you give them some time afterwards to talk, they'll be more likely to hold off during the small group session.