

Team Building, Teamwork, Group Work, and Camps

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Camp experiences enrich children's lives. Camp is a significant context for youth development. Many people who have gone to camp or served as camp staff know

these statements are true. Although many positive anecdotes exist, efforts to systematically document the outcomes and benefits of camp are needed. Behavior changes regarding many of the intangible benefits of camp experience are complex and not always easy to measure. Nevertheless, researchers are showing that relationships between camp experiences and positive youth development are growing.

Youth development focuses on supporting or promoting positive developmental processes such as competence, mastery, positive identity, resilience, caring, connection, and belonging that enhance health and well-being (Benson & Saito, 2006). Camp programs can promote positive youth development when they intentionally incorporate experiences, opportunities, and supports to address specific aspects of this development. Team building and teamwork are related outcomes that can be learned and practiced at camp.

Team building incorporates dimensions of positive youth development such as competence, caring, connection, and belonging within a group. It results in a team, which is usually described as a group of people linked in a common purpose. Team building is both a process of and an outcome from camp experiences. Many activities found in camp can contribute to aspects of team building related to bonding, teamwork, and positive group dynamics. The result of team building is teamwork, which refers to the effectiveness of the collaboration, communication, coordination, and balance of contributions, mutual support, effort, and cohesion that comes from a group.

Even though team building is focused on group work where people subordinate their own interests for the good of the group, the individual is important. However, effective and efficient teamwork goes beyond individual accomplishments. The most effective teamwork is produced when team building results in individuals committing and contributing

together toward a common goal. Team building can be an important factor in any environment including camps with their focus on bringing out the best in a group. These team building skills can be invaluable throughout a person's life.

Research Says

- Afterschool adventure programs have resulted in increases in leadership, communication, team building, and goal-setting skills (Ripberger, 2008).
- Participation in sport often declines for youth after the age of 12 years. Although sports are not the interest of all young people, when coached properly they can lead to team-building as evident in team cohesion, improved communication skills, and increased motivation and enjoyment (Bloom, Loughhead, & Newin, 2008).
- Teams are more cohesive when they are task-oriented and agree on their common goals. Horn, Byrd, Martin, and Young (2012) found that a coach-initiated task-oriented climate was most strongly linked to high levels of perceived team cohesion.
- Although organized youth activities are usually a catalyst for positive development, sometimes these organizations provide a context for negative experiences. Negative experiences may occur because of peers and peer group dynamics that do not facilitate team building and teamwork (Dworkin & Larson, 2006).
- Organized youth activities in a variety of organizations are associated with experiences such as initiative, identity exploration and reflection, emotional learning, and developing teamwork skills (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003).
- Researchers have found that one way to influence the lifestyles and physical activity of underserved as well as obese children was to focus on group dynamic strategies that enhanced cohesion

(focused on team building and teamwork) and built nurturing relationships among children in a focused program (Marin et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2006).

- Participants in team building challenge games (e.g., obstacle course) often experience trust, teamwork, and positive effective communication within their groups (Fautley, 2004; Fisher, 2005; Quezada & Christopherson, 2005).
- Teambuilding can be facilitated by developing a team-building intervention program that focuses on bonding during activities and improving abilities to work together as a group (Newin, Bloom, & Loughhead, 2008).

Teamwork/Team Building and Camps

- Participation in leisure activities at camp resulted in the development of cooperation and effective communication (i.e., teamwork) that affected the development of social capital and sense of community in children at an international camp (Yuen, Pedlar, & Mannell, 2005).
- Campers at a summer residential camp have many opportunities to experience group work as incorporated into the camp program. An important aspect of this group work is the development of mutual support through team-building (Collins, 2006).
- Group work within camps was found to be highly valued by children as well as parents. Children and adolescents with asthma valued the recreational and educational opportunities at camp and parents emphasized their appreciation for the safety at camp (Nicholas, Williams, & MacLusky, 2009).

Bottom Line

Youth programs, when targeted specifically to skills related to interpersonal relationships, mutual support, and group goal setting can provide young people with experiences in team building and teamwork. Much of the research on team building in camp has focused on creating a staff team. This focus is important but facilitating teamwork among campers is valuable. Although autonomy and self-determination are important qualities to encourage in camp, opportunities for teamwork can provide transferable skills related to trust, working together, and problem-solving with others. Campers who learn to work interdependently toward personal and team goals learn lifelong skills. Since not all children participate in organized sports programs at home, activities done at camp can give them a somewhat

comparable team opportunity to feel a part of both large and small groups at camp.

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