

Training for Camp Staff Related to ACA Standards

Objective: Introduce camp staff to the concept of ACA accreditation and standards and how it affects their jobs.

Materials needed: Standards book (for display), membership materials, scenarios (cut apart) to give groups, scenarios with standards references for session leader, flip chart or chalk board, if possible.

Introduction

Give BRIEF overview of ACA standards and accreditation

- The mission of the American Camp Association is enriching the lives of children, youth, and adults through the camp experience.
- ACA standards are nationally established “best practices” for camps.
- Standards cover nearly all aspects of a camp’s operation — site, transportation, health care, staffing, overall administration, and program.
- All types of camps can seek accreditation — agency, religious, private, day, resident, year-round.
- An individual camp’s policies may be stricter than ACA standards as a result of ACA standards or as a result of another organization’s (e.g., YMCA) policies.
- Accreditation should complement the camp’s policies and procedures — not be an extra process outside the camp’s training and system. The important thing is that staff KNOW and FOLLOW camp policies and procedures.

Activity

To explore how much staff know about camp policies (and, subsequently, about standards), divide into groups of three to six people, depending on total group size. Tell groups you are going to give each group a scenario to discuss based on real-life problems from the ACA Crisis Hotline.

Tell the groups to discuss the problem and identify (list the four items on flip chart — or post pre-written list):

- 1. Options:** What are the options? What could the counselors do?
- 2. Training/Policies:** What training have they been given in this area? What are camp policies/procedures? What training do they think they may still need?
- 3. Safety:** What are the health and safety issues involved?
- 4. Recommend:** Based on the above, what are the group’s recommended actions — first steps?

Tell them they’ll have about ten to fifteen minutes to discuss and then each group will report on their recommendations. After ten to fifteen minutes, have groups report — reading the scenario first to the whole group.

As groups identify issues and policies, point out — as appropriate — those areas that are also standards requirements (e.g., “By the way, emergency communication is an ACA standard — camps need defined procedures, and training for staff.”). See scenario “answer sheet” for standards references.

Other areas that could be tied into standards — as appropriate:

- “*In loco parentis*” — standards requirements in day and resident camp are based on the legal concept of the camp being “in place of the parent.”
- Accreditation is an educational process that requires verification every three years, but is expected at all times — by parents, agencies, directors, and other staff.
- Directors may ask staff in specialized areas to help organize written materials for an accreditation visit — a great opportunity to update operating procedures for areas.

Wrap-up

Identify how any remaining training issues can be addressed — make suggestions to director for sessions during precamp, in-service topics, additions to the staff manual, etc.

Emphasize again that policies and procedures are established for reasons (e.g., ACA standards, state regulations, agency policies, or camp traditions). Regardless, staff need to understand and follow procedures to provide children with healthy opportunities to discover, explore, grow, and have fun.

Provide contact information: ACA Web site: www.ACAcamps.org; local section contact information.

Day camp staff training — Scenarios for group discussion

#1

Your camp has one-night overnights during each session for all but the youngest campers. Two small groups of older campers are camping out at the far end of the property. A sudden storm emerges, and the camp is advised that a tornado has been sighted not far from camp. The overnight groups have a two-way radio, but no one is responding to calls from the camp.

#2

The camp's policy is to send home any camper for use of a controlled substance. A camper tells you that all the other campers in his unit are smoking joints, and to prove it, he shows you a joint. The camper is not in your unit, but is in your best friend's unit.

#3

A CIT comes to you, very upset, and tells you that one of the maintenance staff molested her when he gave her a ride back to the dining hall. You've had some problems with this girl flirting with the male staff when she should have been helping with campers.

#4

A parent calls and says she discovered her son had taken Ritalin that he got from another camper — thinking it would give him a “high.” She is angry and concerned about other campers who may be affected also. Your camp's practice for dispensing meds is that campers pick them up at lunch time, and a counselor watches them take it.

#5

Your group is scheduled to go canoeing, but when you get down to the lake, you discover that the canoeing specialist has come down with the flu and has gone home. Your campers are really looking forward to canoeing, having already gone through the basic instruction earlier in the week. You learned the routines and safety procedures during pre-camp, so you convince your co-counselor that it's OK to go anyway.

#6

One of your campers panics on a high element at the ropes course. As one of the staff members is trying to talk him down, some of the campers waiting start calling him “wimp” and telling him not to act like a girl. The ropes course staff member joins in the ridicule, hoping to snap him out of it.

#7

As you take your group down to the bus area at the end of the day, one of your campers runs ahead saying “Cool! Dad’s here to get me!” He has been riding on the bus all week, but seems really excited to see his father.

#8

During rest hour, your group is quiet, and you’ve got a bad headache. So you leave the program aide in charge to go get something from the nurse. When you return, you discover a water fight in full swing — with the aide in the middle of it.

#9

As your group is returning to the bus from the afternoon at the waterpark, you discover one camper missing. You had seen her earlier with several other girls at the snack area. The other girls say she went to the restroom, and they haven’t seen her since.

#10

One of your thirteen-year-old campers confides in you over the summer, grateful to have an older person to talk with about her parents’ recent divorce. The girl says that her mother now works so much she doesn’t have much time for the kids. A sixteen-year-old boy in her neighborhood has been paying her much attention and is now pressuring her for more intimacy. She asks you when you first had sex — and if you use birth control.

#11

You have a new assistant for your group of nine and ten year olds, as your previous one had a family emergency that took her out for the rest of the summer. She appears to be pretty comfortable with the kids, but doesn’t know much about the camp routines and rules. You’re hoping she’ll catch on as the week progresses. You just don’t have the time or patience to explain everything.

#12

A trip staff member calls camp to report that one of the camp vans has been in an accident. The trip leader and several campers are injured — one possibly seriously. The office secretary answered the phone, as most staff were at lunch with campers. The staff member is very upset because she had taken over driving when the head counselor got tired. When it began to rain, she lost control of the van.

#13

As you bring your group down for horseback riding, one of the riding staff pulls you aside and says she saw two kids with their clothes off beside the trail. You leave your group with the other counselor and riding staff and go to investigate. You find an eight-year-old girl and an eleven-year-old boy together in the bushes. They are very

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embarrassed and beg you not to tell anyone.