

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT



ACA Communications Toolkit

The American Camp Association (ACA) Communications Toolkit is designed to guide camp professionals at all levels in their media relations activities. The toolkit is a resource for both proactive public relations and crisis communications.

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Media Relations 101

Spin? Hype? Publicity? What exactly is Public Relations?

As the term applies, it is relating to your target public in some manner whether it's through an article in the newspaper, a story on your Web site, or a public service announcement.

For public relations to be most effective, however, it should serve a larger organizational goal or objective whether that goal is to increase enrollment at your camp or help attract funding. Public relations can help.

Public relations also shapes public opinion. A good story about a camp can have an enormous impact on recruiting camp counselors or campers. A negative story, on the other hand, can have devastating consequences.

For public relations to work, it must be strategic. We must ask ourselves to whom are we communicating and what do we want to say? We need to be able to effectively articulate the benefits of camp.

The public relations toolkit is designed to help camps with proactive media relations and crisis communications support. It is not a substitute for the Hotline but rather serves as a guide to help you maximize your public relations effort.

Public Relations Planning

A good public relations strategy starts with a plan. Using the toolkit as a guide, you can develop a publicity plan with deadlines and submission guideline requirements for various media outlets. This plan/guide can help you develop a media strategy.

Your plan should include an objective statement, goals, and a detailed outline on how you will reach your target audience with the ACA message. Some questions to keep in mind are:

- What is your goal?
- How do you intend to reach your goal?
- Who is your audience? Students? Parents? Policy makers?
- What are your key messages?
- How will you track your results?
- How will know you reached your goal?

Sample Communications Plan

A sample communications plan follows to help you get started.

Camp Name: _____

Contact: _____

Date: _____

Goals

What do you want to achieve through your communications?

Target Audiences

Which groups can help advance your organization, mission, priorities, etc.?

Strategy

What overarching approach will drive all communications activities?

Messages

What ideas should all communications convey? Which are for select audiences?

Tactics

Which activities or vehicles will best convey your messages to key audiences?

- Media
- Direct Mail
- Member Communications
- Advertising
- Web Site/Online Outreach
- Outreach to Potential Partners
- Speakers Bureau
- Meetings/Special Events

Crisis Communications

What systems/processes are needed to help mitigate or respond to crises?

- General Principles
- Crisis Management Team
- Defined Process (preparation, response, follow-up, etc.)

Resources

What resources are needed to support the planned activities?

- Staff and Professional Development
- Board Engagement
- Partnerships/Relationships
- Information and Research
- Collateral and Materials
- Databases, Lists, etc.
- Outreach Protocol (e.g., media)

Measurement

How can you determine whether your communications have succeeded?

- Media hits
- Online hits
- Media Relationships (status)
- Third-Party Relationships (status)
- Online Surveys

- Events (e.g., attendance, surveys)
- Membership (e.g., increase, diversity)

Budget

Implementation Schedule

Broader ACA Objectives

As you develop your communication plan, you should also look for opportunities to incorporate and reinforce the broader ACA objectives. These are goals that ACA seeks to achieve through its national, regional, and local communications. In doing so, sections and camps, can help contribute to a stronger, more coordinated national voice for our camp community.

- Expand awareness of how a camp experience can make a positive contribution to a person’s growth and development.
- Strengthen the capacity of camps to provide the highest quality programs and services.
- Increase the diversity of individuals participating in and benefiting from a camp experience.
- Support the efforts of our national 20/20 Vision
- Advance ACA as the leading authority and resource on issues related to camp, and the learning and development opportunities available through a camp experience.

Is It Newsworthy?

Before implementing any communications tactics, it is useful to ask yourself if your story is newsworthy. Most editors, reporters, and news producers will look at seven indicators to determine if a story is newsworthy. When pitching a story idea to the media, it will be helpful to keep these seven indicators in mind.

Timeliness

- Is the story something that relates to current events or breaking news?
- Is it being released on the heels of national or statewide news on the same subject; it is localizing a national or regional story?

Impact

- How many people in the community will the story influence or affect?

Novelty

- Is there anything out of the ordinary happening?
- Is there something that will challenge our assumptions or beliefs?

Currency

- What are people talking about now?
- Is the item something that is occurring in current events or on everyone's lips?

Prominence

- Are well-known people or institutions involved?
- Do prominent newsmakers, celebrities, politicians, or other high-profile people play a role in the story?

Proximity

- Is the news happening in the community or region where you are pitching the story idea?

Conflict

- Is there drama, clashes between people and institutions, etc.?

Media Do's and Don'ts

This page is intended to serve as a guide during all media interviews. You should refer to it often as a reminder and use it as a reference during a possible crisis communications scenario.

The Do's

- Be sure to have the facts about the reporter and the publication. What is the reporter's beat? What is the publication's demographic? Ideally you should read the reporter's past articles to have a sense of his/her writing style.
- Know your story. The key to giving a good interview is knowing the story you want to tell the reporter. What is it you want to say about camp and the camp experience?
- Prepare talking points. Draft two to three talking points that you would like to get across during the interview. Understand what the reporter is writing about and "bridge" to your key talking points.
- Use statistics. If the article is about camp in general, you may want to reference the impact camp can have on children.
- Use quotable language. Reporters are often looking for quotable language or sound bites that help tell a story.

- Anticipate questions. Ask someone to give you a list of questions and practice answering the questions. It's best not to try to memorize any information but rather to be able to effectively communicate your talking points.
- Use specifics, analogies, and anecdotes to help "humanize" and tell your story.
- Remember the interview begins once the reporter enters the property or begins the telephone call and doesn't end until they leave the property or conclude the call.
- Be assertive but non-confrontational. Most reporters are objective and want to cover both sides of the story.
- Be simple, to the point, and brief.

The Don'ts

- Avoid saying "no comment." If you don't know the answer, and the interview is live and on-camera, bridge to one of your talking points. If the interview is with a print reporter or over the phone, tell the reporter you will find the information and get back with him or her.
- Avoid jargon. Remember the reporter won't know you're talking about if you use acronyms, etc.
- Do not talk "off the record."
- Don't repeat the reporter's language unless it is what you want to say.
- Don't use negative language. Negative language is quotable. Example: "We did not know."

For broadcast (television) interviews:

- The television will "frame" your face. So make sure you appear relaxed and look at the interviewer, not the camera.
- Sit back in your chair with your back erect. Avoid slouching.
- Avoid wearing stripes or patterns. Dark clothes look best on television.
- Avoid long, confusing answers. Most sound bites are less than 10 seconds.

Crisis Communications

Unfortunately, a crisis can occur at any time, affecting any camp at any location. It is for that reason that you should prepare for a crisis before it happens.

Communicating effectively during a crisis is critical. To help all camps prepare in the event of a crisis, we've developed this toolkit to help guide you in your communications. This should not serve as a substitute for the **ACA Camp Crisis Hotline** but rather should help you understand the components of a good crisis communications plan.

Crisis Communications Overview

1. Preparing for a Crisis
 - a) Develop a crisis communications plan. The plan will help guide you through a crisis and help you stay on course during an emergency.
 - b) Establish protocol. It's important to identify a list of key personnel to contact in the event of a crisis. Keep phone numbers, pagers, etc. available for the primary contacts.
 - c) Know the [ACA Camp Crisis Hotline](#) number. Calls to the hotline are confidential. The Hotline staff can help you by talking through your crisis and helping you to identify options. The Hotline is available 24 hours a day, year-round at 800-573-9019.
 - d) Identify your target audience(s). During a crisis, it's important to identify to whom you are speaking. Most often you are communicating with staffers, children, and parents. Remember the media serves as a gatekeeper to other external audiences.
2. Identifying a Crisis
 - a) It's important to identify the crisis and understand its origins. Here are some questions you may want to ask yourself:
 - i. Did the crisis take place at camp?
 - ii. Did the crisis take place outside of camp but involve camp staff, camper(s), or camp families?
 - iii. Is the crisis immediate or ongoing?
 - iv. Is the crisis one that will remain local or will it have national media appeal?
 - v. Is this something that you can ask your Section Executive to help resolve for your camp or is it something that requires national office assistance.
 - vi. Does the crisis concern a media hot button issue—an allegation of child abuse, outraged parents, and accreditation? If so, is this an issue best handled by a national spokesperson?
3. Handling a Crisis
 - a. When a crisis occurs, it's important to gather the facts immediately. In gathering the facts you should talk with camp staff only.
 - b. Remind the camp to follow these suggestions in handling their crisis. Tell them that they can find online assistance at _____.
 - c. If the crisis is at a camp, the camp should designate one spokesperson to speak on behalf of the camp. Ideally this is the camp director, camp owner, or other person of authority. It is best to identify only one spokesperson to ensure a consistency in message. However, the

- camp may ask you to act as the spokesperson—if you feel comfortable to do this. Or the camp may need help from ACA's national office.
- d. Remind the camp that your help, the assistance of ACA's national office, and the online Communications Toolkit are not a substitute for the help and advice from their own attorney or PR counsel.
 - e. If the crisis requires statements from you, control the flow of information. In other words, if the media calls, be courteous, take their information, and ask the deadline to return the call. You do not need to provide an immediate comment to the media but you should not ignore their requests either.
 - f. Develop a written statement. You should work with your attorneys and/or your PR counsel to develop a written statement to share with parents and the media. The statement should include the facts only. Do not speculate and do not place blame. ACA [local office staff](#) or the ACA [national office](#) can provide assistance as well.
 - g. Develop key messages. This should be for your internal use only to help you in discussing the matter with parents and the media.
 - h. Communicate the message and the facts. Provide the media with the written statement and be available for comment. Remember to stick to the facts. Do not try to "hide" bad news as negative media coverage is likely to result and will continue beyond the immediate crisis itself.
 - i. Keep track of all calls and requests. Keep a list of reporters with whom you spoke.
 - j. Respond to the media. Remember the media helps to shape public opinion. A "no comment" statement is seen as an admittance of guilt. Be fair and respond quickly to the media.
 - k. If you are not available by phone or cell phone at all times (during normal business hours), please consider leaving a voice message that directs the media to the national office—"If this is a media inquiry and you need immediate assistance or if this is an emergency, please call the American Camp Association national office at 317-342-8456 and ask for the public relations department"
 - l. The media may ask to speak with other persons affected by the crisis. It is best to restrict access and to refer all questions to the primary spokesperson.
 - m. Keep track of all media coverage. Review all the media coverage for accuracy. Call the reporter when the information is not accurate

In Summary:

- Designate a crisis communications protocol.
- Manage the message and the media.
- Understand and prioritize your audience.
- Communicate early and often.
- Do not lie.
- Do not ignore the situation.

Sample Crisis Press Statement

This statement is a sample used by ACA during an actual media crises. It is an example—and can be helpful as you develop your own statements and key messages. If you need additional assistance, contact the national office public relations office. The statement is not intended to substitute advice from your attorney or insurance representative.

Statement 1: Relating to the death of a young camper from rabies. Although the boy did attend camp, the CDC found his death was not linked to the camp.

Our hearts are broken by the loss of this child, and our condolences go out to the parents and extended family of this little boy. He was an outstanding young man and a great camper. This is a great loss for his family and for our camp family.

Here at XXXX Camp, we are accredited by and follow the health procedures of the American Camp Association, and we keep detailed health records as required by ACA. We have combed these records and talked with our staff and find no evidence of any reports from campers or staff that this child received any kind of bite while at camp or on any of our trips this summer. The health and safety of our campers is our first and foremost concern.

We have been in touch with the family and with The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. The CDC had representatives from their Rabies Division studying this case. I spoke with the CDC this morning, and they do not feel that this camper contracted rabies while he was at camp this summer. I would suggest that you contact the CDC concerning their findings and recommendations. We continue to cooperate fully with all authorities in this heart-breaking situation. The CDC phone number is XXX+XXX-XXXX.

Sample Crisis Talking Points

Key messages relating to a car accident in XXXX. The camp was not an ACA-accredited camp.

Key Message #1

Camp XXX is deeply saddened by any tragedy that affects a family. ACA offers its deepest condolences to the family members.

Key Message #2

We cannot speculate on what happened; The XXXX Camp in XXXX is not an accredited camp.

Key Message #3

The safety of individuals at camp is all camp professionals' number one priority. Over 11 million children and adults attend camp each year, many of them attend the over 2,400 ACA-accredited camps nationwide. ACA is the only national association that accredits all types of camps, based upon 290 national standards for health and safety. The American Camp Association has nearly a century of experience as a national community of camp professionals, dedicated to enriching the lives of children and adults through the camp experience.

- ACA accreditation indicates that a camp has voluntarily allowed its practices to be compared with standards established by professionals in the camp industry.

- American Camp Association standards are recognized by courts of law and government regulators as the standards of the camp industry.

Key Messages Relating to a Boating Accident

Key Message #1

The American Camp Association is deeply saddened when we learn of any injury that occurs at camp.

Key Message #2

The American Camp Association has developed professional standards to be followed by ACA-accredited camps. Safety is at the core of ACA's accreditation system, and safety of campers and staff is paramount within ACA-accredited camps. Aquatic activities at camp require certified, trained staff in appropriate ratios, skill testing, safety systems, rescue equipment, rehearsed emergency procedures, and other guidelines to reinforce risk management and safety during water sports.

Staff training

- ACA standards recommend that camps implement a system to provide each camp staff member, prior to assuming job responsibilities, training that is specific to his or her individual job functions, including clear expectations for acceptable job performance.
- All boating activities in day and resident camps must have an appropriately certified person on duty with rescue skills appropriate to the activity and the aquatic location.
- Camps should supply written evidence that all operators and drivers are provided training prior to use of motor boats.

Key Message #3

XXX Camp is an ACA-accredited camp and has voluntarily undergone a rigorous risk management process to prevent illness or injury to campers and is required by ACA standards to have written emergency procedures in effect for crisis situations. XXX Camp offered immediate response time when administering first aid. XXX Camp had an attending physician address all campers about the incident, debrief them, and determine whether further consultation was needed.

Key messages regarding an allegation of child abuse by male counselor at Camp XXXX. The alleged victim is an 11-year-old boy.

Key Message #1

Camp XXXX is committed to collaborative efforts that can reduce the abuse of children. As an ACA-accredited camp, we work with licensing boards, regulatory bodies, and developers of camp standards to continue to seek ways to promote safety.

Key Message #2

We acknowledge that no state licensing program and no set of regulations or laws can guarantee an accident-free environment; thus, we strive to compliment such programs with sound risk management training and ongoing program assessment and improvement.

- Staff screening standards include the use of application forms, reference checks, personal interviews, work history reviews, and background checks.
- Staff training standards include educating camp staff on the recognition, prevention and reporting method for child abuse; age-appropriate behavior management techniques to help create a

physically and emotionally safe environment; supervision of campers; safety considerations; emergency procedures; and more.

- Staff and camper supervision standards recommend observation of all staff while on duty, training for supervisors, and specific performance guidelines.

Key Message #3

The cumulative effects of ACA's child protection standards are more reliable and practical than the varied state-to-state criminal background checks, which are only one facet of a comprehensive staff screening process. This more comprehensive approach to screening is recommended by the Nonprofit Risk Management Center and the report of the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law.

Key Messages Regarding the Death of a Camper

Key Message #1

Camp XXXX is deeply saddened when we learn of any tragedy that affects the life of a child. We extend our deepest regret and concern for the family members.

Key Message #2

Camp XXXX is an ACA-accredited camp and has voluntarily undergone a rigorous risk management process and is required by ACA standards to have written emergency procedures in effect for crisis situations. [Leave out if camp is not accredited]

- We are continuing to cooperate with authorities pertaining to this matter.
- We do not have all the details at this time since authorities are still in the midst of investigating the situation.

Generating Stories

How to Generate Publicity

Each year, nearly 11 million children and adults attend camp. For each child and camp, the experience is unique. For some, it is the journey toward lifelong friendships; for others it is the chance to rock climb or water ski for the first time. For every child, there is a story we can tell the media about the importance of the camp experience.

The following materials are designed to help you implement a proactive media relations strategy.

Press Release Writing Tips

A press release should be timely, informative, and well written. A press release should generate media attention for your story, not tell the whole story, so it's important to keep it brief. The format of a press release is similar to an inverted pyramid. The first paragraph should contain the main ideas of the story, and subsequent paragraphs should elaborate further with additional information. Think of the first paragraph as a brief summary of the news you wish to present in the release.

A press release should provide a reporter with the facts; describe who, what, when, where, and how. Here are some additional ideas to keep in mind when writing a press release:

- Don't advertise – If your release has a promotional rather than factual angle, it will most likely be turned down by your media contact.
- Create an "attention-getting" headline – You should convey immediately why your news is important.
- Write for your audience – Clearly indicate to the editor why your news is important to his/her readers. You should include noteworthy quotes, background information, and illustrate the value of this information.
- The release should have your city (in capital letters) and date starting the first sentence.
- Your release should follow Associated Press writing style. Most libraries or bookstores offer an AP writing guide.
- Include quotes in your release. Be sure to get permission from the individuals quoted prior to putting them in your release.
- Include a boilerplate – Write a brief summary about your camp's services, and goals to emphasize your credibility – mention your years in business, contact information, etc.
- *Formatting suggestions:*
- 8 1/2- by 11-inch paper.
- Use at least one-inch margins.
- Use "###" or "-30-" to indicate the end of the release.
- Use bold typeface for headlines.
- Capitalize the first letter of every word in the headline with the exception of articles (i.e., "a", "an," "and," or "the") or prepositions (i.e., "of," "to," or "from"). Note that this combination of upper and lower case words makes the headline easier to read.

- Always include contact information, including the phone number for the person who should be contacted for additional information.
- Get to the point with as few words as possible. Experts recommend 300 words or a maximum of 500 words.

Tips for Writing Opinion-Editorials

Opinion, or guest editorials, are an excellent opportunity to tell readers about the importance of the camp experience. An opinion editorial typically educates a reader on a relevant subject or expresses an opinion on a particular issue.

Most newspapers have very specific guidelines for writing editorials, so be sure to check with the editorial page editor before submitting an op-ed piece. Some newspapers post guidelines online. Here are some tips to keep in mind as you write your guest editorial/op-ed piece:

- It is best to keep op-eds between 650-700 words unless otherwise indicated. The longer the piece, the greater the chances it be edited down or declined entirely.
- The place of the op-ed is significantly enhanced if it is written by a community leader or someone who is considered “newsworthy.” Perhaps a prominent business professional who benefited from camp? Or a leading child educator who has helped to develop a camp’s curriculum?
- Accompany editorials with a brief note explaining who you are and why you’re writing the piece. Include names and contact information.
- After sending the editorial, call the editor and extend an offer to work with the paper in revising the article, should they choose to run it.

Tips for Writing Letters to the Editor

A letter to the editor is the means by which reader can correct, or comment on, a recent article that appeared in the publication.

Most letters follow a simple structure. The first paragraph references the recent article and states a position (of the writer, or of ACA). The second paragraph explains why the writer agrees or disagrees with the referenced article. Here, it’s best to use quotes or statistics in order to prove the appropriate points. The final paragraph often gives a call to action or directs readers to more information.

Here are a few basic rules to follow to help increase the chance of a letter to the editor being published.

- Make sure the letter responds to a recent editorial or article. Reference the article and the date at which it was published. Send the letter within a day or two of the original publication.
- Make sure the letter is short and simple. Most printed articles are between 200-300 words. Type the letter and include contact information. Most newspapers will call to verify accuracy.
- Use statistics and provocative anecdotes whenever possible.
- When addressing the letter, research the correct name and spelling of the editor.

Tips for Hosting a Media Open House

A media open house is an excellent opportunity to showcase a camp, the staff, and facility. An open house can take place during a special event such as:

- Camp Olympics — You can set up the camp in a series of Olympic-type sporting events and challenge the campers to compete against the counselors.
- Around the Farm — You could invite the media to see the amazing animals at camp. Show the media how the horses are groomed or how the children learn about snakes and spiders.
- The Three R's — Rappelling, Horseback Riding, and Raft Swimming — Invite the media to cover the "Three R's of Summer" as they watch children learn to rappel, ride a horse, and play in the water.

The following tips will assist you in organizing a successful event:

- Prepare a message. Remember to make sure to have two to three talking points in mind about what you want the media to know about the camp experience. For example, you can talk about how camp teaches children independence and a respect for their environment.
- Select a logical location. Make sure the location is safe and secure for reporters. Make sure the media understand if an event will be held outdoors and ask what equipment they will need from you (i.e. power supply, place to park a satellite truck, etc.)
- Notify the media. Send a media advisory, or media alert, to key reporters inviting them to the event. Always include contact information and a cell number where the reporter can call the day of the event. Call the reporter a day or two before the event to see if he/she will be able to attend. If it is not possible, extend an invitation for a reporter to cover the camp at a later date.
- For planning purposes, you may consider hosting your event on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday morning. Some media markets are looking for good stories to cover during their long weekend morning shows while other markets are short staffed on weekends. In some cases, you might want to check with a broadcast station first before planning your event.
- Provide the media with a press release about the event and/or a press kit on your camp. Make sure to include a brief bio on the camp director.
- Identify two to three people to speak with the media during the event. Ideally this would include a camp counselor, camper, and the camp director. Children under the age of 18 will need their parents to sign a waiver in advance of any media interviews.
- Book a photographer. Some weekly newspapers may be unable to send a photographer but are interested in covering the story. Your ability to provide photos to reporters will enhance your visibility.
- Designate a media greeter. You should have a designated person meet the media as they arrive and assist them during the event.
- Follow-up. Contact news outlets that expressed an interest in attending the event but did not show. They should receive the press release and photos with a letter asking them to consider covering the camp story.
- Evaluate news coverage. Stories should be evaluated in terms of your objectives. Were your talking points in the story? Were you able to recruit new campers as a result of the coverage?

Remember to thank reporters for covering your story. A personal letter can go a long way in a reporter remembering you next time you have a story to tell!

Tips for Pitching Talk Radio

Today there are over 10,000 radio stations in the United States. With advances in technology, many of these stations are also streaming live audio over the Web. Most media markets have talk radio shows with local guests discussing current events.

The most important factor in deciding whether talk radio is the right tactic for you is to determine the radio station's format and audience. Is the show a public affairs show or does it deal with family and parenting issues? Once you determine the correct show, you should consider the following steps:

- Identify the station and show you would like to reach and call the station to determine the appropriate person to contact. Typically it is the news director, producer, or host.
- Write a letter or email to your contact requesting a guest spot and outlining why the interview is timely and important to the listeners. Include your credentials to help illustrate why you are an expert on the topic.
- Follow your letter with a phone call.
- Once your show has been confirmed, determine all the details for your segment. Is the interview live or taped? How long is the interview? Will you be required to be in-studio? Will listeners be allowed to call-in with questions?
- Draft your key message points and any questions you may expect.
- Keep the interview very conversational. Make sure to keep your responses brief and bridge to your key talking points.
- Remember to offer listeners a "call to action." Direct them to your website and the ACA website for additional information

Tips for Pitching and Securing Broadcast Interviews

The notion of summer camp conjures up a variety of images including swimming and canoeing with friends, the shared experience of learning a new sport or outdoor activity, and the camaraderie of a camp side cookout. For the broadcast media, these visual images can be particularly compelling and a reason to cover the "story of the camp experience."

Most major cities are served by an ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox affiliate. With the growth of the cable television market, you will find most cities also have a local access station. Many of these stations produce their own morning, noon, evening, and weekend coverage. When pitching broadcast media, it is important to identify which broadcast segments are appropriate for your story. Usually feature news stories are covered in the morning or weekend time slots.

Here are some additional tips to keep in mind when pitching broadcast media:

- In most media markets, you will likely pitch your story to the assignment editor. It is best to send an email pitch first followed by a phone call. Your email should explain to the editor why your story is worthy of consideration. It should also include a reference to the camp spokesperson as well as a summary of camp activities the reporter would likely cover.
- You will also want to identify the reporters and editors that cover issues relating to youth development and camp. It is important to build relationships with these reporters and provide them with information on your camp.

- In addition to a pitch sent via email, you may consider sending an information kit on your camp. The kit may include background on the camp and activities as well as a bio on the camp director and/or camp spokesperson.
- It is always best to follow-up your correspondence with a personal phone call. All reporters face deadlines so it's best to reach them when it is convenient for them. You should avoid calling television reporters within an hour or two of their broadcast.
- Once a reporter has agreed to cover your story, you will need to find out specifics on the interview including:
 - How long will they need to be on-site?
 - Will the interview be live or taped?
 - What types of footage do they need?
 - Do they require b-roll footage?
 - What are their technical requirements? For example, will they need a flat, open space to park a satellite truck?
- You control the interview. Prepare your talking points in advance and discuss with the reporter the locations and activities he/she can expect to shoot.
- The interview begins once the reporter enters your property. Take into consideration the neatness of the campgrounds and camp buildings.
- Children under the age of 18 will need their parents to sign a waiver in advance of any media interviews.

Record the interview and assess the outcome. How many calls did you receive as a result of the story?
How did you articulate your key messages?

Key Messages by Topic

The following key messages are designed to help assist you in developing press materials, including press releases. They can also be used as your key messages during media interviews.

Accreditation:

- The American Camp Association is the advocate for the accredited-camp experience.
- ACA accreditation assures parents that the camp has had a regular, independent safety audit that goes beyond regulations in most states.
- ACA accreditation means that your child's camp cares enough to undergo a thorough (over 300 health and safety standards) review of its operation — from staff qualifications and training to emergency management.
- Accreditation is voluntary, and ACA accreditation assures families that camps have made the commitment to a safe, nurturing environment for their children.
- No accreditation process, no licensing program, no set of regulations or laws can guarantee safety. However, accreditation is the best evidence for parents that a camp is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for their children.

Adult Camps:

- Adult camps are a growing segment of the camp community. Like their counterparts in youth camps, adult specialty camps can also focus on team-building exercises and self-esteem issues.
- Adult camps offer an oasis of wholesome fun in a hectic and stressful world.
- Many camps provide physical challenges and thrilling adventures for the young at heart.

American Camp Association:

- The mission of the American Camp Association is enriching the lives of children, youth, and adults through the camp experience.
- ACA's over 7,000 members encompass all segments of the camp profession, including agencies serving youths and adults, independent camps, religious and fraternal organizations, and public/municipal agencies.
- ACA is the largest association serving the organized camp industry.

Benefits of Camp:

- An independent research firm, Philliber Research Associates, conducted the largest study of camper outcomes in the United States.
- The research found that 96 percent of children said that camp helped them make new friends and 92 percent of children found that the people at camp helped them feel good about themselves.
- Camp provides children with the opportunity to connect with nature, to participate in human-powered activities, and to benefit from personal and primary relationships.
- Many young people who attend camp experience an increase in their self-esteem and are able to establish a true sense of independence apart from their families.
- Camp is an element in a child's total development, and it complements the academic skills that are learned in school with experientially-based life skills.

Camp Costs and the Economy:

- Camp Costs: Fees to attend camp can vary anywhere from \$100 to \$800+ per week. There is a camp for every child and for every budget.
- Seventy-five percent of ACA-Accredited® camps offer some level of financial assistance to over one million children who are from underserved or lower-income families, have special medical needs, or special situations that might preclude them from attending camp.
- Each year, the ACA community mobilizes over \$39 million annually in camp scholarships.
- Camps are doing everything to assure that every child can attend camp regardless of economic status.
- Across the country, ACA is working with local partners to provide more camp experiences.
- There is a camp for every budget.

Community:

- Camp is one of the few institutions where young people can experience and satisfy their need for physical activity, creative expression, and true participation in a community environment.
- Noted experts in child development have expressed their thoughts on summer camp as a valuable resource for giving children the value of belonging to a community of their own.
- Camp connects children to authentic relationships that afford friendships, understanding, and appreciation for one another and the global community.

Corporate Camps:

- Social and business networks are critical in the 21st century.
- Camps working with the corporate world give adults the opportunity to develop/practice critical competencies such as trust building, communication, and critical thinking to achieve collective success and teamwork.

Family Camps:

- In 2008, 42% of camps offered family programs. That number is up from 2003, when 36 percent of camps offered family programming.
- Family camps allow families to unplug from cell phones, television, and iPods® and plug into each other.
- Family camps help parents who are looking for a healthy, positive experience to have with their children, allowing them to bond, grow closer, and build relationships as a family.
- Family camps offer cross-generational activities that produce positive outcomes that continue after the camp experience.

Grief Camps:

- As always, camp directors are responding to the needs of their campers in an ever-changing society.
- For generations the camp community has nurtured the souls of children, youth, and families.

Health and Wellness:

- The American Camp Association is a leader in health and safety standards for camps.
- The daily activities that make summer camps so memorable offer an added benefit to youth: healthful exercise.
- A summer experience at camp is the perfect prescription for keeping children active and healthy.
- A camp wellness program's main goal is to improve health habits of campers with activities tailored to the age and developmental levels of the children.
- Childhood obesity is a national epidemic. Research has found that children gain more weight over the summer months than during the school year. A child's summer camp experience can provide the physical outlets needed to keep kids healthy year-round.
- According to research conducted by ACA, 63 percent of children who learn new activities at camp continue engaging in these activities after they return home developing healthy habits that last a lifetime.

Homesickness:

- Homesickness is, above all, a normal feeling. It is the natural result of separating from home and loved ones.
- Opportunities for children to experience healthy, successful separation, help children discover who they are and to recognize their strengths.
- In a recent study, nearly 96 percent of all boys and girls who were spending two weeks or more at overnight camp reported some homesickness on at least one day.
- One way to minimize homesickness is to involve the child in the process of choosing a camp. The more that the child owns the decision, the more comfortable the child will feel being at camp.

How to Choose:

- Camp is a great place for children to unlock their potential and discover the world. This special environment helps young people develop positive self-esteem and enhance their social skills while having fun!
- ACA offers resources to help families find the right camp for every child. Visit our family-dedicated Web site — www.ACAcamps.org/campers-families — which not only helps parents search for the right camp through our extensive database, but also offers information on a variety of child and youth development issues.
- ACA offers *Camp e-News* — an e-newsletter designed to serve as a resource for families by answering questions and offering expert advice. The newsletter can be found at www.ACAcamps.org/campers-families/news-resources/parent-newsletter. Parents can sign up to receive the newsletter via e-mail.
- ACA has **24 local offices** around the country that provide help to parents as they search for camps in that particular region. Parents can find the office in the region they are interested in by visiting www.ACAcamps.org/campers-families.

Nature:

- According to a 2005 study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, American children spend on average 5½ hours a day plugged into some kind of electronic medium (TV, video games, computers, etc.). Most of that time is spent alone.
- Camp allows children to unplug from technology, and plug into the world around them —making authentic human connections, interacting with nature, and developing healthy behaviors.

- A recent study at the University of Essex in England concluded that evidence suggests that nature can help us recover from pre-existing stresses or problems, has an immunizing effect that can protect us from future stresses, and helps us to concentrate and think more clearly.
- Parents can view articles, online resources, and going green family fun ideas on ACA's parent Web site at www.ACAcamps.org/nature.

Specialty Camps:

- The industry has been very responsive to the needs and interests of our ever-changing population — young and adult campers.
- At a specialized camp, campers can find their niche, learn, and feel good about themselves.
- The diversity of camps today reflects the diversity of America — there is a camp for every interest — from a soccer camp to weight loss camp.
- ACA values diversity and inclusion — a community of camp professionals dedicated to enriching lives through the camp experience.

Special Needs:

- Camp allows special needs children to be children first.
- The camp community recognizes that the camp experience should be accessible to all children. A physical, medical, or mental disability is not a roadblock for a camp experience.
- Each year more than a million special needs children benefit from summer camp. Some camps specialize in serving certain groups while other camps integrate special-needs campers into the total camp population.
- A camp's terrain or activity-level may make it difficult to accommodate children with special needs. Parents should work with the camp to determine safety and medical accommodations, mainstreamed programming, and appropriate facilities.

Statistics:

- More than 12,000 day and resident camps exist in the United States; approximately 7,000 are resident camps, and 5,000 are day camps.
- Each year, more than 11 million children and adults attend camp.
- Nonprofit groups including youth agencies and religious organizations operate approximately 8,000 camps, and 4,000 are privately owned independent for-profit operators.
- Camps employ more than 1,200,000 adults to work as counselors, program/activity leaders, unit and program directors/supervisors, and in support services roles such as maintenance, administration, food service, and health care.
- The number of day camps in the U.S. has grown by nearly 90 percent in the past twenty years.

Technology:

- Technology at camp does not need to infringe upon the beauty of camp independence, but it can give the parent a means to feel connected.
- Technology at camp can enhance all the positive aspects of the camp environment.
- According to a 2005 study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, American children spend on average 5½ hours a day plugged into some kind of electronic medium (TV, video games, computers, etc.). Most of that time is spent alone.
- Camp allows children to unplug from technology, and plug into the world around them — making authentic human connections, interacting with nature, and developing healthy behaviors.

Trends:

- Camps continuously discover new and vital ways to promote learning through partnerships with parents and children; with home and camp, and with school and camp.
- In an ACA survey, 75 percent of camp directors reported adding new activities and programs over the last few years. The newest program additions in recent years are challenging and adventurous activities, including high and low ropes courses, climbing walls, zip lines, backpacking, mountain biking, and cave exploring.
- In an ACA survey, over half of the camps reported having community service or good deed programs incorporated into their programs. The top projects conducted at camps were community clean-ups, food drives, recycling programs, and volunteering with senior citizens and hospital patients.
- Nearly 4 percent of all students attend school year-round. Camps are extending the season and diversifying their services.

Weight Loss:

- Child obesity affects one in five children in the United States.
- Each summer, the more than 5,000 overnight camps and more than 7,000 day camps provide leadership and promote healthy, active living—at least while children are at camp.
- In the camp community, children and youth participate in healthy activities that contribute to the growth of healthy habits

Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

What is Accreditation?

ACA Accreditation means that a camp cares enough to undergo a thorough (over 300 health and safety standards) review of its operation – from staff qualifications and training to emergency management. American Camp Association collaborates with experts from The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Red Cross, and other youth service agencies to assure that current practices at camp reflect the most up-to-date, research-based standards in camp operation. Camps and ACA form a partnership that promotes growth and fun in an environment committed to safety.

What is the difference between state licensing of camps and accreditation by ACA?

Accreditation is voluntary and ACA accreditation assures families that camps have made the commitment to a safe, nurturing environment for their children. If a state requires licensing, it is mandatory; licensing requirements vary from state to state. ACA standards are recognized by courts of law and government regulators as the standards of the camp community.

Does ACA accreditation require a criminal background check?

ACA accreditation standards require a staff screening system which may include criminal background checks where permitted by law. When talking to a camp director, ask what the screening process for that camp includes.

How can parents be sure their child will be safe at camp?

Nothing substitutes for the vigilance and care of parents in determining a safe situation for their children. While no institution--schools, churches, youth programs, camps, or families--can absolutely guarantee a child's safety, parents should take an active role in determining that camps are fully committed to providing a summer of fun and growth in well supervised and nurturing camp environments.

What questions should parents ask to help them find the right camp for their child?

Talking to a camp director will give you a good idea about the camp's philosophy. It is also an opportunity to ask the director some questions including:

- What training do counselors receive?
- What is the counselor-to-camper ratio?
- What are desired qualities in camp staff?
- How are behavioral and disciplinary problems handled?
- How does the camp handle homesickness and other adjustment issues?
- Is the camp accredited by the American Camp Association? Why? Why not?

Crisis Communication Questions

Following a death/accident/abuse allegation, media questions are often pointed and difficult to field. Listed below are some of the common questions and general responses that can be tailored to address individual situations. As always, utilize proven key messages and the resources available within ACA for help.

Is the camp accredited?

Yes (or no) Camp ___ is (or is not) an ACA-accredited camp. You can find the current listing of ACA accredited camps on ACA's Web site at www.ACAcamps.org. [We do not provide this information unless directly asked.]

Will you (ACA) investigate?

We are an educational organization. State authorities have not granted us authority to investigate, gather testimony, secure confidential reports, or subpoena confidential records. We rely on officials with such authority to conduct investigations. ACA is always deeply saddened when we learn of any tragedy or allegation of wrongdoing that affects the life of a child. We are committed to finding new ways to educate camp staff on best practices, safety, standards, and risk management within the camp community.

Will you (ACA) remove accreditation?

Accreditation is normally granted or removed based on results of a full accreditation visit and verified compliance with accreditation criteria. This includes compliance with up to 300 health and safety standards covering health, safety, and program issues. When those authorized under state law to conduct investigations have completed their work, a re-accreditation visit may or may not be warranted. Accreditation is not automatically removed from a camp based on an accident or injury. No accreditation process, no licensing program, no set of regulations or laws can guarantee safety. However, accreditation can be withdrawn from a camp if ACA is notified by appropriate authorities that laws which significantly affect the health and safety of campers or staff have been violated

Was accreditation ever removed from this/a camp?

Official records of a camp's accreditation history are maintained at our national office. We do not maintain that record. You may contact the standards department at the national office.

Camps can lose accreditation for other reasons, such as for non-payment of fees or for failure to get an accreditation visit in the required cycle. So, that information alone may not be helpful.

ACA has, however, removed accreditation from camps for significant health and safety violations. Therefore, though not a guarantee, current ACA accreditation is still the best evidence of a camp's commitment to providing a safe and nurturing environment for children.

Are there complaints against this/a camp?

ACA has a process for complaint resolution on issues about camps. This process focuses on finding resolution. The details of complaints are not available as a public record. However, violations of ACA's Code of Ethics may result in penalties for the camp, including removal of accreditation. [View Complaint Resolution Process Manual](#).

What is your standard for ____?

A brief summary of all the requirements of ACA standards can be found on ACA's Web site. Answers to some of the frequently asked questions about standards can be found at www.ACAcamps.org/funsafety.

Should this have happened?

All institutions in our world – churches, schools, youth programs, camps, families – recognize that no one has an impenetrable safety net from the ills of society or from harm. ACA training and guidelines are designed to educate camps to take all reasonable precautions to provide an environment that makes safety for children the top priority.

Has this happened before? How common are drownings in camps? Abuse, fires, etc?

Because “camp” is defined by society very broadly, we do not have specific data on crisis situations in the industry at large. Within ACA, we hear of few such incidents each year. But any tragedy that affects the life of a child is a concern for those of us devoted to the well-being of children through safe and positive camp experiences.

Are background checks required for staff in camps? What about for international staff?

Criminal background checks are just one piece of ACA's comprehensive approach to evaluating the background of applicants and their acceptability to work with youth. Our standards also require reference checks, personal interviews, and work history reviews. The screening requirements, along with strong training and supervision guidelines, combine to provide a comprehensive approach to child protection.

The screening and training requirements for international staff are no different than those for U.S. staff. International placement agencies, familiar with the resources and agencies in the countries from which international staff come, help with the initial application and screening steps.

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