

5. Mean Girls

A Hotline caller wanted to know if we had ever helped camps deal with severe relational aggression that started during a camp session and carried on after camp via social media. While in session, the caller's camp determined they had a situation of severe relational aggression by a group of high school girls toward a socially awkward cabin mate. The mean girls targeted her after a conversation about boys during which the awkward girl shared that she'd never had a boyfriend. The mean girls kept teasing her about the admission and insinuated that it was because the girl was a lesbian and liked other girls. The taunters' ringleader got the whole cabin riled up and paranoid that the awkward girl was identifying and grooming her cabin mates to be queer. So an innocent occurrence of touching while in line at a meal (a hand brushing a hip) erupted as an incident of inappropriate touching and upset the whole cabin. The camp staff stepped in to address the issues and thought they had everything amicably resolved so that everyone was comfortable. The camp even sent one of the mean girls home because of the incident. However, post camp a parent of a cabin mate let the camp know that the mean girls were still aggressively bullying the awkward girl via social media.

What can we learn from this case?

Policies and Risk Management	Staff Training	Key Takeaway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your rules for camper behavior? Are they made known to parents and campers prior to camp? • What is your policy and tolerance for relational aggression and other forms of bullying? • Does your camp have policies regarding how much information is shared with parents of uninvolved campers who witness and experience the issues created by severe bullying and relational aggression? • Do you work to make your camp a bully-free zone and encourage campers to stand up for one another if they witness unkind behavior directed at someone else? • Do you ensure that staff behaviors at camp match your camp's values? • Are your camper and staff supervision policies and procedures well enforced and intentional to minimize camper behavior issues? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are staff trained to be attentive, active, and involved while supervising campers? • Are staff trained to understand that active supervision is the key to keeping campers from harming each other? • Do you train camp staff to recognize and respond to all forms of bullying? • Are camp staff able to recognize and respond to peer-to-peer abuse? • What policies and procedures does your camp have in place to resolve bullying issues for both victims and perpetrators? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff to be vigilant about all forms of bullying and to intervene when they see or hear something. • Staff training on bullying should be mandatory for all staff. • Being aware is the best defense for protecting the vulnerable and targeted victims (and bystanders too). • We cannot allow bullying to interfere with all campers having the opportunity to enjoy camp.

Resources

- "Girls at Camp: Overcoming Relational Aggression," by Bob Ditter; *Camping Magazine*: [ACAcamps.org/article/camping-magazine/girls-camp-overcoming-relational-aggression](https://www.acacamps.org/article/camping-magazine/girls-camp-overcoming-relational-aggression)
- "Bullying Prevention: Are You Up to Speed?" by Bob Ditter: [ACAcamps.org/resources/bullying-prevention-are-you-speed](https://www.acacamps.org/resources/bullying-prevention-are-you-speed)
- Cyberbullying fact sheet, by Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin; Cyberbullying Research Center: [cyberbullying.org/cyberbullying_fact_sheet.pdf](https://www.cyberbullying.org/cyberbullying_fact_sheet.pdf)
- "Is It Rude, Is It Mean, or Is It Bullying? Distinguishing Problem Behaviors at Camp," by Signe Whitson; *Camping Magazine*: [ACAcamps.org/article/camping-magazine/it-rude-it-mean-or-it-bullying-distinguishing-problem-behaviors-camp](https://www.acacamps.org/article/camping-magazine/it-rude-it-mean-or-it-bullying-distinguishing-problem-behaviors-camp)
- "Screening Tool for Professionals & Parents Addressing Bullying Allegations": [signewhitson.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ScreeningTool.pdf](https://www.signewhitson.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ScreeningTool.pdf)
- "Preventing Peer-to-Peer Abuse: Supervision as a Line of Defense," by Katie Johnson; *Camping Magazine*: [ACAcamps.org/article/camping-magazine/preventing-peer-peer-abuse-supervision-line-defense](https://www.acacamps.org/article/camping-magazine/preventing-peer-peer-abuse-supervision-line-defense)