

Under the Influence:

Respect, Responsibility, and the Conduct of Camp Counselors

Stephen Wallace, M.S. Ed.



Among the many challenges camp directors face at staff training time is effectively addressing the personal conduct of those charged with caring for the campers — a task made increasingly difficult by high rates of underage drinking (not to mention other drug use) among high school and college students. Tackling this challenge strictly from a command-and-control, behavior “management” perspective bypasses important opportunities to both protect children and teach valuable, lifelong lessons to new generations of leaders and role models.

Chief among those lessons is that the campers are under their influence at camp . . . and throughout the year.

An Epidemic Defined

Any discussion about underage drinking is best preceded by looking at the facts about youth and alcohol.

- Alcohol is used by young people more frequently, and more heavily, than are all other drugs combined.
- The average age that young people start drinking is thirteen.
- The younger an individual is when he or she starts to drink, the higher the chances are he or she will have alcohol-related problems later in life.

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- Alcohol use by young people affects still-developing cognitive abilities (until the early- to mid-twenties) and impairs memory and learning.
- Alcohol-related automobile crashes kill thousands of teens each year and injure millions more.

Summer Staff at Risk

Not surprisingly, young people in their late teens and early twenties (who may make up the bulk of a camp's summer staff) are most at risk from binge drinking and its aftermath.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration breaks out the risks in the following ways:

- Binge drinking, often beginning around age thirteen, tends to increase during adolescence, peak in young adulthood (ages eighteen to twenty-two), and then gradually decreases.
- Binge drinking during the past thirty days was reported by 8 percent of youth ages twelve to seventeen and 30 percent of those ages eighteen to twenty.
- Among twelve- to twenty-year-olds, 15 percent were binge drinkers, and 7 percent were heavy drinkers.
- Nearly one out of every five teenagers (16 percent) has experienced "blackout" spells in which he or she could not remember what happened the previous evening because of heavy drinking.
- Binge drinking during high school, especially among males, is strongly predictive of binge drinking in college.

- Frequent binge drinkers were eight times more likely than non-binge drinkers to miss a class, fall behind in schoolwork, get hurt or injured, and damage property.

Indeed, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* points out that alcohol use by young people is a leading contributor to death from injuries, plays a significant role in risky sexual behavior, increases the risk of assault, and is associated with academic failure and illicit drug use. Specifically, this important report highlights that:

- An estimated 1,700 college students die each year from alcohol-related injuries;
- Approximately 600,000 students are injured while under the influence of alcohol;
- Some 700,000 students are assaulted by other students who have been drinking; and
- About 100,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assaults or date rapes.

Last but not least, there are also legal consequences — including arrest — associated with underage possession . . . consequences even the most sophisticated and well-educated counselor may overlook.

Communication With Counselors

Too often, dialogue between administrators and staff is one way — highlighting policies, procedures, and disciplinary steps rather than the finely textured reasons for them in the first place. Replacing ultimatums with informed discussion helps build important connections between rules and rationale, addressing expectations for personal conduct based on the principles of respect and responsibility. Those principles reinforce the incredibly powerful role that counselors play in influencing the choices of youth.

This approach works best as part of an overall strategy that encourages safe, healthy — and legal — behaviors by staff members. Anything less leaves camps susceptible to the modeling of inappropriate and unacceptable behavior, examples that easily transcend time and place, indelibly marking young minds already struggling to reconcile many competing messages about personal conduct and responsibility.

Respect for Community

A critical component of any well-functioning summer camp is respect: respect for oneself, respect for others, and respect for the community. Bundled together, they promote a true appreciation for the role of camp counselor and the incredible power it bestows.

In theory, signing on for the job means relinquishing the ego-centric patterns of thinking and behaving generally promoted in our wildly individualistic culture, perhaps especially during the college years, and embracing an other-centered approach to caring for, and about, all members of the camp community, particularly the children. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. Reframing

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staff decision-making with an eye toward personal accountability related to respect makes choices about personal behavior more a referendum on commitment to the campers than a divisive game of cat and mouse between counselors and administrators.

Responsibilities and Rewards of Being a Mentor

With respect comes responsibility, most poignantly reflected in the relationships between counselors and campers and most critically actualized in the role modeling that takes place whenever there is interaction (in person, on the phone, or online). Helping counselors internalize a true understanding of their responsibility to campers sensitizes them to the very real, and very likely, consequences of their own decisions, thus making poor choices less likely.

Teens Today research from SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) points out that young people rank “setting an example” for brothers and sisters as one of the most commonly held reasons they choose not to drink or use drugs. A similar sense of responsibility can be nurtured when it comes to counselors and their campers. And the benefits can be measured in behavioral outcomes.

First, young people with an informal, natural mentor in their lives — such as a camp counselor — are more likely than not to believe their mentor has a responsibility to them *and* that they have a responsibility to their mentor . . . such as “being good” and/or living up to their mentor’s expectations. When those expectations include discussion of, or modeling behavior regarding, alcohol, drugs, and sex, the results can be dramatic.

According to *Teens Today*, middle and high school students reporting a high level of mentoring are significantly more likely than those reporting a low level of mentoring to avoid risky behaviors. More to the point, young people who have attended a day or overnight summer camp are less likely to drink (26 percent versus 36 percent); use marijuana (8 percent versus 18 percent); or engage in sexual behavior, such as intercourse (29 percent versus 40 percent); or oral sex (29 percent versus 39 percent) than are their non-camper peers.

There are other important benefits as well. Young people with a mentor are more likely to report having a high Sense of Self (46 percent versus 25 percent) and to say they take positive risks (38 percent versus 28 percent), such as performing charitable work, starting a business, taking advanced placement courses, or trying out for a sports team. Looking at campers and non-campers, the numbers tell a similar story (53 percent versus 40 percent and 48 percent versus 30 percent, respectively).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Sense of Self and Positive Risk-Taking are each linked to lower incidence of destructive, or potentially destructive, behaviors and to overall mental health.

Strategic Approaches to Prevention

Of course, discussions about decision-making imbued with references to respect and responsibility are most effective when they represent just one thread of a larger strategic approach to prevention

Sense of Self

Sense of Self is a young adult’s self-evaluation on his/her progress in three key developmental areas: identity formation, independence, and peer relationships. *Teens Today* research has found that teens with a high Sense of Self feel more positive about their identity, growing independence, and relationships with peers than do teens with a low Sense of Self. Specifically, high Sense of Self teens reported feeling smart, successful, responsible, and confident and cited positive relationships with parents. Also, significantly, high Sense of Self teens are more likely to avoid alcohol and drug use than are their low Sense of Self peers.

Positive Risk-Taking

Teens who take positive risks (Risk Seekers) in their lives (such as joining a club or tackling a physical challenge); in their schools (such as taking advanced placement courses, trying out for a sports team, or running for student council); and in their communities (such as volunteering to help the homeless or elderly, starting a business, or working with younger children) are 20 percent more likely than teens who do not take positive risks (Risk Avoiders) to avoid alcohol and other drugs. Risk Seekers are also more likely than Risk Avoiders to describe themselves as responsible, confident, successful, and optimistic and to report they often feel happy.

that encompasses well-defined, well-rehearsed, and well-executed strategies designed to create change.

And when it comes to influencing the personal behavior of counselors, effective strategies must be multidimensional, systemic, and practical.

A multidimensional approach:

1. Changes commonly held attitudes and perceptions about “normal” and acceptable behavior by applying social learning theory to community-based social marketing initiatives;
2. Involves staff members in the planning and implementation of practical, replicable activities that offer meaningful alternatives for fun, camaraderie, and release;
3. Provides reinforcing educational information about the risks, including legal ones, associated with certain behavior;
4. Establishes clear, unambiguous expectations for conduct, both in camp and during free time; and
5. Enforces consequences for violating camp rules.

Social Learning Theory and Social Marketing Campaigns

Social learning theory addresses, in part, behavior change resulting from the modeling, observation, and imitation of others, directly or indirectly. It recognizes the prominent role of reinforcement (which makes behavior more likely) and punishment (which makes behavior less likely) as they relate to the environment in which a person is making choices. For example, when a counselor's decision to avoid smoking marijuana while working at camp conforms to the behavior of the other counselors, she may receive reinforcement for that behavior in the form of acceptance. She may also be reinforced by a third person (such as the camp director for staying out of trouble) or by the satisfying results of the behavior itself (such as being more connected to the children). Conversely, the observation of punishment reinforces the unacceptable nature of certain choices. Research suggests that many behaviors are learned through modeling, including those involving moral judgments of "right" and "wrong."

Social marketing campaigns involve the planning and execution of marketing programs to bring about social change. According to the Social Marketing Institute, the ultimate objective of such programs is to influence action. The desired actions, avoiding alcohol when underage for example, are more likely when the perceived benefits are greater than the perceived costs. Those perceptions can be created or altered through standard marketing techniques applied to social behavior. Such campaigns have proven successful in addressing a number of important issues, such as seat-belt use, youth smoking, HIV/AIDs prevention, and environmental citizenship.

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It is also important that camp directors not fall into the trap of "owning" the problem. That lets other important stakeholders off the hook. A systemic view involves all members of the community in building and embedding its multidimensional approach. Not until everyone from the counselor to the cook recognizes the role of community in establishing and enforcing reasonable expectations for behavior can we effectively avoid mixed messages and achieve desired results.

Finally, whatever steps are taken to ensure appropriate conduct by staff must be practical and thus achievable. Changing a culture requires repetition in messaging, content, and consequence, and that is only possible when the overall strategy is easy to explain, easy to implement, and easy to measure.

So What Can You Do ASAP?

- ✓ Assess the situation at your camp and which issues seem most problematic.
- ✓ Support the active involvement of all segments of your community (including the counselors) in developing a strategy to address staff behavior.
- ✓ Actively communicate expectations, information, and consequences.
- ✓ Provide alternative activities and multiple channels for feedback to determine results.

With concerted effort and a well-developed strategy, we can empower our counselors to model positive, appropriate behaviors by reinforcing respect and responsibility in the camp community. ■

Photo courtesy of Camp Winnebago, Fayette, Maine.

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Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility

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SADD *Teens Today* Research

www.SADD.org/TeensToday.htm

SADD's "An (other) Inconvenient Truth" and "Why Not 21?" Op-Eds

www.sadd.org/opeds.htm

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

ncadistore.samhsa.gov/catalog/facts.aspx?topic=159

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

oas.samhsa.gov/nsduhLatest.htm

Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking

www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/calltoaction.pdf

Why 21? — "Get the Truth About the 21 Law"

www.Why21.org

Staff Training and Risk Management — Key Risk Information for Front Line Staff

Charles R. Gregg and Catherine Hansen-Stamp*

You are in charge of your camp's spring staff training and are scrambling to pull together the agenda for this year's training for staff counselors and leaders. There is a lot of information and wisdom you would like to impart to them in a limited amount of time. What is important? How do you get staff "buy-in"? What is at stake for the camp? For staff? For the campers and their families?

It is critical to keep in mind that your leaders are the visible and tangible part of camp that campers and parents see, listen to, and hear about — a major element of how camper families form a vision of the camp's personality, mission, and focus — from the get-go. Your leaders are on the front line, teaching skills, telling stories, supervising campers, and tucking campers into their bunks as they miss Mom and Dad. They are leaders, role models, and mentors and can be absolutely formative in the life of a camper — or not. Leaders need to know that their words and actions have the most direct impact on the campers — not only in framing the camp's reputation and personality, but in addressing risk management and legal exposure.

In light of leaders' important role, consider presenting your information in a framework that assists them in understanding your camp, and their role in the risk management equation. What risks are we talking about and who are we managing them for? There are really two sets of risks. First are the inherent and other risks of camp and its activities — that is, the risks associated with what, where, and how camper activities (structured or unstructured) take place, and who is involved (e.g.: camp counselor, counselor in training, independent contractor). These risks can result in injury or other loss to campers. Second is the risk of loss (monetary or otherwise) to the camp operation (or its leaders) often resulting from an injury or loss to a camper. What do staff need to know in the effort to minimize the risk of loss to both camper and camp? Key is the concept that the most productive effort is to endeavor to run a quality camp — of which well-trained staff are an integral part.¹ Equally key is the fact that although a camp and its staff can endeavor to responsibly manage risks, they cannot promise or ensure campers' safety. Importantly, camp leaders have the ability to instill in campers — even young campers — the reality that campers share in the responsibility for their own well-being and the well-being of others at camp.

In this article, we will discuss the value in giving staff an overarching framework to set the table for effective staff training. We will then discuss staff's role in this framework and key areas they need to understand to be effective leaders at your camp. We will refer to American Camp Association® (ACA) Standards² that provide direction on the content of staff training. Lastly, we will provide

guidance on the legal significance of staff training, and its impact on a camp's legal exposure.

Understanding the Camp

It is vital that your leaders understand your camp — the major themes that will permeate all the smaller details they learn about their particular duties and responsibilities at camp. These include the following:

1. The camp's history, mission, and culture — What does your camp want the campers to "get" from their stay at your camp? What type of campers does your camp draw? What makes your camp special, unique, and different in its focus? What, historically, have been the camp's biggest challenges or issues, from a risk management perspective? You can discuss the camp's incident history (considering the categories listed here) to give counselor's some direct insight — including informing them of both serious and minor incidents.
2. The camp's physical environment — both on premises and off premises (e.g., trips taken away from camp on federal or state land, via a camp's permitted use). You know your camp's environment (and history) well. What is the picture that leaders need to understand? It's not only the hazards and risks, but the neat places to see as well — mountains, gullies, ponds, caves, etc. Give them this overview. Use graphics such as a slide show or movie to give them the big picture as you describe it.
3. Facilities and structures — What is where? Give them the overview and the tour. Help them understand the hazards and issues here — including access to facilities for those with disabilities. Does the camp have any waterfront gimmicks or outdoor climbing walls, and are those secured when not in use? What are the on-site issues?
4. Programming and activities — Even if a leader is hired as a leader in the equine program, all leaders need an effective overview of your programs and activities. If this is a leader's first year, they may have viewed your Web site but not taken much in. Treat them like a first-time camper, and give them the breakdown of what your camp has to offer, across the board, and the "theme" you may use to offer these activities to campers and provide them with choices.
5. Equipment and animals — What basic equipment (or animals) does the camp offer and use? Where is equipment stored? Where are horses pastured, and what is the routine? Even if a leader is hired to lead backcountry trips, it is valuable

for them to understand the basics of the whole operation — particularly if they might consider cutting through the horse pasture to get the campers back to camp! No matter what a leader’s tasks, what are the basics in accessing equipment, storing it, recording its use or ongoing maintenance?

6. Transportation — Will staff be assisting with transportation? What vehicles does the camp use, where are they stored, and what, if any training is required? What issues and challenges has/does the camp face in transporting campers — either on or off premises?
7. General health and emergency response — Where do campers go for routine health concerns or to take their medicine and, importantly, what is the counselor’s role here? What are the basics for emergency response both on premises and off, and in the event of either a programming emergency or a camp crisis (e.g., tornado or flood)?
8. ACA standards, camp policies, and relevant laws or regulations — If the camp is accredited by ACA (and even if it is not), leaders need to understand, generally, what the ACA standards and camp policies are, and their significance for staff. The notion that the camp’s accredited status rests on all staff honoring the standards, as they apply to the camp — and importantly, that a leader can increase risks to the camper as well as increase a camp’s legal exposure in ignoring or violating ACA standards or camp policies. Camp policies include those that are basic to the running of the camp, as well as those that apply to a leader’s specific position and duties. Be mindful that the camp should, in its policies, emphasize the appropriate place for, and value of, a leader’s ability to exercise judgment in the performance of his or her duties. Camp policies and training should incorporate relevant laws or state camp licensing requirements.

Understanding the Counselor’s Role

Having learned about the camp, the counselor must next understand her or his role in achieving the goals of the camp including the importance of responsibly managing its risks. The camp’s expectations in this regard must be made clear and reinforced by documentation discussed below.

The ACA standards speak forcefully to the pre-camp training of counselors and others, and will be referred to as we describe the following aspects of that training (*See, generally, ACA Standard HR 11.*):

1. The counselor will have general supervisory and monitoring responsibilities relating to the entire camp population, and will have specific responsibilities relating to assigned activities and campers. In this regard, the camp should provide counselors with a general job description and overview of the camp. *See ACA Standard HR 6.*
2. Regarding the general responsibilities, some camps have

“Is the counselor ever “off duty,” for example, with respect to the welfare of a camper?”

announced their expectations to include “24/7” oversight of the campers — a responsibility that transcends specific assignments relating to an activity, location, or group. While the intent is clear — every counselor is responsible for every camper (on and off the campus) — the charge can be daunting and requires some explanation of the practical limits of what a staff member can do. Is the counselor ever “off duty,” for example, with respect to the welfare of a camper? Counselors must be clearly instructed in the “what, where, when, and how” of their responsibilities to observe, report, and come to the aid of a camper. *See ACA Standards HR 8 and 14.*

3. A counselor will have specific duties relating to certain activities and is likely to have responsibilities for a cabin. *See ACA Standard HR 7.* Management must be satisfied regarding the counselor’s skills in these areas, and if they are lacking, provide immediate training to meet the camp’s expectations. In the hiring process, counselors will have presumably presented certifications in certain skill-sets, if appropriate. The counselor should be trained with respect to management of natural and other physical hazards, and the use of equipment and gear.
4. Crucial are the counselor’s skills in behavior management, the identification of the beginning of emotional and other conflicts, and maintaining the proper relationship with the campers — including modeling good behavior and adherence to camp values and policies. *See ACA Standards HR 15, 16, and 17, for example.* Training with respect to behavior issues is particularly important in this era of “the virtual kid,” who comes to camp over-sanitized medically and emotionally, and often delayed in recognizing risks, using good judgment to manage them, and accepting accountability for under-performance.
5. Counselors should, in fact, be aware of ALL camp policies, as noted above, including Internet and telephone use (by campers and staff); drug and alcohol use; and an absolute “no tolerance” for one-on-one relationships or inappropriate contacts during or after the camp session. *See ACA Standard HR 8.*
6. Counselors must understand their role in spotting health and emergency medical issues, know to whom to report such issues, and understand policies regarding the Health Center

and its use. See *ACA Standard HW 13*. They must understand their responsibilities and the limits of what they are authorized to do in the management of camper medications during trips off campus.

7. Counselors must understand the camp's Emergency Action Plan, selected strategies for the waterfront and other areas and travel off campus to urban and remote areas. Instruction should include the matter of unidentified visitors to the campus — what, and to whom to report, regarding these visitors. See *ACA Standards OM 12 – 15*.
8. Counselors must understand camp policies regarding sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual conduct and the reporting of information that might reflect incidents of child neglect or abuse. See *ACA Standards HR 8 and 11*.
9. If the camp considers it appropriate, counselors should be instructed in the matter of observing and reporting on the performance and behavior of peers. In addition, counselors should be briefed on their role in supervising and working with junior staff, like counselors in training. For example, what are the appropriate responsibilities of a junior counselor, and how can they productively assist the counselor? The same goes for a counselor's interactions with independent contractors. Will the counselor be attending an afternoon raft trip with campers, conducted by an independent contractor? What is the counselor's role on this trip?
10. Counselors should be trained on the importance of exercising good judgment, and the flexibility, in the face of camp policies or not, to exercise judgment in appropriate situations (and your staff/training manual should reflect this). Importantly, if counselors disagree with or are confused about a particular camp policy or see a problem or hazard at camp, they should be encouraged to voice their concerns to camp staff immediately, and understand that they will be listened to.
11. The curriculum for counselor training should be written, followed consistently, and updated frequently. If there is a question about what a counselor was told on a particular matter during training, management should be able to point to the relevant item in a training manual or agenda.

The items described above, and others, should be documented in a manner that reflects the counselor's understanding of them and intent to abide by them. Appropriate vehicles for that documentation would be a counselor code of conduct, a job description, an employee manual, and an employment agreement. In addition to providing guidance and a reference, these documents should make clear the seriousness of compliance and the consequences of non-compliance. Considering differing state laws on the "employee-at-will" doctrine and other employment issues, camps should consult with their legal counsel in crafting these documents.³

Legal Perspective on Staff Training

What are the legal implications of a counselor's role and training? The counselor is at the forefront of the camp's interaction with its campers. The counselor IS the camp. The law recognizes this and may find the camp liable for a counselor's wrongful acts and omissions. It is critical, therefore, that the counselor understand and be trained in applicable ACA standards and the camp's practices, for the emotional and physical well-being of the camper — and to minimize the risk of loss to campers and camp. The counselor's conduct will be compared with how a reasonable counselor would have acted in the same or similar circumstances. Failure to act reasonably can expose the counselor, and the camp, to a charge of negligence. More severe errors in conduct can bring greater exposure — even criminal penalties. Camp management may find it helpful to discuss issues of direct and vicarious liability with their legal counsel, or perhaps have counsel participate in the training session, to better impress upon the trainees the exposures they and the camp share — civil and criminal.⁴

Conclusion

Make training interactive, informative, and clear. Encourage questions and concerns, and help your counselors understand that what they say and do really matters — for the welfare of the campers, the camp, and the counselors, too. Help them understand that it serves the best interests of the camp, its families, and the counselors, to train and present a counseling staff that partner professionally with camp management, parents, and campers to deliver an experience of positive growth and development. It all begins with training. ■

This article contains general information only and is not intended to provide specific legal advice. Camps and related organizations should consult with a licensed attorney regarding application of relevant state and federal law as well as considerations regarding their specific business or operation.

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Endnotes

- ¹ See *The CampLine*, Spring 2005 article "Important Staffing Issues for Running A Quality Camp Program" for a broader look at these issues.
- ² See *The American Camp Association Accreditation Process Guide* (2007), as updated.
- ³ See *The CampLine*, Fall 2007 article "Avoiding Staff Surprises" for more detail on these issues.
- ⁴ See *The CampLine*, article cited in endnote 1, and *The CampLine*, Winter 2008 article "A Camp's Duty of Care – In Good Times and Bad" for a more detailed look at the duty issue.



International Staff Immunizations: Requirements and Recommendations

In 2008, an estimated 26,000 international staff worked at camps throughout the United States. Of those, roughly 80 percent worked at an ACA-Accredited® camp. Working with international staff is a rewarding experience; however, challenges may present themselves without careful planning on your part, specifically with regards to immunizations.

It's important to remember that international staff members are just that — staff. They are not campers or guests. As staff, it is realistic to require that they meet camp expectations regarding immunizations and are able to provide a complete immunization record. It's unreasonable to assume that you will have time to assist them in obtaining what they need once they arrive on campus. While most international staff have insurance, often that insurance doesn't cover immunizations.

For most countries, there are no visa requirements for immunizations. And, while working with an international recruitment agency can simplify the process, it is still up to the camp to provide medical forms and requirements for immunizations. All requirements should be communicated as soon as an employment offer is made, as immunizations may require lead times and are often easier for staff to obtain in their own country. (Additionally, it is also important to request that international counselors bring an adequate supply of any prescription medications. It may be difficult to get refills in the U.S.)

When identifying immunization requirements for international staff, first consider what your state requires. For example, Massachusetts is very specific with regard to regulations, other states may not be as specific. Many states with more rigorous regulations

Once you have hired an international staff member, it's imperative that you communicate the required health and immunization information.

For most countries, there are no visa requirements for immunizations. Check with your state department of health for any state requirements. ACA standards require a health history form, complete with immunization record. This includes the date of the staff's last tetanus shot. If the staff choose to fill out an exemption form, this form must be signed and on file.

It is the camp's responsibility to provide a list of required immunizations and health forms. Do not assume that new staff are aware of what they need. Even when working with an international recruitment service, confirm what your obligations are and what the service provides on your behalf.

Early communication is preferred. It is easier for international staff to get necessary immunizations at home than it is once they are on site.



Resources

Centers for Disease Control — www.CDC.gov

ACA Accreditation Resources — www.ACAcamps.org/accreditation/hyes.php

Employing international staff can provide a rich experience for both campers and staff alike. To avoid potential risks, it's best to have immunizations addressed well before campers arrive. The best risk management is ensuring that everyone is protected through proper immunization.

will spell out what international staff must have in terms of immunizations. Susan Baird, R.N., M.P.H., M.A., chair for the Healthy Camp Study Advisory Committee, suggests camp nurses check the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC's) Web site, www.CDC.gov, which offers extensive information on immunizations, including schedules for adults and children.

ACA standards require a health history form, including a list of immunizations and date of last tetanus shot. ACA standards do al-

low for exemptions, however a signed exemption form must be on file. (Visit the ACA Web site at www.ACAcamps.org/accreditation/hyes.php for standards at a glance, or to download a copy of the ACA Health Forms.) Camp is a perfect setting for puncture wounds and lacerations, so current tetanus should be strongly encouraged. In addition, the hepatitis vaccine is important. While proper safety procedures should be learned during orientation, it is still possible for counselors to come into contact with bodily fluids.

There are not many differences between foreign and U.S. immunization requirements. Most nurses will be able to easily identify what international staff have had, and what they may lack. Nurses should also make a special note of any staff or campers that have not received all immunizations, either because they are from another country, or because they have a signed exemption form, so that these individuals can be identified immediately if an outbreak occurs. It is important to remember that because camp is a "closed" community, two or more cases of similar symptoms are actually considered an outbreak by the CDC.

Employing international staff can provide a rich experience for both campers and staff alike. To avoid potential risks, it's best to have immunizations addressed well before campers arrive. The best risk management is ensuring that everyone is protected through proper immunization. Remember, camps have the right to require immunization information from international staff. ■

Take Control Before the Crisis

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Important Summer Resources

Web Links

- Centers for Disease Control (www.CDC.gov)
- The National Pediculosis Association (www.headlice.org)
- National Women's Health Resource Center (www.healthyywomen.org)
- ACA's overview of criminal background checks (www.ACAcamps.org/publicpolicy/documents/CBCedPiece2-07.doc)
- U.S. Department of Labor: (www.dol.gov)
- ACA's overview of Mandated Reporter Laws: (www.ACAcamps.org/publicpolicy/documents/MandatedReporter.pdf)
- ACA's article on searching camper's belongings *Privacy vs. Protection — Can You Search Camper and Staff Belongings?* (www.ACAcamps.org/campline — Click on the Fall 1998 issue of *The CampLine*)
- Grief Recovery, Inc. (www.griefrecovery.ws)
- Department of Natural Resources (www.fws.gov/offices/statelinks.html)
- Media Relations 101 (www.ACAcamps.org/members/toolkit/prfundamentals.php)
- ACA Crisis Communications Toolkit (www.ACAcamps.org/members/toolkit/crisiscomm.php)

Understanding The Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act

The Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act was enacted by Congress and signed by President Bush on December 19, 2007. Designed to prevent the tragic and hidden hazard of drain entrapments and eviscerations in pools and spas, the law became effective on December 19, 2008. Under the law, all public pools and spas must have ASME/ANSI A112.19.8-2007 compliant drain covers installed and a second anti-entrapment system installed, when there is only a single main drain.

A few things of which to be aware:

- This act does include pools operated on a seasonal basis.
- State health and enforcement agencies are responsible for the enforcement of this act. This may vary from state to state so it is important to work with your local officials.
- Work with a reputable company!

There are many resources available. Some of these include:

- A free Webcast: Industry experts discuss the Act in a roundtable discussion. It is followed by a Q&A session from registered participants. (http://www.aquaticsintl.com/poolsafety/08safety_fa.html)
- Frequently Asked Questions (www.cpsc.gov/businfo/vgb/poolspafaq.pdf)
- Consumer Product Safety Commission Enforcement Position (www.cpsc.gov/businfo/vgb/pssaenforce.html)
- Resources for Pool Owners/Operators (www.cpsc.gov/businfo/vgb/draincman.html)
- Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act (www.cpsc.gov/businfo/vgb/pssa.pdf)
- Summary Analysis of the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act (www.apsp.org/clientresources/documents/2Summaryof%20P-SSafetyAct.pdf)

The ACA Camp Crisis Hotline **800-573-9019**

The ACA Camp Crisis Hotline is available twenty-four hours a day and is offered year-round. It is important to remember the hotline is not a medical, insurance, or legal advice hotline, but it does serve as an "ear" to help you talk through your crisis. The hotline staff can help you think of issues and questions and identify other resources that can assist you.

Education Reform and Your Camp — There's No Better Time to Forge Relationships With Your Legislators

You know that the camp experience is an important part of a child's development and education — but do your elected leaders? As this country wrestles with considering how to improve our education system to meet 21st Century needs, it is ever more important that we develop advocates in our elected leadership who understand that a camp experience can be an incredibly valuable part of the year-round education of the whole child.

This summer is a great time to invite your elected leaders (state and Federal) to your camp to show them that camp is not just recreation, but as part of year-round learning experiences, it contributes to the growth and development of children, youth, and adults.

- You can literally show them how the camp experience significantly enhances the work done by schools, civic organizations, and government institutions helping children develop into healthy adults.
- Take the opportunity to show them how camp provides a safe and nurturing environment that gives children and youth a sense of community.
- You can tell them how kids are at less risk when they feel loved, capable, and included

— and that your camp fosters these feelings of accomplishments and self-worth.

- Convince them that camp offers a supervised, positive environment with well-defined boundaries that help children and youth grow.
- And also importantly in this world — show them that camp builds compassionate, committed leaders who understand community service!

The American Camp Association has made inviting your legislators to camp easy — with the informative *Toolkit: Congressional Visitors and Your Camp*, complete with samples of invitation letters, agendas for the day they visit, tips from Congressional staff members, advice on working with the media — and much more And, all for free! Simply visit the ACA Web site at www.ACAcamps.org/publicpolicy/congressional_toolkit.php to access the *Toolkit*. We've even set up a great tool where you can create and e-mail your invitation letters and send them to as many of your state and Federal elected leaders as you wish (you don't even need to know the addresses as we have set that all up for you).

Join in the movement to educate our elected leaders about the value of the camp experience in the education of all of America's children!



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*Providing Camp-Specific Knowledge on Legal,
Legislative, and Risk Management Issues*

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THE CAMP LINE®



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