

CAMP DIRECTOR COMMUNICATIONS TEMPLATE

SHARING THE NEWS WITH PARENTS

An important component in getting through the impact of COVID-19 is the ability to meaningfully communicate with camp parents about your plans. Provided here are conditions and suggestions for camps on how to communicate with parents throughout this crisis.

CONDITIONS FOR PARENT COMMUNICATIONS



- **Audience First:** Every communication vehicle starts with one core belief: *It is not about you. It is about them.* While you have a point to make or a thought to share, you will be much more successful if you start and end with an “audience first” lens.
- **Camps Are Communities:** You already know this, but think about it in the context of the pandemic. Your communication is an opportunity to be a leader, role model, and guide for people who feel lost and scared for their children. Do not alienate them by leading your conversation/letter/email with talk of money or “what’s in it for you.”
- **Earned Intimacy:** Your parents make a critical decision to entrust their child to you. That is a priceless gift. Show that you appreciate this fact by mentioning their child by name and asking about their child in this difficult moment. That is where every interaction should start. Customization is key.
- **Fewer Words:** Many people no longer like to read. Reduce your word count, make your points scannable, and resist the urge to elaborate on topics of complexity.
- **It’s a Dialogue, Not a Monologue:** While it is ultimately your responsibility to make key decisions around when and how your camp is able to operate this summer, you will be more successful if you lead with empathy. Think of yourself as a democratic leader, open to other perspectives. Treat every communication as a discussion — an opportunity to invite feedback and discourse. It may mean you have more conversations with anxious parents than you might like. That is OK. You are protecting your business, reputation, and longevity. Nothing is more important than that.
- **The Definition of Safety:** Safety is on the lips of every American, but that does not mean we all share a common definition. One person thinks of the terrible impact of the virus on the most vulnerable every day, while another sees too much fuss over masks. If you need to reference this critical topic, take care. The best approach is to refer to your state and local health department requirements.
- **An Open-Ended Situation:** No one knows when this is going to end. It may be years. So be very careful about making promises for the future. You may not be able to honor them.
- **A Better Narrative:** While many differing points of view exist on this crisis, you have the ability to tie to an apolitical story that is important to everyone: child development. Share your insights about how to build children’s resiliency and joy.
- **Be Prepared:** Anticipate tough questions from parents, spurred by their anxiety and love for their children. While you do not have to reference them in a written communication, you will need to answer tough questions like:
 - “How will you handle an outbreak?”
 - “Can I get a refund midway through the summer if new developments occur?”
 - “Will you show us proof of staff antibody tests?”

We recommend creating your own “Tough Questions” FAQ in advance of your communication strategy.

COMMUNICATION TEMPLATES



Initial Phone Call

- How is your family? How do you think (insert child's name) is thinking about the virus? What is the hardest thing for them about this situation?
- In my family, we have found a silver lining is (insert a positive and authentic point you have learned; you are role modeling the way you are managing a tough situation).
- We understand how important camp is to your family, and we have spent the past weeks trying to understand what camp might look like this summer. We have concluded there are three aspects to the crisis:
 - Safety (Insert what your state health department will permit)
 - Operations (Insert your decision on how/if you will operate this summer)
 - Most importantly, your child (Based on your Safety and Operations points, paint a picture of how it will impact their child)
- With that information, (insert camp name) has decided:
 - Add specific steps that will happen next (no more than three steps)
 - Next step for parents, including milestone dates
- Do you have any other questions, ideas, or feedback for me?
- In closing, I just want to say thank you, (insert parent name). (Insert child name) has been a joy/fun/gift/etc. to our community and is irreplaceable to us. Ultimately, our decision to (insert specific) is intended to give (insert child name) the safest and happiest summer possible, despite the difficult circumstances.

Initial Letter

Dear (insert parent name):

Custom introduction: I have been thinking about (insert child name). Does he/she/they still (insert activity that child likes)? I know the virus will not change their ability to (insert child's special attribute/skill/gift).

Generic introduction: I have been thinking about your family. I know these are tough, frustrating, and scary times. If there is anything I can do to be helpful to you or your child, please let me know. We are looking for ways to provide hope and happiness to our camp families right now.

For myself, I have found the crisis to be a challenge. But I have also been reminded of the precious gift of family ties, the boundless promise of children, and the hope camp offers.

This (week/month/year), one of our campers wrote/told/mailed me a story that made me smile/laugh and remember what really matters: (insert specific child's POV on value of camp families and connections).

I am holding onto to that special memory as I plan for this summer.

Due to the virus, (insert camp name) has decided to (insert decision). We arrived at our decision after considering three important factors:

- Can we operate camp safely? (Insert your state health department standard)
- How would we operate during this unusual summer? (Insert your decision on how/if you will operate this summer)
- Most importantly, would your child have a good experience? (Based on your above Safety and Operations points, paint a picture of how it will impact their child)

We did not make this decision quickly. It is based on input from scientists and health experts, counselors and program leaders, and our years of experience managing a successful camp.

For camps that have made the tough decision to forgo traditional camp for summer 2020:

(Address refund/rollover policies)

The hardest part of our decision has been to think about the impact on your child. It is devastating that camp will not happen this summer. But we believe it is the safest choice for our camp, and that gives us comfort.

Truthfully, there is another difficult aspect of our decision — the financial consequences. As a small business that is entirely dependent on annual attendance, the virus threatens our ability to survive. We are trying to find a way to do that while still meeting your needs.

As a result, we have decided to (insert choice). This will allow us to (insert specific that helps them see the trade-off value).

This may not be the outcome you were hoping for. I understand, and I am deeply sorry for this complex situation. If you would like to talk about it, I am happy to do so.

So where do we go from here? Expect (insert next immediate steps, ideally with a specific date).

We are eager to hear if you have any other questions, ideas, or feedback for us. Please let us know.