



Discussion Guide for Camps & Other Organizations Preparing For and Dealing with Violence

Updated May 2013

In light of recent events involving acts of mass violence, many camp administrators and staff have questioned their policies and preparation related to aspects of safety and security in their camp operations and how to communicate with necessary parties (staff, campers, parents, etc). The following guiding questions are meant to serve as starting points for conversations that examine critical policies and practices needed to be prepared for acts of violence and other crisis situations. Every camp is different and must examine their own program, staff, and campers to know the best way to address the following issues. These questions serve as a springboard for conversations between camp administrators, staff, emergency response personnel, and other relevant stakeholders.

Crisis/Emergency/Incident Response Issues

- What are your current crisis/emergency/incident response procedures? When was the last time they were critically reviewed and updated by camp administration? Were local emergency response personnel involved in this review?
- During camp wide emergencies, do your current plans require everyone to meet at a central site (or previously identified areas)? Have you considered an approach whereby everyone would “scatter to rally points”?
- What kinds of incident responses do you practice (fire, storm, flood, missing campers, intruder, active shooter, etc.)? How often do you practice? When do you practice with just staff? Campers and staff? How do you practice without causing undue stress (e.g., you don’t set a fire to practice fire drills)?
- How is practicing a response to natural disaster different from practicing a response to violent crime and how will it affect your campers and staff? How do you de-brief these practices?
- What are ways to empower your staff to respond appropriately to an incident when the higher authority or initial response personnel are not immediately available?
- How do you address the differences between “lock down” and “lock out” situations with your staff?
- How will campers and staff be accounted for? Do emergency response personnel have access to camp records if necessary?
- What improvements need to be made to your incident response plans?

Crisis Communication Issues

- What crisis communication systems do you have in place with staff? How do you communicate a variety of potential emergencies with them? Who is your communication point-of-contact? If that person is unavailable, who becomes the point-of-contact?
- How would you communicate with parents in the case of a violent incident (for example, a mass shooting)? What have you told parents with regard to communications from camp?

- How have you trained staff and campers regarding their role with media - what to say and where to direct questions (or sharing through social media) about traumatic events that may happen at camp?
- Does your camp use automated messaging? What are the pros/cons to automated messaging (e-mail, voice, text) within your camp system?
- How might ACA's Crisis Communications Toolkit support your communication response plans?
- What improvements need to be made to your crisis communication plans?
- What have you done ahead of time to establish media relationships in case of traumatic events?

Site Security Issues

- Do you have site security policies and/or procedures?
- What kinds of security reviews have you considered and/or carried out (e.g., have you invited police, rescue squad, and other emergency personnel out to visit your site; involved security companies; surveillance)?
- Are emergency personnel familiar with your site? What are ways to make site maps available to emergency personnel upon arrival during a crisis?
- Have you hired (or considered hiring) security personnel? Have you discussed the pros/cons of having an armed (where legal) staff person? What other discreet weapons are available on site in the event of self-defense?
- Do you maintain overnight guards or on-duty staff? How do you evaluate their performance?
- How do you manage public areas (roads, public lands, etc.) adjacent to (or even passing through) your site and do you control access?
- What level of security is okay before it becomes too much of an "overwhelming" presence?
- What areas of your site and programs are most vulnerable to intrusion?
- What improvements need to be made to increase the security of your site(s)?

Support Personnel Issues

- Have you inventoried the "human resources" you would need in cases of traumatic events (grief counselors, religious leaders, etc.)?
- Have you established relationships with grief counselors and/or religious leaders in your community who could assist in cases of traumatic events?
- Do you have these types of personnel already employed on your staff? Do you have volunteers with these skills who you could contact?
- What relationships have you established with emergency response personnel (sheriff/police, fire personnel, first responders, county/state police, etc.)?

Campers in Public Places

- What practices do you use with your staff to help them keep track of the campers/participants and maintain a "circle of safety"?
- Do you allow the staff (or campers) to use their cell phones as a part of your security plan when in public places?
- What conversations do you have with the staff and campers before going to public spaces?
- How do you train your staff and campers to deal with strangers that approach your group while in public spaces? What specific incidents or events (car driving by slowly, a person watching your group from periphery, etc.) do you discuss with your staff to raise their awareness of their surroundings?
- Do you practice drills related to campers in public places, even if only with your staff?

- Are you staff trained to respond appropriately if they are the only staff on scene in a crisis?

General Questions

- Do you offer programs/services for user groups throughout the year? How would your responses to, and planning for, violent/traumatic events differ because of the presence of user groups on your site?
- When do you talk with your staff/campers about outside violent events? How do you accommodate parents' wishes about the awareness level of their children to traumatic events?
- What key messages do you share with parents about your shooting education/shooting sports/target programs (archery, riflery, etc.)?
- How do you talk with staff about an employee you have fired? What kinds of retaliation do you consider?

For more information and resources on the issues related to violence, visit:

<http://www.acacamps.org/knowledge/public-violence>