

Camper Discipline

The purpose of discipline is to teach. Many problems encountered at camp can be handled by means other than punishment. Examples of this are:

- Casual conversation
- Personal conference
- Carefully applied peer pressure
- Group discussion
- Prayer

Some situations at camp require that punishment be given. This should be done in a calm matter, not done in anger or haste. The camp director needs to be made aware & has the authority to recommend or administer punishment. Possible forms of discipline may include:

- The depriving of privileges (waterfront, canteen)
- Cooling off period
- Time out
- Work detail (only after checking with camp director)
- In extreme cases, campers may be sent home (with director's consent)

Guidelines

- Make sure the campers know the rules—both the camp rules as well as the rules the counselor needs for the control of his cabin.
- Be sure to call any violators by name. This helps the camper to know that it was directed at him & not anyone else, as would be the case if a general announcement were made.
- If the violator continues, use not only his name, but walk over to him & remind him of what was just asked of him.
- Expect obedience. One is much more likely to get cooperation when it is expected on the part of the camper.
- Try to ask & not order. This invites cooperation rather than the negative vibes resulting from ordering campers around.
- No physical punishment.
- Make sure the camper knows he has done something wrong. One of the quickest ways to damage the relationship with a camper is for the camper to have no idea why he's being disciplined.

- Try to find out the “why” behind the behavior of the one being disciplined. It could be that the camper has some needs that are unsatisfied. Others show negative behavior in order to get attention or to demonstrate the influence that they have. Then there are those who feel inadequate & unloved.
- It is important to give the camper the benefit of the doubt.
- Be careful not to discipline a camper for something that is a personal dislike of the counselor.
- It is best to discipline a camper when he is within arms reach of you. Whenever possible discipline the camper in private. Never humiliate any camper in front of others. This goes a long way in respecting the personal worth & dignity of the camper.
- Give the camper as much responsibility as possible. The camper then feels he is trusted. Use common sense when giving responsibility.
- When possible, avoid the use of negative terms such as “don’t” “stop” “no” “you can’t”. Good terms to use are “Let us...” “Why don’t we...” “Don’t you think it would be fun...” Campers thrive on praise just like everyone does.
- Be consistent in your discipline.
- Discipline should immediately follow the offense.
- Legitimate accidents & mistakes should not be disciplined.
- Threats of discipline are to be avoided. Follow through on your word.
- A group is never to be disciplined for the action of an individual.
- Keep your temper. Be careful not to let things upset you. Once a camper knows that certain things bother you then he has gotten the edge over you.
- Don’t overreact; sometimes it may be best to just let some things go.
- Be impartial in your judgment. Never favor one camper over another.
- Maintain a loving attitude toward even the most troublesome campers. They need all the more to experience the love of God through the camp.
- Use the three F’s—fair, firm & friendly.

We must remember that six to ten campers have been entrusted to us as counselors so that the counselor can affect them eternally with the good news of Jesus Christ. There is no greater privilege in the world, & discipline is a critical part of this influence. It must not be taken lightly!

(adapted from Sandy Creek Bible Camp & Horton Haven Bible Camp materials)