

## Character Development – Day Camp – 25 Ideas

By Sherman Lake YMCA Outdoor Center

Here's a terrific list of tested ideas that will incorporate character development into all aspects of your camp program! This also is a great starting point for your staff to use for brainstorming.

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- 1. Introduction to camp at the flagpole.** Divide kids into “cabin groups” of 8-10 and discuss with the campers the definitions of the four core values and what each color represents. Ask kids for examples of how they can incorporate them into their lives.
- 2. Use the character vocabulary when you speak.** Remember, thoughts become words, words become actions and actions become character.
- 3. Character creed.** This is like a pledge of allegiance, but it reinforces the campers’ commitment to practicing the core values: “I pledge my commitment to the four core values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility, and to reflect them in my thoughts, words and actions to be the person I was intended to be.”
- 4. Community commitment check.** Counselors get together with their group of campers and ask the campers what rules (behavioral guidelines), based on the core values, they would like to live by for the week.
- 5. Get-to-know-you games or “icebreakers.”** A juggling ball with the core-value colors is used in games such as “Light Speed” and “Group Juggle.”
- 6. Brief and debrief; ask the campers.** How do you think the core values apply to a particular activity before you start? They will have great responses. At the end of the activity, refer back to their responses to see how they applied caring, honesty, respect and responsibility during the activity.
- 7. Arts and crafts.** Projects can vary: For example, campers can make lanyards using the four colors while the facilitator talks about the core values. Bracelets can be made with beads of the four colors and the letters CHRR combined. Fridays are a great day to tie-dye items with the four colors.

8. **Climbing tower.** Each climbing route has one of the core-value colors associated with it. During briefing and debriefing we use the core values as the focus.

9. **Archery.** The targets have the four core values written on the matching corresponding color. During briefing and debriefing we use the core values as the focus.

10. **Capture the four core values (capture the flag).** Instead of using one flag on each team, we hide two flags on each side. The goal is to capture all four of the core values to be a complete team. One team represents caring and honesty, while the other team is the respect and responsibility team.

11. **Card games.** Lunch time is often followed by a quick card game. Uno® is a great game that has the four colors on the cards. Many card games deal with trying to fool your opponent (lying), and counselors try to get the campers to think about that aspect of the game and how honest it is.

12. **Skits.** All skits incorporate the four core values and how to be a good audience using the values.

13. **Theme days.** Fridays are a good day to incorporate a theme. For example: “Responsibility” theme day focuses on cleaning up camp. The group that collects the most “people flowers” (trash) gets a reward at flagpole that afternoon.

14. **Sandcastle building.** Who can make the sandcastle that best represents one of the core values?

15. **Orienteering.** Each course has a designated name: the Caring course, the Honesty course, the Respect course, the Responsibility course. The group breaks up into small groups of about 3-4 campers and tries a course. Then they tell us how they used that value while they were participating in the activity.

16. **Waterfront activities.** Relay races are done by dividing groups into four core-value groups. Each group represents a value and completes their relay.

17. **Nature hikes.** Heavy emphasis is placed on respect and responsibility for nature. We also talk about the “leave no trace” policy.

18. **Name things after the four core values.** For example, name a group of kids the “Honesty Group” and another the “Caring Group.” There are four corners (or walls) in most rooms; name them after the values or the colors.

19. **Use the colors.** Visual cues keep the core values in people’s thoughts. Keep all of your arts and crafts supplies and decorations in the four colors.

20. **Make relationship-building your #1 priority.** If there is conflict in your group, make resolving it more important than getting to basketball.

21. **Meals and manners.** Meals are a perfect opportunity and setting to teach about manners and relationship building.

22. **Buddy system.** The activity may be swimming, but the specific values being taught come in the pre-swimming instruction from the lifeguard (leader). The leader explains the need for and working components of the buddy system. Basically, campers (swimmers) are divided into pairs (buddies). The instructions are that you are responsible for making sure you know where your buddy is and that he or she is all right. You are responsible for caring for that buddy. At designated intervals, the lifeguard blows the whistle and you must find and stand next to your buddy. Campers who cannot find their buddy must tell the lifeguard. This teaches responsibility and caring for one another. The buddy system can also be used for field trips, hikes and other situation where keeping track of people is important.

23. **Collaborate with other community value programs.** We partnered with our local police program called Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education (D.A.R.E). Two police officers attended the day camp each day. They began each week with a presentation on resisting drugs and alcohol, and then spent the rest of the week intermingling with the campers and building relationships.

24. **Songs.** There probably is no better way to get participation by campers in learning about values than singing. Most love it and music is a very gentle, non-pervasive way to the spirit.

25. **Stories.** Kids love stories. They listen very intently as the storyteller weaves a value message into an interesting yarn. They remember the stories and the morals they teach.

\*Most of character development comes from using the vocabulary with the campers and teaching by example. Each and every activity is briefed and debriefed using the four core values. The above examples show some of the ways we use them in everyday activities