



## **Tips for Counselors**

**YOUR ROLE:** You, the counselor, are the key to connecting your students with values your group is attempting to teach and instill. Your life will be an open book for your campers as you spend time with them. How you act while at camp with them is more important than what you say. Your attitude and outlook on life will be under continuous examination as your campers observe you and learn from your reactions to life. You set the standard for the camp experience they will have, and you have a huge impact on how they will learn to look at life and evaluate experiences when they return home.

**Counseling:** Here are some brief suggestions for occasions when you are counseling students in one-on-one situations:

1. **NEVER BE SHOCKED:** Never be surprised, never argue, never ridicule, never blame...always understand.
2. **BE TRUSTWORTHY:** Realize that, by law, you can't keep everything a child tells you a secret; especially in areas dealing with their personal safety. The best response if asked is to "keep a secret" is: "Please know I care a lot about you. Please trust that whatever you tell me I'll handle with your best interests in mind."
3. **"WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME ABOUT IT?"** This is usually enough to get the conversation started.
4. **BE A GOOD LISTENER:** Don't be in a hurry. Keep good eye contact. Listen for things not said (i.e. body language). Don't be too quick to give advice.
5. **CARE ABOUT THEM AS INDIVIDUALS:** students can easily tell whether you care about them or are just putting in time with them.
6. **IMPORTANT:** Guy counselors, please counsel only guys. Girl counselors, please counsel only girls.
7. **KNOW YOUR LIMITS:** If you feel uncomfortable, or like the issue is too large for you to handle, don't hesitate to talk to your group leaders.



**Guidelines for Conduct:** The following are guidelines for appropriate/inappropriate conduct with campers:

### **TOUCH**

**Appropriate:**

Handshakes and High-Fives  
Short, Congratulatory or greeting hugs – side hugs  
Arm around the shoulders – briefly

**Not Appropriate:**

Sustained contact (long hugs, etc)

Backrubs, tickling, massages, etc  
Touching of private parts – no exceptions!  
Touching a child in anger, disgust or frustration  
Initiating frontal hugs  
Sexual embraces, kissing  
Lap sitting  
Wrestling and rough-housing in cabins/tents

### **TALK**

**Appropriate:**

Verbal praise for achievement or behavior  
Verbal encouragement  
Value based teaching (non-sexual)

**Not Appropriate:**

Compliments or questions relating to physique or body development  
Jokes regarding gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, or disabilities  
Sexual jokes of any kind  
Swearing or vulgar language  
Verbal Harassment, bullying or abuse  
Individual secrets, sexual coaching or conversation

### **TERRITORY**

**Appropriate:**

Public one-on-one interaction (see below)  
Group or public environments

**Not Appropriate:**

Sitting or lying on a bed with a camper  
Private one-on-one interactions  
Gift giving to a particular child

**ONE-ON-ONE'S:**

All one-on-one interactions with campers must be done in a public place with others visible. Must be seen, but not necessarily heard – what we call within “eye contact”

**SHOWER PROTOCOL:**

Counselors or campers shall never “sit around” or “walk around” the cabin or shower areas without a towel or clothing covering private areas. Towels/clothing must be worn at all times even when going from changing areas to showers (no exceptions). It is not acceptable to display sexual body parts intentionally (even if it's a joke)

Removal of shorts, tops (for girls), or swim suits will not be allowed for swimming at any time.

**Ground Rules for Great Cabin Conversations:**

Many groups will recap their teaching times with cabin conversations. The purpose of these small group conversations is to give students an opportunity to apply what they've learned to their lives. It is not a time for you, as a counselor, to tell them what they should have learned. It is a time for them to wrestle with the questions and issues they came across during their day.

**KEEP IN MIND:**

- Your camping retreat is a multi-day experience (sometimes it's a week long process). Be patient with yourself and your campers. The start of your retreat may be rocky, but it will get better.
  - Cabin Discussion is a time for their questions and issues. Not yours. You may have a lot more to learn from them than you expected going into this – if you give them a chance to open up.
  - It is a time for you to listen and to guide
  - Allow for open discussion, even passionate discussion, and disagreement. But make sure you keep it a safe place physically and emotionally:
1. No Slams. Sarcasm and unkind remarks have no place in a discussion. This will cause students to clam up and not participate. Disagreeing is okay, but never allow a student to be attacked.



2. Allow questions to be asked even if they throw your agenda off track. Their questions are important and might bring them into the conversation.
3. No one is ever forced to talk. Silence can be a sign of distrust, and their trust might have to be earned. During the retreat, ask your quiet student questions - when you're not with the rest of the group - hopefully you can earn their trust by letting them know that you care about them and their input.
4. Only one person talks at a time. Each person's opinion is worthwhile and deserves to be heard.
5. Ask for their opinions. Sometimes students are hesitant to say anything until they believe that you want to listen.
6. Have everyone sit on the same level - i.e. all on the cots or all on chairs or all on the floor.

#### **TIPS AND TRICKS:**

- Go around the circle. Have each person share "around the circle"
- Direct Questions: if you're curious about what someone thinks or why they behaved in a certain way, ask them directly.
- Talking sticks: assign an object to be the "talking stick". Whoever has the talking stick is the only one who can speak.
- Drawing, sculpting, folding, etc. allow feedback in forms other than speech
- Three Rocks: Each participant has 3 rocks. In order to speak the student must pay the facilitator one rock. You can also require that all rocks must be used by the end of the activity.
- Reflection and silence: Give participants the opportunity to think about what they want to contribute before you ask for a response.
- Creating Metaphors: Ask the group to create a metaphor for what happened: "it is like..."