



**Ebersole Environmental Education Center**  
3400 2<sup>nd</sup> Street | Wayland, MI 49348 | 517-755-5001  
[www.lansingschools.net/ebersole](http://www.lansingschools.net/ebersole)

## **Camper Behavior Management**

Updated: March 2022

R 400.11113(1)(2)(3)

Director:

Date:

## **(a) General Rules for Camper Behavior Management**

Learning how to effectively manage camper behavior is an important skill that all staff need to learn. Behavior management is not the same as punishment. Instead, behavior management has to do more with teaching. Specifically, it involves teaching campers right from wrong, how to respect the rights of others, which behaviors are acceptable and which are not, with a goal of helping to develop a camper who feels secure and loved, is self-confident, self-disciplined, knows how to control their impulses, and who does not get overly frustrated with the normal stresses of everyday camp life.

If you are having difficulty managing a camper, it is important to remember that you may not be doing anything wrong. All campers are different and have different temperaments and developmental levels and a style of management that may work with one camper may not work with others.

Understand that how you behave when managing a camper will help to determine how your camper is going to behave or misbehave in the future. If you give in after your camper repeatedly argues, becomes violent or has a temper tantrum, then they will learn to repeat this behavior because they know you may eventually give in (even if it is only once in a while that you do give in). If you are firm and consistent then they will learn that it doesn't pay to fight doing what they are eventually going to have to do anyway. Be consistent in your methods of behavior management. It is normal for campers to test their limits, and if you are inconsistent in what these limits are, then you will be encouraging more misbehavior.

- I. **Discipline Personnel:** In most cases, the lead teacher will serve as the primary point of contact related to camper disciplinary issues. At no time should a non-staff (Ebersole, Lansing School District, or other) adult be involved in the discipline of a camper. If additional disciplinary assistance is needed the Ebersole director may become involved in order to support the lead teacher with disciplinary issues.
- II. **Corporal Punishment:** At **NO** time shall corporal or other physical punishment be used as a disciplinary practice. In fact, there are only two circumstances (immediate physical harm to self or immediate physical harm to others) that would ever warrant staff and/or non-staff adult chaperones putting their hands on campers.
- III. **Deprivation, Isolation, and Hazing:** At **NO** time shall campers be deprived of food or sleep, be placed alone without supervision, observation and interactions, or be subjected to ridicule, hazing, threat, or excessive physical exercise or excessive restraint.
- IV. **Positive Approaches to Behavior Management:** Satisfactory behavior changes usually result from verbally reminding campers of the expectations and rules, positively praising campers that are demonstrating the desired behaviors, and/or by contacting the lead teacher to manage the situation.

- V. **Referrals:** Camper issues that do not resolve themselves immediately or appear disruptive of the program or other campers should be referred to the lead teacher or director as soon as possible.
- VI. **Timeouts:** Prolonged exclusion from an activity is NEVER allowed. The rule of thumb for timeouts is 1 minute per year of age. Campers must be supervised during a timeout. If a camper needs a longer time-out or cool down period, work with the lead teacher or director to identify a suitable alternative.
- VII. **Try not to Escalate:** If the situation is escalating, back off and give the camper space. Sometimes campers and staff just need a minute or two to cool down before they can discuss and resolve the behavior.
- VIII. **Director Involvement:** There are times when it is right for a director to assist in the management of camper behaviors. These include but are not limited to the following:
  - a. Behavior that endangers the camper or others;
  - b. Repeated offenses – the staff have followed the consequences but nothing is working;
  - c. The camper is just not listening to that staff person – a new staff person could be the trick to get them to comply; and
  - d. The staff member is extremely frustrated.

The director or lead teacher may need to bring campers to the office for a timeout/discussion of behavior. There may be times that a phone call home to parents will be warranted. All phone calls must be approved by the director or lead teacher.

Detailed recommendations for behavior management of campers is contained in ***Positive Approaches to Managing Campers: A Camp Counselor's Guide to Behavior Management*** (Carr, D.J., Jaskiw, N.J., Jaskiw, N.P., 1995). Staff and non-staff adult chaperones may obtain a copy of this small book from the main office free of charge. Additional resources and materials can be found in the subsequent sections of this policy.

## **(b) 20 Tips and Tricks for Working with Campers**

*All tips come from his book, "Summer Camp Rules" by Bob Ditter*

One of the biggest challenges we as staff face is negative camper behavior. Instead of waiting for the behavior to appear, we need to look for ways to prevent it, and focus on positives. Bob Ditter is a licensed social worker who has worked with the camp industry for 30 years. These tips and tricks are from his book and go a long way in preventing negative behavior and building relationships.

1. Be aware of your non-verbal communication. The look on your face, the tone of your voice, the way you hold your body – those all determine how you feel. School age children can get up to 70% of communication from nonverbals.

2. Make eye contact. Getting children to look at your eyes in a non-threatening way is a sign of trust and increases the chances they are listening to you. With devices becoming even more prevalent, eye contact has lessened in conversations. However, note that some children will look away if embarrassed or ashamed of behavior – allow them some space to do so at those times. Also, in some cultures eye contact can be threatening ... just be aware.
3. Smile! This helps to build a positive relationship and shows that you are sincerely happy to be around/with them it shows people that you are there in the moment with them.
4. Be on the same physical level. Kneel down next to, sit down next to or across from camper, and for teens stand next to them but widen your stance so that you are as tall or slightly shorter than them.
5. Develop a “look” of your own. The stern look that parents use to warn children they are crossing a line – a steady, serious look that conveys “This is not funny – this is serious.”
6. Develop a second “look” – the positive look. Catching campers when they are doing something good. Give them the look.
7. Praising campers. Tell them you are impressed versus proud. This honors their individuality.
8. Encourage new friendships. Guide campers toward relationships with peers and let them develop those relationships – give them a little boost.
9. Move towards your campers. Shouting from a distance is not effective – when you need to talk to your campers move towards them so they can see that you are serious.
10. Drop the rope. Campers will try to provoking you into a power struggle. Stay calm, make kids right about what they are right about, pause, state what you expect and move on.
11. State what you expect in positive terms. Tell them what you want them to do (i.e. please walk) instead of what you do not want them to do – do not run.
12. Thank campers for doing what you asked them to do. Recognize that they are listening and following expectations sincerely.
13. State what you expect and detach. Children do not need a long lecture or explanation, especially when you are in a situation where they want you to pick up the rope. State your expectations and move on.

14. Pick your battles. Choose what is non-negotiable (issues with safety and welfare) and things you can let slide (making a bed so tight you can bounce a quarter off of it).
15. Take kids aside. If a camper needs attention, take a few moments to take them aside and talk with them one-on-one. With this focus and being out of earshot of other campers, you can give them the attention needed and head off any potential behaviors.
16. Separate the “player” from the audience. When a camper is acting up in front of others; that may encourage them to act out more to impress the “audience”. Removing them from others or removing the others takes away that “performance” and allows you to interact with the camper one-on-one.
17. Get on board – join with campers first. If campers are not doing something that you asked them to do; take a minute or two to join with them – build that connection before you redirect them to the task. Example – you asked the boys to sweep the cabin but they are playing a version of broomball. Take a minute and join the game - and then explain that if they finish sweeping early, you can re-start the game after the work is done.
18. Redirecting behavior. If they are engaging in an activity you don’t want them to – instead of asking them to stop, ask them to join you in a different, more enjoyable, activity. This allows them the choice to choose a safer activity without getting into a power struggle.
19. Keep them busy. Boredom is dangerous and can lead to homesickness – use cabin bins, art supplies, toys and other games to keep campers busy. Down times- rest hour, transition times, getting ready for bed are all times to create fillers.
20. Ask for help! Smart move – it shows you need another perspective in dealing with that camper or situation. Gives your camper a better chance at succeeding at camp.

### **(c) C-OAR Values Program**

- I. **Program Concept:** Beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, every group will review the C-OAR Values as part of their camper and adult orientations. Throughout their stay, campers will work to exhibit the C-OAR Values and staff will positively praise campers for exhibiting the values in practice. At the end of their visit, each group will elect one camper (four total) who most exemplified each of the C-OAR values. Those campers will have the privilege of signing and scribing a C-OAR Values wooden oar. At the end of the year, each oar will be dated and hung in the main lodge for future campers to admire.
- II. **C-OAR Values:** Here are the C-OAR Values we will emphasize with campers while they are at the center:

- a. Be Grateful. We would like campers to recognize, be thankful, and show appreciation for all that they have in their lives.
- b. Be Gritty. We would like campers to push themselves and to persevere when faced with setbacks and challenges.
- c. Be Curious. We would like campers to show interest, ask questions, actively participate, and try new things.
- d. Be Kind. We would like campers to use kind and encouraging words towards themselves and others, and to lend a helping hand when needed.

III. **Identifying Campers:** At the end of each visit the adult staff and non-staff chaperones will elect one camper who most embodied a C-OAR Value while at the center. During the last meal, those campers will be recognized by staff and, as stated above, allowed to sign and scribe an oar. Final and tie-breaking decisions can be deferred to the Ebersole staff.

## **(d) Homesick Campers**

Homesickness is described psychologically as a "manifestation of separation anxiety". Many young camper would put it more clearly as "that terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach." Homesickness is often caused by anxiety over separation from parents. For many children, camp is the first and the longest time they will be away from home. We most typically think of "emotional" homesickness—crying and clingy behavior, sadness and symptoms of depression. However, homesickness often manifests itself as physical symptoms in addition to the emotional symptoms.

### I. **Ebersole Philosophy on Homesick Campers:**

- a. With sensitive guidance, almost all campers overcome initial difficulties to become active and happy while at camp.
- b. Campers will benefit significantly in character development after overcoming the challenge of homesickness.
- c. It is not a failure to leave camp early, but in most cases it isn't necessary. Our staff are ready and able to help campers help themselves to have a good time at camp.
- d. We work with parents to help children succeed at camp; they are our partners and have given us the privilege to work with their children. Often, parents/guardians may also need some help understanding that camp will benefit their child even if it seems difficult or scary.
- e. We discourage parents from removing homesick campers from camp on the basis of a letter or phone call that they receive from their child, since homesickness is often fleeting and may even be gone by the time parents become aware of it.
- f. We give each camper and parent the time, guidance, and support they need to conquer homesickness.

- II. **Hard Times to Be Homesick:** Homesickness can strike anytime, but it is more likely to happen when campers are particularly reminded of home life or are bored. Be extra-vigilant for homesickness during these times:
- a. Early Morning – Campers who wake up early with nothing to do will immediately begin to think about waking up at home and seeing their parents at breakfast. Have activity books, reading materials, paper and markers, etc. available in a bin in the cabin. Allow campers to bring something into their bunk before bed at night to play with in case they wake up early.
  - b. Mail Call - if the camper isn't getting mail, take a few minutes to seek out a staff member from another bunk or an activity area the camper really enjoys, and ask them to jot a note to your camper. The camp office has envelopes and stickers and will put the note in with the regular "delivered" mail so that your homesick camper will get mail like his/her friends.
  - c. Meals – the homesick camper should always be near a staff member at the table. Encourage conversation and eating. Some homesick kids make themselves physically sick with anxiety and worry, and not eating contributes to the inability to overcome the troubles. Mealtimes also are likely to be times when cabin mates talk about home, so be alert and ready to ask questions about the day at camp or the evening activity coming up to steer the conversation away from home.
  - d. Before Bed – the homesick camper is desperately in need of a scheduled bedtime ritual in the cabin. Staff should be an involved presence as campers are getting ready for bed. Chat with homesick campers about their day at camp, what's happening tomorrow, and anything to keep their mind focused on camp and not who would usually be tucking them in at home. Reading, group sharing circles, stories and quiet games will all help get your campers get to sleep. Because homesickness is so catching, especially once campers are tucked into bed, if a camper is crying and can't stop, it's usually best to help them calm down just outside the sleeping area so that other campers can fall asleep.

## **(e) Strategies to Combat Homesickness**

Underlying the situations which cause homesickness is fear; a fear which is the outgrowth of the loss of security enjoyed by the camper in their home environment. It becomes one of the staffs basic tasks to bridge the gap between the home and camp environment, to instill in the camper a feeling of "belonging" from the first moment at camp. Here are some methods and techniques that have proven successful:

1. Acknowledge the camper's feelings by saying, "You seem scared." (lonely, hurt, etc.) Reassure the camper that their feelings are natural and they are not alone. Often an understanding person, willing to listen and empathize is all that is needed. Be supportive, encouraging, empathetic, but firm.

2. Don't make promises you can't keep, such as to help them call home or let them go home. Since camp is an opportunity for children to grow, mature and gain independence, do not try to "rescue them" from the experience. Instead, assure them that you believe in them and their ability to succeed.
3. Try to identify and solve specific reasons behind the homesickness, for example anything inappropriate such as teasing, bullying, feeling left out, etc. Help campers learn to live with the problems that are simply inherent to camp life (i.e., it's raining, the water is cold, etc.).
4. Encourage the camper to bond with yourself and other staff and campers. Help the camper understand that there are plenty of people at camp who will help them get through the hard part and have fun.
5. Set achievable goals for the camper to begin to "get them through the day."
6. Be empathetic but firm about participating in camp life. Keep campers busy.
7. Have a one-on-one talk with them. Be informal, unobtrusive, and friendly. Respect their thoughts and feelings. Be understanding, sympathetic, yet enthusiastic about camp. Ask them about themselves, their interests and hobbies, what they enjoy doing, what they want to do at Camp. Do everything to make them feel that they are one of the gang, and can be a valued participant in the activities.
8. Tell them about the activities. Show them the canoe area, crafts, and other places of interest. Stimulate and motivate them with positive suggestions and support.
9. Give them responsibility in keeping with their ability. Have them undertake chores within the range of their capabilities, doing tasks that result in successful achievement and build confidence and happiness. Check in with them often.
10. Help them to write a letter home. Be careful to tell about the fun you're having at camp and that the camper can't wait to see them. Emphasize fun activities and growth.
11. Use a sticker chart, or other positive reward system.
12. Get help from siblings if older siblings are attending the same camp, the Director or leadership staff can help you make arrangements for a few minutes for the children to talk each day. This helps reassure the homesick child but does not cast the older child as a caretaker -- a situation that can cause resentment.



13. Get help from staff! You do not have to do this alone. All of the Ebersole and visiting staff are potential resources and supports. We are a team. Do not ever feel like you are working by yourself.

Many of these suggestions will prove to be successful. Never ridicule the camper for being homesick since it is a serious issue. Make sure that the director is aware of a homesick camper. Please do not tell the camper that you can call their parents. We use phone calls only as a last resort because many times when the camper talks to their parents, it makes the homesickness worse. If a camper is going to call home, the director and/or lead teacher will handle the call. If a camper is truly homesick for more than 24 hours, we may send them home. We want them to try camp again and sometimes, a camper just isn't ready to be away from home.