

A Parent's Orientation to Camp

*By Sherry Mernick, Dave Peterson, and Stephen Wallace
Cape Cod Sea Camps Resident Camp Directors*

Recognizing the anxiety that many parents feel when their child heads away from home, many schools and colleges now offer a "parent orientation" to share important information about what parents can expect of their child's experience and what communication systems are in place to impart information one way or the other. Since we do not have an opportunity to meet with all of the camp parents, we hope that this brief introduction to our community, camper code of conduct, parent-child separation advice, and communication protocols will prove useful as you prepare to send your child to camp. Of course, we welcome your questions and are always available by phone or in person to discuss any concerns or requests you may have. We are looking forward to welcoming your child to CCSC!

Community

We work hard to create a community in which all of our campers and staff feel welcome, supported, and safe ... physically and emotionally! Making kids feel at home means making camp something more than cabins, basketballs and boats. Camp is about people living with, and caring for, each other. In fact, CCSC communities have always been caring ones in which all members feel safe and are able to express themselves through words and actions without fear of failure or ridicule.

Our caring community is a safe community. And, according to a list we posted on the refrigerator in the camp office, safe places are ones in which:

- People are kind
- There is laughter that comes from sharing meaningful work and play
- There are rules ... they are few and fair and are made by the
- People who live and work there, including the children
- People listen to each other
- People care about each other

For more than eighty-five years, creating safe communities has guided us as we seek to provide for children the type of educational experiences that will be remembered as much for their enjoyment as for their intrinsic learning value.

Our community will include children of different ages coming from different cultures and different family, school and life experiences. Their differences and likenesses will guide us in creating a community in which they can live safely, and in which they can fully absorb the magic of learning that makes camp ... well, camp.

There are a number of other important goals that we have for your child's experience in our camp community. These are incorporated into outcomes covering five key areas:

Independence – Uses the many community resources available to ask for help and support when experiencing difficulties.

Self-Reliance – Makes positive choices and accepts responsibility for personal behavior.

Self-Confidence – Expresses confidence in his/her ability to succeed educationally and socially.

Exploration – Embraces opportunities to try new things, make new friends, and contribute positively to the community as a whole.

Respect – Contributes positively to the community as a whole, demonstrating respect for oneself, others, and the institution of camp.

Code of Conduct

An important part of creating a community of caring is establishing – and enforcing – expectations for personal behavior. Much as we have developed standards for our counselors and staff, so too have we articulated a “Code of Conduct” for the campers. According to the Code of Conduct, each member of the CCSC community is expected to conduct him/herself according to the highest standards of conduct, attitude and morality on or off campus or at any time during the year. It is predicated on an “honor system” stressing personal responsibility, mutual respect, and trust.

Any camper found to be in violation of any portion of the Code of Conduct while attending CCSC either on or off campus, would be subject to immediate disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. In addition, violations of the Code of Conduct at any time during the year which are deemed to be detrimental to the camp community would be subject to withdrawal of or refusal to grant admission for future attendance.

Here are some of the highlights:

- ***Alcohol and other drugs*** – CCSC prohibits the possession or use of alcohol, tobacco and non-prescription drugs;
- ***Sexual harassment*** – CCSC intends to provide an environment free of sexual harassment for all members of the camp community. Inappropriate behavior includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, pressure for sexual activity, demeaning sexual propositions, exposing oneself, making sexually explicit or suggestive remarks about another person, sexually oriented jokes or personal questions, and other verbal content or physical contact that results in an individual feeling uncomfortable or threatened;
- ***Sexual behavior*** – between campers including JCs and staff is strictly prohibited even if consensual;
- ***Verbal, emotional and physical harassment or bullying*** – by campers towards campers, including JCs or staff will not be tolerated. Behavior that constitutes harassment and bullying includes comments which are demeaning with respect to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, color or disability, hazing, stalking, or other intimidating conduct; uninvited or unwanted physical conduct (e.g. hitting, grabbing, pushing, and pinching); pressuring others to perform demeaning, humiliating or dangerous acts.
- ***Inappropriate language*** – All members of the community are prohibited from using profane and/or vulgar language

- **Personal presentation** – All members of the community are expected to maintain commonly accepted standards for appropriate dress. Overly revealing clothing, or clothing containing inappropriate pictures, language, symbols or suggestions is disallowed and will be confiscated until end of session.
- **Off-campus behavior** - expects all members of camp community to conduct themselves with propriety both on and off campus;
- **Curfew and Boundaries** - Campers may not leave the camp property except on organized camp trips or with their parent(s) or guardian(s). Campers must have written or verbal permission to go off campus with someone other than a parent who is over 21 years of age. Overnights are allowed with parents only. It is the responsibility of each camper to make his/her whereabouts known to his/her counselors or head counselors at all times and adhere to unit curfews and/or unit bed times/lights out as defined for each age group. Unsupervised departure from cabins after lights-out is strictly prohibited.

Separation from Camp

Of course, we recognize that being separated from his or her parents often represents a big adjustment for children of all ages. Below are some helpful hints to support your child before and during his or her camp experience. They are compiled from suggestions taken from Chris Thurber and the American Camping Association.

- **Encourage your child's independence throughout the year.** Practice separations, such as sleepovers at a friend's house, can simulate the camp environment.
- **Involve your child in preparing for camp.** The more that the child owns the decision and process, the more comfortable the child will feel being at camp.
- **It is very helpful for campers to arrive and depart with their bunkmates** so adhere to the camp's session dates as much as possible.
- **Discuss what camp will be like before your child leaves.** Consider role-playing anticipated situations, such as using a flashlight to find the bathroom or having open discussions with counselors.
- **Reach an agreement ahead of time on calling each other.** CCSC requires campers to wait a week before calling so please honor this policy.
- **Send a note or care package ahead of time to arrive the first day of camp.** Acknowledge, in a positive way, that you will miss your child. For example, you can say "I am going to miss you, but I know that you will have a good time at camp." Email is ok, but getting real mail or a small package is more fun.
- **Don't bribe.** Linking a successful stay at camp to a material object sends the wrong message. The reward should be your child's new found confidence and independence.
- **Pack a personal item from home,** such as a stuffed animal or other familiar object to make their bunk more personal.
- **When a "rescue call" comes from the child, offer calm reassurance** and put the time frame into perspective. Avoid the temptation to take the child home early. Give the director a call to enlist support.
- **Talk candidly with the camp director** to obtain his/her perspective on your child's adjustment.

- **Don't feel guilty about encouraging your child to stay at camp.** For many children, camp is a first step toward independence and plays an important role in their growth and development.
- **Trust your instincts.** While most incidents of homesickness will pass in a few days. If your child is not eating or sleeping because of anxiety or depression, it is time to go home. However, don't make your child feel like a failure if their stay at camp is cut short. Focus on the positive and encourage your child to try camp again next year.
- **Remember, the cabin counselors serve a unique role of friend, confidant and parent.** Their job is to provide a safe environment and have lots of fun with your camper. Because of the demands of very busy days, they may not have the ability to always return calls. The directors can always relay information and check in on campers.
- **One of the benefits of the camp experience is the development of personal problem solving skills.** Encourage your camper and help with strategies to enlist support outside the usual networks of Mom and Dad.
- **Visiting camp and getting a tour before opening day** is a good way to help your camper to visualize their new surroundings and limit future anxiety. Seeing familiar faces when you arrive is always reassuring.

Communication with Directors and Campers

Communicating with camp directors and, at times, directly with their child helps parents to “participate” in the camp experience. Below are some rules of thumb to guide these important interactions.

- Directors are always available to speak with parents
- Head Counselors of new campers will give parents a call during the first week to update them on their child's acclimation to camp
- If there are homesickness or behavioral issues, the Head Counselor and one of the directors will be in touch with the family.
- After the 1st week of a camper's stay, they may call parents once a week during either rest hour (12:45-2:15) or after dinner (6-7pm). Please do not try to arrange calls 2 or 3 or 4 times a week as this is disruptive to our efforts in creating a measure of independence for the campers.
- We maintain a no cell phone policy.
- Emails will be delivered to campers with our regular mail each day.
- While it is nice to visit your camper, it is best not to visit more than once a week as again it is disruptive to our program and surely somewhat disappointing for some of our campers who come from a great distance and do not have visitors.
- Care Packages are a nice way to say I'm thinking of you, but don't overdo it! There is too much junk food in the cabins, which attracts animals and is decidedly not a good food option for growing children.
- If you have questions or concerns about your child's experience, please let us know so that we may work together in resolving your question or concern.