

When in Public Places

In those situations when campers are brought to locations where they will intermingle with the public, we have a special responsibility to ensure their safety. As a group leader, you must be continually aware of their location and insist that they stay with the group. You must also inform them what to do if they become lost or separated from the group, or if they are approached by a stranger.

The following guidelines apply when campers go to “public” sites like parks, or participate in events where other non-campers are present.

General

Wear something to identify group members, which makes supervision and counting easier (e.g., yellow shirts, similar bandanas, baseball caps).

Maintain the regular ratio for the age group with a minimum of two adults. A first aid certified staff member must be easily accessible – within voice distance.

Use the buddy system and teach campers “why” it is used (to watch out for each other). Take a head count every 15-30 minutes, before and after moving from one area to another, or more often if the activity or situation involves crowds, “attractive nuisances,” or other distractions.

Make sure campers know what to expect and what the rules are in general, include expectations for unusual circumstances, such as using playground equipment or spending money. Camp policies on behavior (polite and appropriate) carry over in to out-of-camp trips.

Explain the plan to all (campers and staff) to address potential emergencies or situations, such as, illness, extra bathroom trips, being approached by strangers, or meeting someone the camper knows. Campers must be accompanied to the restroom with another camper.

Keep belongings with the group OR have someone stay with them. Do not invite others to join the group without the knowledge and consent of a staff member. Report uninvited guests or suspicious circumstances to staff immediately.

Define the area in which campers are to stay unless specific permission is obtained from their assigned staff member. If leaving the boundary area, they must go with a buddy.

When in a stationary area, like at the park, staff should spread out within the group, remaining visible, accessible, and attentive to the needs of the campers.

When Walking

Walk in pairs on the right, to allow others to pass comfortably.

A staff member should lead and another should follow, in most instances.

Suit the pace to the slowest person. Keep the group together.

Cross streets as a total group at designated crossings only. Obey traffic signals. Count heads before crossing and at regular intervals.

If a Camper is Lost

Inform campers that if they are lost they should remain where they are. It is your responsibility to find them. If you are in a staffed public facility and a camper becomes separated from the group, the camper may approach a member of the facility staff to tell them they have become separated from their group. They should not approach a stranger. You may want to retrace your steps in an effort to locate the camper (without leaving the rest of your group unsupervised.) If you do not find the camper quickly, inform a member of the facility’s staff. See Lost Camper Plan for important information and procedures.

If Approached by a Stranger

Inform your campers that if they are approached by a stranger they should not speak with him/her or go with him/her. If they are threatened in any way they should yell and run. They must tell you about the incident (or a facility staff member if they do not find you) and you should report it to the appropriate authority.

Camper to Camper

Campers should be encouraged to remain in groups at all times. There is never an appropriate time for a male and female camper to be alone in a building or away from the group at any time. Instill in campers a sense of modesty—both in the way they dress and the way they interact with one another. While camper relationships (i.e. boyfriend/girlfriend) seem to be inevitable, they are definitely a distraction to the overarching ministry that occurs at camp. Discourage campers from behaviors that distract their attention and the attention of the camp from the true focus, which is Jesus Christ.

Staff to Camper

Staff members (paid or volunteer) shall keep all relationships with participants on a professional basis. This policy does not in any way hinder the development of healthy and close friendships. Staff members should not develop intimate relationships with participants. In order to avoid unwarranted accusations, staff should never be alone with a participant in sleeping quarters, rest rooms or bathhouses. Staff members not directly involved in a particular program are discouraged from participating in program events without approval from the Camp Manager.

The counselor, when engaging in one-to-one conversations with a camper during daylight hours, will do so in a public place and not in the confines of a cabin.

If a counselor must visit a camper who is alone in the cabin or health center, they must do so only accompanied by supervisory personnel.

Counselors are to be in control of their emotions. The Program Director is available to assist if camper discipline becomes too difficult for counselors. Within the group, counselors need to communicate any problems or difficulties to each other and their Dean in an effort to help and support.

Camper-to-Staff Ratios (and Exceptions)

In-Camp Ratios

Specific camper-to-counselor ratios should be set (see ACA's recommended camper supervision ratios) with your camp's needs in mind. Ratios should be determined based on the age and ability of campers as well as your camp's layout and topography. Consider when campers must be with counselors (e.g., at activity areas or when in the cabin) and when it might be okay for them to travel with just a buddy (e.g., when going to the bathroom if it is in eyesight of the counselor, or perhaps farther if the campers are older). Keep in mind that other staff members in a specific area can be held accountable for more than just the campers in their immediate vicinity. For example, some camps have a low-key period during the day where the entire camp is given freedom to travel between activities in a controlled, well-defined area. In this situation, staff members might be assigned to provide complete coverage throughout the area, around its perimeter, and, if necessary, at specific activities and off-limits areas. At all times, proper general supervision should be maintained and monitored by supervisors who roam the area and monitor supervision.

If you have counselors with specific roles, such as group counselors and activity counselors, your staffing needs and supervision ratios may be different than if they perform dual (or more) roles. Also consider what function, if any, your junior counselors or CITs might play.

Be sure to also think about any exceptions to your established ratios. Is it okay for campers to have less supervision during rest hour or bedtime? (Be careful with your answers here. Research has proven that unstructured times like these are actually when most camp injuries occur.) What about during meals or during large-group games and evening activities? Will you have times when campers travel from activity to activity unsupervised? Can you make changes to ensure that campers are always with a counselor? For instance, some camps have a camper-choice activity period, during which campers individually choose where to go. All campers and counselors meet in a central location, and the counselors leading the activities gather their campers and walk them to the activity. They also walk back together at the end of the time period. In such a plan, campers remain constantly supervised, and the camp knows that everyone is where they are supposed to be at all times.

Lastly, address any situations or activities that require a minimum of two counselors. For instance, consider mandating two counselors at activities with higher risk, such as all aquatics, horseback riding, and any challenge course activities that involve elements (high or low), as well as two counselors on all overnight activities and trips, including at least one counselor of the same sex as the attending campers. When setting your camp's staffing requirements, you may also want to encourage a minimum of two counselors for any situation or conversation with a camper that could be perceived as uncomfortable or sensitive, such as changing time in the locker room or gathering information about an allegation against another camper or a staff member.

Camper Age	Number Staff	Overnight Campers	Day-only Campers
5 years and younger	1	5	6
6-8 years	1	6	8
9-14 years	1	8	10
15-18 years	1	10	12

HR.8.2 At least 80 percent (100 percent for camps primarily serving persons with special needs) of the staff are eighteen (18) years of age or older?

HR.8.3 All staff is at least sixteen (16) years of age and at least two (2) years older than the minors with whom they are working?

Out-of-Camp Camper-to-Staff Ratios

When planning for your camp's trips, again consider the age and needs of your campers. The destination will also affect recommended supervision ratios; for instance, your ratios might be very different if you have staff members leading an out-of-camp climbing expedition versus attending the local Renaissance Festival. Be sure to think through possible scenarios at each location before setting your final ratios. How will your counselors keep campers together in crowds? Are aquatics activities part of the outing? That is, do you need to send a lifeguard (or lifeguards) or other staff members with specific training (or first-aid certifications, etc.)? What if a camper doesn't want to participate in a specific activity (like a ride at an amusement park or the planetarium at your local science museum)? Do you have any campers attending who have special needs?

Supervision of Campers, Sensitive Issues, and Boundaries

The following information serves as an example of camper-supervision training that goes beyond basic staff-to-camper ratios. These paragraphs and the subsequent outlines cover staff responsibilities in supervision, the camp's expectations of staff and campers, and sensitive issues such as child abuse and being a mandated reporter, bullying, and personal boundaries.

In your camp's staff orientation, be sure to highlight any areas where new staff may need additional guidance. Discuss appropriate language and behavior with campers (and with each other). Address how they can protect themselves from false accusations (and from making campers uncomfortable). Outline what to do if they find themselves in an uncomfortable position, and remind them of where to go when they need help (and that it's okay). Another helpful resource for staff is the American Camp Association's e-Institute course *Camp Is for the Camper* at www.ACACamps.org/einstitute/camper, which can be taken online prior to arriving to camp.

Being a camp counselor is a job. It's a fun job, but it is still a job. Your primary duty in this position is to ensure the safety and well-being of the campers in your care. To this end, think of your campers first in every decision that you make. You should not be worrying about your next break or what you're going to do this weekend with your friends.

Keep track of your campers. You should check attendance every time your group leaves or enters a building, at the beginning and end of every activity period, and every time you blink. You should check attendance constantly. It should haunt you in your sleep. Seriously, keeping attendance is the best way to keep your campers safe. If you know where a camper is, you're better able to anticipate and prevent accidents. Every camper should be accounted for at all times—including when campers are traveling to and from the bathroom and to and from elective activities. It's never okay for a camper to be "somebody else's problem." If you see a camper who's not accompanied by a counselor, it's your duty to stop her and find out where she's going.

Because some children (and some adults) are not good at saying when they feel uncomfortable (they may be embarrassed or think it's not the cool thing to say), it is important to honor everyone's personal space. This space includes their individual belongings (including beds at resident camp) as well as their bodies. Everyone in the group should practice asking to sit next to someone or to borrow something. In addition, you, as the counselor, need to be very aware of what you do and say regarding campers' bodies, which includes commenting about