

Overtime Athletics Summer Training: Professionalism



Overview: Being a Youth Development Professional

*Becoming a Youth Development Professional entails making the transition from M.E. to K.I.D.S. You'll need to change from being **Mostly Egotistical**, focusing primarily on yourself at school or at work, and instead focus on your campers by exhibiting **Kindness, Initiative, Discretion, and Safety**.*

By choosing to work at camp, you have chosen to be responsible not only for your campers' emotional, physical, and mental well-being, but also to be responsible for their growth and development. This is both a serious and highly rewarding set of responsibilities.

Just as saying or doing one positive thing can change a child's life forever, it is also true that saying or doing one harmful or neglectful thing can devastate a child. Children are resilient, but they cannot bounce back from a careless coach who looks away or forgets to check safety measures.

Although some of the points below seem obvious, each is worth noting because each can become a serious pitfall if neglected. Becoming a youth development professional means adhering to the general principles below, as well as to the specific requirements of your particular job at camp.

Overview Cont.

- **Learn**—Find out all you can about the camp where you're working and the responsibilities of your job. Participate in all the training that your camp offers and read your entire staff manual.
- **Show Up**—Arrive at camp on time, start activities on time, and be available to your campers.
- **Make a Positive First Impression**—When meeting teammates, campers, and parents, be in dress code, wear your name badge, make good eye contact, use a firm handshake, and smile.
- **Lead by Example**—Your most powerful teaching tool is your own example. The way you conduct yourself shapes the behavior of everyone around you and speaks louder than words.

Overview Cont.

- **Spend Time with Your Campers**—Spending time having fun with your campers is the best way to understand them and earn their respect, which in turn increases their compliance.

You'll also want to put the K.I.D.S. principles into action.

Kindness—Treat others with love and consideration, putting their needs first.

Initiative—See what needs to be done and do it without asking.

Discretion—Use good judgment anytime you are on camp property. Whether you're working directly with campers or just in the vicinity of young people, the choices you make shape the camp's culture and your reputation. Be on your best behavior.

Safety—Follow all of the camp's rules and regulations and use common sense in order to maximize the well-being of those around you. Avoid unhealthy risks.

- **Keep Your Personal Life Private**—Politely deflect any personal questions from your campers.

- **Spend Your Time Off Wisely**—Plan relaxing and rejuvenating activities if/when possible, please remember as an employee your actions reflect us as a company. Please obey all laws and camp rules.

Duty of Care

*Your job as a leader in a camp, school, or other youth program includes the responsibility for the health and safety of the participants. That is, you have a **duty of care** for the participating children. You function as a surrogate caregiver, in place of the parents or **in loco parentis**.*

The duty of care formula has the following elements:

- Every person with respect to every other person, is expected to act in a reasonably prudent manner; if a person fails to act in such a manner; that is acts negligently; and
- If such negligence is a proximate cause of damage or injury to another person; then
- The negligent actor may be financially liable for the damage or injury.



Duty of Care Cont.

In every thing you do, all summer long, the law requires that you act in a reasonably prudent manner. If you fail to so act and your failure is a cause of a child's injury, then you, and the camp or program that you work for, may be liable for the damages caused. Remember that your negligence does not need to be the only cause for you to be liable for the injury.

This duty extends not just to the children in your group, or in your activity or at your table at meals, but to ***every child you come in contact within the program or camp for which you work***. This means that you can not “walk by” a situation in which a camper needs care without taking action on behalf of the child.

The first question to ask yourself in any situation relating to your duty of care is; what would the parents or other camp counselors do now? There is another way to think about this. What if a child you are responsible for is injured and the parents asked what happened. Will what you did be seen by them or other camp counselors as reasonable prudent?

Duty of Care Example

You, along with other staff are “water watching” general swim. The campers in the water are playing tag. This is a game they often play. One way the campers avoid getting tagged is to slip under the dock for a few seconds when the camper that is “it” comes in their direction. It is against the rules and unsafe for campers to be under the dock because they can not be observed there by the lifeguards. Because you are talking to another staff member and not keeping a watch on the campers in your area, you don’t see a camper go under the dock. That camper gets tangled in a rope and drowns. You never know what happens because of the noise the campers in the water are making and your inattention until the whistle for “buddies” is blown. Then you discover a camper in your area is missing.

Is it negligent (not reasonably prudent) to fail to pay attention to the campers in the water when you are water watching?

Was your failure a proximate cause of camper’s drowning?

Are you liable for this death?

The answers to these questions are; **YES**.



Fulfilling your Duty of Care

To fulfill your duty of care does not require you to protect a child against all injury. Some risks are inherent in summer camp programs. For example, there is a risk of falling down or bumping into another person in many games or sports. You do not have a duty to protect campers from such risks. However, if there are protective or safety devices used in the activity you are supervising, it would not be reasonably prudent to permit the campers to participate in this activity without using these devices.

It is not permissible to ignore or implement rules of games that foster an unsafe environment.

Put simply, **THINK BEFORE YOU ACT**

Duty of Care

Part II

Here are seven strategies to help you act in a reasonably prudent manner in your role as In Loco Parentis to fulfill your duty of care for the children in your program or at your camp, school, or other youth-serving organization.

(1) First, think about who you are.

Regarding the activity you are leading or supervising; are you properly skilled, experienced and prepared to do what is required. If not, you need to take steps to become so or decline to undertake the activity. Becoming sufficiently skilled or experienced means, learning on your own and/or working with a more experienced leader to become knowledgeable in the skills and safety issues of the activity.

(2) Second, think about who the children are who will be doing the activity with you.

Both the *nature* of the activity and the *method* of doing the activity should be determined by answering, in each situation, questions such as:

- How many children are there?
- What are their ages?
- What is their gender?
- What is their experience level?
- What instruction do they need to perform the activity?
- Does one or more of the group members have special needs?
- What is the group composition and dynamic?

Duty of Care Part II cont.

(3) Third, think about the equipment you need to conduct the activity.

The success and safety of the activity will be enhanced by answering, in each situation, questions such as:

- What equipment is needed? How much?
- Is the equipment in the condition needed?
- Have you got all the parts?

(4) Fourth, think about the risks associated with the activity and how to best manage them.

Risks and injuries can be managed, that is reduced and/or eliminated by answering, in each situation, questions such as:

- What are the risks of the activity listed by severity and frequency?
- What steps can be taken to manage these risks before the activity begins?
- What actions can be taken to control exposure to or otherwise limit these risks?
- What action can be taken to reduce any injury that occurs?

If help from third parties is needed, where is it available, how is it obtained and how long before it will arrive?

(5) Fifth, as the activity is ongoing, continue to think about the questions listed in Steps 1-4 above.

As the activity is going on, things change. You may find yourself in a situation that you know little about. The children with you may become hot, cold, tired or bored. The equipment may break, not work as expected or a part of it lost. New or different risks may present themselves. Any of these things or any thing else, alone or in combination, must continuously be assessed and guide how you continue to do the activity.

Duty of Care Part II cont.

(6) Sixth, think about “go – no go” determinations just before you start and all the while you are leading the activity.

“Go – no go” decisions are the decisions you make based on the latest information. They are “change or maintain” direction decisions. If the decision to do the activity was based on information that indicated it could be done safely but before you start the activity you get new information that indicates otherwise, you need to reassess where to proceed, proceed differently or stop. The no go decision is not easy to make. The children will likely be unhappy. However, think about the alternative. If with the new information, the reasonably prudent decision is to stop, you decide not to and a child is injured, you have failed in your responsibility for the care of the children and may be liable for the injury.

(7) Seventh, obey all laws, rules, standards, guidelines, policies, procedures and instruction. These include state laws and rules, camp association standards, activity or place specific guidelines and camp policies, procedures and instructions.

Obey them all, even the ones you don’t agree with. All of these, from laws to instructions, come from persons likely to have more experience than you. These persons have made the mistakes or witnessed the outcomes of not obeying. They are passing or promulgating these in an attempt to reduce or eliminate risks and injuries. If you second guess them by deciding that you do not need to obey any of these from laws to instructions and a child, you are responsible for is injured your conduct is not likely to be judged to have been reasonably prudent.

In summary, if you think before you act using the seven steps described here you will succeed in being a reasonably prudent camp counselor. The job you will have at a summer camp, school, or other youth-serving program is not easy but will be incredibly rewarding. Because of the magnitude of your responsibility, it’s a job worth doing well. It’s worth it, both for yourself and the children in your care.

Youth Inspired – How Kids Want *You* to Behave

Balance Fun and Firmness

Balance being fun and having a good time with being firm and enforcing the rules. Reward good behavior when you see it, rather than just pointing out rule violations.

Enforce Rules Fairly

Understand that it is your job to enforce rules and boundaries. Use a patient tone when enforcing the rules. Provide reasons for rules. Be consistent. Follow your own rules, especially in front of young people. Balance giving freedom and responsibility with enforcing safe and reasonable limits.

Be Calm and Respectful

Avoid yelling, shaming or getting overly angry. Stay positive. Avoid favoritism. Other young people will notice and will feel neglected. Be patient, because some young people won't always listen or follow directions.

Spend Time with Kids

Get to know each young person individually. What is unique? What do they have in common? Provide comfort to any young person who is feeling bad. Listen carefully to their experiences. You will gain the respect of young people by spending time with them. Turn off mobile devices. Lead by example.

Additional Points

All young people want structure and guidelines, even though they won't ask for them. Establish guidelines and structure early on. Enforce those rules strictly and consistently. Young people will not do what they are told simply because they are told. Instead, they need a role model—a strong leader—to follow. Be consistent. Remember that little problems, if left uncorrected, turn into bigger problems. Great leaders never play favorites, even though they will have favorites. Great leaders also blend confidence with humility. They know when and how to ask for help.

Using Body Language to Enhance Communication

Six principles of Non-Verbal Communication

1. Proximity is about understanding how people use and perceive the space around them.

- Personal space versus public space
- How to use the space around you
- How it affects the messages that we are sending

2. Kinesthetics is just a fancy way of saying body *movement*.

- It includes using your arms, hands, and torso, facial expressions, and body orientation.
- These movements can all affect how your message is heard and understood.
- Facial expressions
- REMEMBER TO SMILE!

3. Posture and body position can be used to determine your degree of attention, involvement, and interest.

- It is also a pretty clear indication of caring, respect, and fondness.
- Leans in, sits up, and angles his body towards the activity= more interest and excitement
- When listening, attentive posture says, “Your words are important to me.”

Using Body Language to Enhance Communication Cont.

Six principles of Non-Verbal Communication

4. Gestures

- are non-verbal body movements that communicate a specific meaning.

High fives, nodding, winking, thumbs-up, OK, and waving are all good examples.

5. Eye contact

- In most Western cultures, eye contact with another person shows respect, interest, and confidence. It shows you care enough to focus on the message you're hearing or delivering.

6. Presence

- Being present when you're speaking, or listening is crucial to clear communication.

Cultivating Patience

Patience helps young people learn

They are experts at finding and pushing the limits and boundaries we set for them.

And... pushing limits is totally normal. It's one important way that young people learn about the world. Pushing limits with adults teaches young people what's possible.

Key strategies:

Be clear and consistent with the boundaries and limitations

Be willing to explain (and re-explain) why boundaries and limits exist

Engage in the conversation and tolerate the question of essential boundaries

Impatience hurts interactions

Losing your cool, overreacting, giving dirty looks, yelling, being sarcastic, and other responses adults use when they are being challenged don't work that well with young people.

Campers learn that you've lost control

Campers learn that your response to their pushing limits is unpredictable

They may respond by losing respect for you or by pushing back harder

Cultivating Patience – Cont.

Patience is a skill. And just like other skills you must practice to get better at it.

(You are in the best place in the world to practice getting better at being patient!)

Practical strategies for everyday development of patience:

1. Speaking calmly when you are unhappy
2. Taking a breath before you speak, especially if you don't like what you see
3. Let others go first
4. Ponder ideas when it's not urgent to decide
5. Try things again
6. Ask for help when you need it

Simply break things down into specific behaviors to practice.

A patient mindset involves three things:

1. Recognizing what's developmentally normal behavior. Camper's exuberant, silly, or impulsive behavior is normal for their age.
2. Not personalizing children's misbehavior. 99% of children's misbehavior is evidence of a skills deficit, rather than an intention effort to annoy you
3. Being truly present. Reduce distractions as much as possible. This means packing away your cell phone and mentally setting aside events in your personal life

Cracking Kids' Secret Code

Listening Sensitively to Forge Understanding

What people say is not always what they mean, which poses a challenge for all youth leaders. Listening carefully to the subtext of what young people say promotes compliant behavior though authentic relationships.

How do you know something is code?

- Coded messages can be hard to spot. They range from total silence to violent acting out.
- Look for code when you find yourself saying: *“Something about this interaction doesn’t seem quite right.”* or *“there is a disconnect here.”*

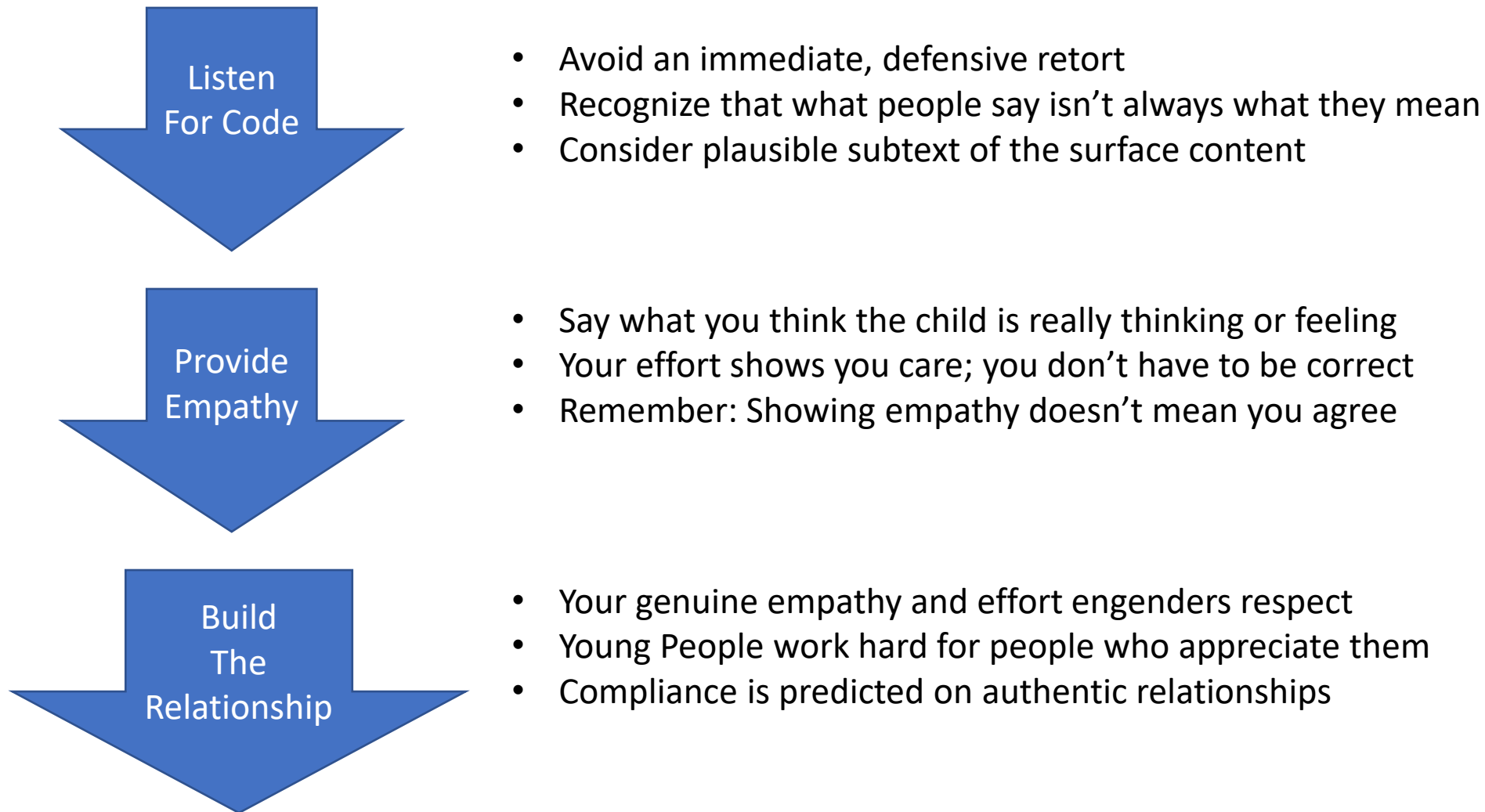
Why do people use code?

- Codes may be defenses against uncomfortable feelings.
- Code is sometimes used unintentionally, or unconsciously when people are afraid to trust another person with their authentic feelings, are afraid of rejection, or afraid of offending another person.

What do you do with a coded message?

- Decode the message with careful listening, observing body language, and reflection.
- Diffuse the strong emotion with empathetic statements and gentle guesses at true feelings.

Cracking Kids' Code Strategies – The Flow Chart



Cracking Kids' Code Examples

Examples of Decodes:

Surface Content

*I don't want to play.
I hate kickball.*



*Ben doesn't like me.
He's always mad at me.*



*This place stinks.
All the activities are stupid.*



Plausible Decodes

- I'm tired. I'm thirsty. I've overheating.
- I've just been bullied by a peer.
- I'm embarrassed because I'm not a good athlete and I don't want to look foolish on the kickball field.

- I don't make friends easily.
- I'm unsure of my social standing.
- I don't know how to respond to someone else's bad mood.

- I'm homesick. Everything here seems unfamiliar.
- My first attempt at trying a new activity was miserable.
- Games here are more competitive than I expected.

Skillful Discipline

Get to know your campers

Campers are most likely to comply when they respect you. Respect, in turn, hinges on your campers' feeling that you really care about them. Begin showing this care by learning their names, hometowns, likes, and dislikes. Campers are especially impressed when you know something about them on opening day.

Lead close-up

Barking orders, commanding from the sidelines, and otherwise leading from a distance will separate you from your campers and make them less inclined to listen to you. You *are* in a position of authority, but you need not be authoritarian or bossy. Your campers will resent you if you abuse the power that your position affords.

Establish Rules Early

To set a tone of respect and state clear expectations, gather your campers quickly. Most camp leaders prefer a combination of explaining the camp's rules (typically called "orientation") and allowing the campers to discuss and establish some rules of their own.

Put On the Brakes

Children are naturally curious and energetic, but their impulsivity and poor judgment can quickly transform enthusiasm into chaos...or worse. Plus, it can be easy to begin acting immaturely when you're playing with kids all day. Just remember: You are the adult. It's your job to put on the brakes and regain control when your campers start to lose control.

Skillful Discipline

Supervise Actively

Some camp leaders confuse being “on duty” with snoozing or simply being in the vicinity of campers, but when you’re on duty, you need to be active. Walk around, talk with campers, and see what everyone is up to. Actively supervising, rather than passively existing at camp will prevent misbehavior and camper-to-camper abuse.

Use Effective Praise

It’s easy to notice bad behavior but “catching kids being good” is a skill you may need to cultivate. When children arrive at camp, they’ll be looking for boundaries. They won’t ask aloud, but they *will* be thinking: *What are the rules here? What can I get away with? How will my counselor treat me differently than my parents?* But when children listen, follow directions, and behave unselfishly, you should offer praise that is positive (not sarcastic), immediate (not delayed for days), specific, and true (not exaggerated). Genuine praise, used strategically, helps reinforce and shape good behavior.

State the Positive Alternate Behavior

It’s easy to spot misbehaviors and describe what you don’t like. However, if you’d like to teach new and positive behaviors, then you’ll need to describe them specifically. “Stay within 10 feet of your swim buddy” is more powerful and lasting than “Stop drifting apart from your buddy.”

Skillful Discipline

Invite Problem-Solving

To reinforce the rationale behind rules and give young people healthy perspective on the consequences of their misbehavior, ask questions such as, “What do you think we might do about this?” “How might you turn things around?” and “What’s a reasonable consequence?”

Rehearse and Redo

In the spirit of forgiveness and grounded in the notion that performing the positive alternate behavior (Strategy #1 above) promotes durable behavior change, try having an individual or a group start fresh and perform an activity correctly. With a little coaching, most kids get it right.

Provide Buddies

Peers can be excellent teachers, through their youthful explanations and easy-to-follow example. Share some leadership responsibility by buddying up a skilled child with a child who is still learning. Supervise their interaction to keep the instruction positive and inspiring.

Debrief Time-Outs (penalty box)

Some young people won’t understand exactly why you removed them from an activity, asked to take a break, or given a time-out. When things have settled, it’s essential to ask, “Do you know why I asked you to take a break?” and then allow them to make amends with others.

Skillful Discipline

Communicate with Parents

If a young person's misbehavior is chronic or severe enough that you are *considering* shortening his or her stay, it's time to call parents so they are not blindsided by a definitive call to come pick up their child now. In this early call, discuss the child's specific misbehaviors, your approach so far, what has worked, what hasn't worked, and what the effects have been on the other young people. Explain that you must take into account the needs of the other young people at your camp, school, or youth program. Listen carefully to any suggestions parents have for managing their child's misbehavior and plan a follow-up call to update them.

Skillful Discipline - Cont.

Penalty Box

Asking campers to sit and think about how they've behaved is not just a technique to use with young children. If done well, time outs work with older children. To reflect on how your behavior affects yourself and others. When giving a time out, keep your own voice calm and ask the camper to sit quietly for two minutes. At the end of two minutes, discuss the behavior that led to the time out, its effect (including on others), and the positive, alternate behavior.

Requests + Rationales

Sometimes, children misbehave out of ignorance, not malice. Calmly stating your request, such as "Please ask me before you take my tennis racquet" is even more effective when you tag on a rationale, such as "I just like to keep track of my stuff." Giving campers the reason for rules provides an added incentive for them to comply next time.

State Desired Behavior + Consequence

This technique combines a calm, clear statement of the positive alternate behavior ("Instead of hitting someone you're angry with, use your words or come find a staff member.") with a pending punishment ("If you hit someone again, you'll be sent home.") Avoid the common pitfalls of anger and hyperbole. Screaming at a child or threatening a consequence you would or could never enforce is folly. And remember, it is never OK to withhold food as a punishment; it is never OK to use physical discipline; and it is never OK to use profanity.

Logical Consequences

Whenever possible, impose a consequence (i.e., a punishment) for a misbehavior that is logically connected to the misbehavior itself. If you can design something for campers that helps them make amends for what they've done, so much the better.

One-on-One Conversations

Sitting and talking with your campers allows you both to share your perspectives and brainstorm about possible solutions. Stay calm, listen carefully, and make a specific plan. Finish by asking the camper, "What can I do to help you be successful with this plan?"

Skillful Discipline Cont.

Inexperienced staff tend to react to children's misbehavior with simple punishment or lengthy lectures. However, the most skillful discipline approach emphasizes prevention—strategies that reduce the likelihood of misbehavior occurring in the first place. Here are seven more powerful strategies.

Create Structure and Limits (MARK IT)

- Stating rules up-front—before children have a chance to test limits—helps to minimize misbehavior.
- Rather than lengthy lectures, mark limits with a few clear, simple guidelines for each activity.
- Set a reasonable duration for the activity so that fatigue doesn't spark mischief.

Make Process Comments (SAY IT)

- Most young people understand rules and the basic difference between right and wrong.
- Therefore, simply saying what you've observed—such as “It looks like it's important for you to win” or “That was a harsh way to treat a friend”—is an effective way to correct misbehavior.

Stay Physically Close (PARK IT)

- Experience with particular young people will teach you which ones are prone to misbehavior and even what the precursors to serious misbehavior are.
- Use this valuable knowledge to park yourself physically close to potential troublemakers. See what you can stop early.

Skillful Discipline Cont.

Using the strategies and tools outlined makes working with kids easier. Makes instructors work lives easier. Makes camp and program experience better.

Prepare for Transitions (PREP IT)

- Stopping a fun activity, especially when your team is behind, can be frustrating and spark misbehavior.
- Prep your group for transitions by announcing half-times, two-minute warnings, and end-of-period transitions.
- Punctuate competitions with cheers and good sportsmanship.

Redirect Emerging Problems (SEND IT)

- Left to their own devices, many young people spin activities out of control. When you notice things getting a bit rowdy, send the activity in a positive direction by giving it some structure and limits

Assign Responsibility (GIVE IT)

- When you give young people a meaningful and age-appropriate job to do, they feel a sense of purpose. In turn, this sense of purpose—this feeling of belongingness and importance—diminishes the desire and the opportunities to misbehave. Supervise all jobs, of course.

Tap Signature Strengths (TAP IT)

- Young people who misbehave often get a steady diet of criticism.
- You can motivate positive behaviors when you reverse that trend by tapping into the skills individual children possess. Offering genuine praise and chances to help other children really helps.