

## **Preparing for Camp: Partnering With Parents & Campers**

YMCA Camp Seymour will make every effort to ensure your child has a wonderful experience at camp. Parents can help by letting us know in advance (by calling camp, or through the enclosed Letter to My Child's Cabin Leaders that you bring with you to check-in) about specific behavioral, health-related, emotional, or other issues that affect your child at home or school. With sufficient notice, we will contact parents in advance of your arrival at camp to discuss strategies for helping to ensure your child's success.

### ***Helping Campers Succeed***

The following can act as a guide to communicating with your child about different aspects of camp. The number one characteristic of a successful camper at YMCA Camp Seymour is that the camper *wants to be at camp*. Campers who understand what the camp experience is, and want to get the most fun out of their stay at camp, will create a successful experience for themselves and others.

**Happy campers are:** Emotionally stable and independent enough to enjoy the camp experience; able to care for themselves at an age-appropriate level, maintain basic hygiene (brushing teeth, showering, table manners, etc.); emotionally appropriate with peers and staff; and physically safe with self and others. We expect campers to uphold the YMCA values: Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Caring, Forgiveness, & Service.

**YMCA Camp Seymour offers a recreational program focused on building friendships.** Participating fully in activities is important and expected. Camp is physically active, with long days (7am-10pm) and a structured schedule; there is a one-hour rest-period each day. Sharing and group-building activities are a regular part of cabin activities. The camp experience does not include phones, TV, computers, or candy at our store.

**Teamwork is a big part of the camp experience.** Many of our activities are designed to give campers the opportunity to move out of their comfort zone (i.e., climbing wall, boating, group building, overnight campout, etc.). As part of group living, campers will participate in cabin & camp clean up, eat meals served family-style, and travel around camp with a group, or at least with a buddy, at all times. Some of these things might seem like "work" to your child and it is important to prepare for these aspects of camp – as well as for the fun!

**Camper Behavior Management** is implemented with care and respect by our staff. There are some times when a camper's behavior detracts from the overall experience of the cabin group by requiring excessive one-on-one attention from the staff. As a commitment to the success and enjoyment of camp by each camper, we want you to know our usual steps for redirecting challenging behavior.

- Cabin Leaders will talk about the undesirable behavior with the camper and together make a verbal corrective plan for success. The Cabin Leader will let his/her Unit Leader know what happened.
- If the behavior continues, the Unit Leader will have a conversation with the camper and create a written plan for change. At this point the Unit Leader will call the camper's home, explain what has happened, let a parent know the approaches that we have tried, and ask for advice with the situation ("what do you do at home when \_\_\_ occurs?" "Is there something that might be causing this behavior?" "Are there any suggestions you have?") Our partnering with parents has been very successful! But...
- If the behavior continues, the Camp Director might suggest directly involving the parent in a phone conversation with the camper. This call would be initiated and supervised by the Unit Leader or Director.
- And, unfortunately, there are situations when campers are removed from camp and parents are asked to pick up their child from camp without refund. This, of course, is not our preference, but may be required for the well-being and safety of the whole group, or as a logical consequence for inappropriate behavior. Camp promotes a bully free environment and if children are ruining the experience of other children, they will be sent home.

## **Missing Home (Homesickness)**

### ***Preparing Your Child***

For most children (including those who have been to camp before), missing home is part of the baggage that accompanies a stay at camp. Parents can play a big role in helping their child to overcome missing home before and during camp, and in doing this, grow closer to their child.

### **Develop Realistic Expectations**

Developing realistic expectations about camp is very important. Parents can sometimes over-glamorize the camp experience. ("Honey, you're going to have the best time of your whole life!" or "You'll make the greatest friends!") Obviously, going away to camp will be fun and worthwhile, but it is important to make sure your child understands it may not be fun every minute – there may be problems to solve, feelings of worry or sadness to overcome, insecurities to work on...and these problems and feelings are normal.

Go ahead and talk about the fun they'll have, but also discuss rainy days; about liking some people more than others (both campers and counselors); about making choices in the camp program (and about second and third choices), and how hard it is to do everything that's offered at camp. Talk about the waterfront (and the aquatic life with whom we share Puget Sound), and that cabin groups spend an overnight together sleeping in the woods. Discuss worries they might have about not being "good" at an activity, or about making friends. By doing this, you help children understand their feelings, so they are better able to recognize and cope with them.

### **Visit Camp Early**

Many children fare better at camp if they are able to actually see where they will be staying. Consider taking a trip to visit camp during an Open House, so your child will have an opportunity to see the cabins and other facilities. While you are at camp, discuss what it will be like. Consider role-playing anticipated situations, such as using a flashlight to walk back to the cabin after campfire.

Cautious children especially need to know: what a cabin looks like inside (where they will sleep, put their clothes, etc.); who else will be in the cabin (usually 10 kids and 2 counselors); where the bathrooms are; where the Dining Hall is, and how they'll get food. Be sure to visit places of particular interest (kids who like sports should see the courts and ball field, if they are a water person they should visit the waterfront and pool, etc.)

### **For More Information**

Additional resources regarding preparing your child for camp, and reducing feelings of missing home, are available on our web site at [www.campseymour.org](http://www.campseymour.org). Or, you can call the camp office (253-884-3392) and we will mail you a copy of some additional pro-active strategies.

We'll see you at camp!