

Taking Responsibility

(This is the first in 4 articles on the "Four R's" that we stress at Camp Champions)

As you might have seen in a previous article, we focus on the "Four R's": showing Respect, taking reasonable Risks, Reaching out to others, and taking Responsibility. This article talks about what we do to stress responsibility.

To begin, we want our campers to be responsible for their possessions and their cabins. With this in mind, we have cabin and personal inspections that assure that they are making their beds, keeping their cabin clean and washing themselves. The campers also take turns cleaning the bathhouses. While we cannot promise that they will continue to do so at home, we can assure you that they will have the basic skills.

The campers keep their eating areas clean. They scrape off their dishes and utensils and take them to the washing areas. They wipe off their tables and sweep underneath. Last year, Shirley and John (our wonderful head cooks) introduced a "Clean Table" competition that awards a weekly winner for both the boys and girls. The winning cabin gets a special meal served to them with table cloths and table service! OK, we are not too proud to provide a little extra incentive.

Responsibility at camp, however, goes beyond just material items. We stress taking responsibility for actions as well. We provide clear rules with fair and understandable consequences. We stress fairness and sportsmanship in our activities. In these ways, we are not unusual compared to other camps. We try to take personal responsibility a step further. For a young camper, this can mean pointing out the importance of helping cabin-mates and avoiding hurtful language.

As the campers get older, our message becomes more nuanced. We want them to understand that they can greatly affect other's opinions of them. For example, if a camper is struggling with a cabinmate, we might ask her what she can do to improve the relationship. The initial response is usually something like the following: "it is not my fault . . . she is the one that is being mean/won't listen". In this case, we will challenge the camper to re-think the situation. We will suggest that she cannot expect the other girl to change spontaneously, but she CAN change her own approach. With this in mind, we might ask her what she might be able to do to improve the situation. Of course, we will be having the same conversation with the other camper as well. While this does not resolve all issues, we think it an important lesson that I can significantly affect

how others experience me and, as a result, I can take responsibility for my relationships.

Working with the campers this way reminds each of us that we need to be personally accountable and responsible in all we do. As such, it is a welcome (if not somewhat daunting) reminder.

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