

# Day Camp Dynamics: Part I

## Drop-Off, Parent Communication, and Pick-Up

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*These three points of contact—drop-off, parent communication, and pick-up—represent opportunities to set the tone for the day, partner with parents, and showcase your camp's organization, spirit, and style. It's tempting to focus only on the core element of day camp: activities with children. However, your careful attention to these frequently neglected aspects of the day camp routine will make the difference between a good camp day and a great camp experience.*

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### **Section 1: Drop off**

Starting the day with a positive drop off sets the tone for staff, campers and parents. Here are some key ideals to keep in mind for a strong start to the day:

- Make sure your body language is communicating positive messages to those around you. Remember, "You say a lot without saying a lot."
- Have a positive and happy tone of voice. Remember, "Say what you mean and mean what you say, but don't say it mean."
- Be sure you are interacting with you kids at all times. It's nice to get caught up with fellow staff about what they did last night, but that can wait for another time. You only have one chance to start your day the right way.
- Remember... Parents are always watching! Put your phone away, show up on time, and be on top of your game right from the start.
- Be well organized and be where you are supposed to be to start the day.

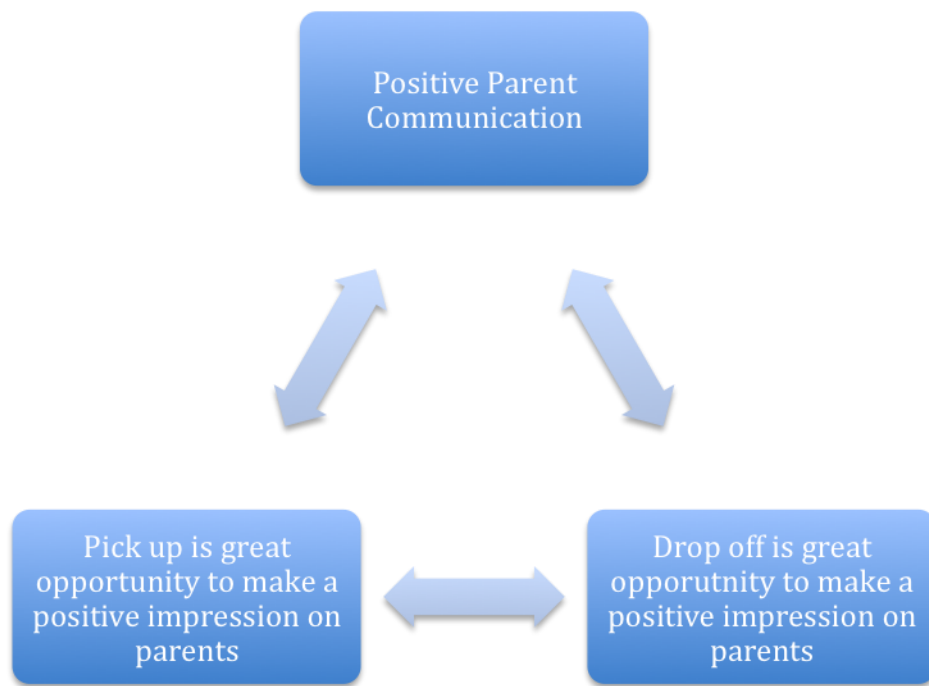
### **Section 2: Parent Communication**

Positive and intentional parental communication is so important at day camp. Here are few tips to remember when working with parents...

- Communicate with parents daily.
- Share information with parents as soon as possible. Same day communication is critical.
- Remember that parents will talk with other parents.
- Use written notes, face-to-face conversations or a phone call.
- Communicate completely. Give all information surrounding events.
- Provide reassurance and explain how the staff responded.
- Share the positives about campers to parents.
- Be proactive in your communication. Initiate conversations and follow up.

### **Section 3: The Pick Up**

- Know when, where, and how your campers are picked up.
- Pick up should be fun.
- Be sure pick up time is organized.
- Be sure you are keeping track of your kids and know who they are or are not supposed to go home with.
- Offer genuine praise to your campers and their parents regarding your camper's day
- Be sure your body language and tone communicate that you have had a great day.



Notes about Drop-Off, Parent Communication, and Pick-Up at Your Camp:

# Day Camp Dynamics: Part II

## Off-Site Trips & Group Management Tips

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*Off site trips at day camp are always a lot of fun. However, it's important to do all of the correct preparation and work ahead of time to insure the safest and most fun trip possible. Here are several items to keep in mind about off site trips...*

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- **Be sure to have a clear plan.** Even if you have taken the same trip several times before, it doesn't matter. Make sure all staff and parents are clear about what you are doing. Consider how you will get there, how long it will take, and exactly where you are going. Factor in traffic or any other unseen delay. Make all staff are clear about your plan. Will weather affect your time at this facility?
- **Make sure your paperwork is in line.** Medical forms, parent permission forms, emergency contact information, maps, permits of use for where you are going (if appropriate) etc.
- **Account for all children.** Make sure you know how many kids are going; who exactly those kids are and how many kids are coming back and who exactly they are. Every once in awhile you read or hear about a camp that left someone on a trip. You don't EVER want to be that camp! Some techniques you can use are the buddy check, the "magic number", and labeled armbands.
- **Home base.** Set up a "home base" with campers as a safe place to always go. Check there first if a camper is missing.
- **Emergencies.** Have an emergency action plan if anything were to go wrong. Be sure to always have a well stocked first aid kit, camper and staff medication, staff up to date with first aid training and CPR, communication equipment, and does your user group need to supply any other equipment?
- **Plan.** Be sure to know the lay of the land prior to your trip. You don't want to be surprised by anything. Check for new risks like rocks, broken glass, or any other hazard.
- **Don't Yell.** Remember to use different group management techniques to get a group's attention. Silent Coyote, the Incomplete Sentence, and the Clap once technique is good examples of this.
- **Preview.** Provide a preview plan for your kids ahead of time. Compliance is always better when campers know what to expect.
- **Enjoy.** Keep your enthusiasm up during your off site trips. It takes a lot of energy to move a group of campers from Point A to Point B, but you and your campers will have lots more fun if you keep a positive attitude and participate in activities, rather than hanging out on the sidelines.
- **Check-In.** Be sure to always be checking in with your kids. Check in one on one with your kids

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# Day Camp Dynamics, Part III

## Transition and Adjustment

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*All families face challenges related to transition and adjustment, especially when offering a camp experience to their son or daughter for the first time. Your sensitivity to what families are experiencing when they drop their children off at day camp will help smooth over any rough spots. Expect the transition from home to camp to be emotional for some parents and children. Expect that some parents and children will need time, coaching, and support to adjust to life at camp. When in doubt, ask, "How can I be most helpful?"*

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### Section 1: Pre-Season Contact

#### Some important things to remember...

- Be familiar with your camp's website. This is how most families first learn about your camp.
- If you work at a camp fair, be sure to look sharp and greet families warmly. You are the public face of camp and the warm tone you set can reassure families.
- A phone call home to parents is often helpful to families who have just enrolled.
- Whatever contact you have with families, remember that you are the voice of camp. Be polite and accommodating. Be honest if you don't know the answer to a question and offer to find out quickly.
- Buddy up families and/or campers before camp. Parent-parent and child-child interactions around camp are reassuring and understandable in ways that staff-family contact sometimes isn't.
- On site tours, picnics or family days are a great way to orient new families to your camp's culture.
- Help kids learn each other's names during any pre-season gatherings. Knowing a few other people who will be going to camp at the same time makes children feel even more welcome.
- Practice bus rides to make the transition much smoother on the actual opening day.

### Section 2: Opening Day

#### Make families and kids feel welcome...

- **Greet:** Shake hands, make eye contact, smile, and state your name and role. Be sure to have a name tag prominently displayed.
- **Orient** all newcomers: Keep it simple. There's lots to think about on opening day, so simply state what the family needs to do next and what the schedule is for the day.
- **Comfort:** Provide food and drink for refreshment after time in the car or bus. Let everyone know where the bathrooms are located. Don't wait for them to ask. Anticipate their needs.
- **Individualize:** Get each camper's name, learn where they are from and what they like to do. The more you can personalize the experience, the more welcome parents and children will feel.
- **Integrate:** Get all kids involved in an activity and/or game immediately. Getting everyone up and having fun right away takes away opening day jitters and validates everyone's hope that camp will be fun and lively place that cares for children.
- **Connect:** Buddy up new campers with returning campers. Getting kids connected immediately takes away the number-one concern that all campers have: *Will I be able to make new friends?*
- **Encourage** participation: Get all kids involved. Provide social support and early opportunities for success. A positive first impression is essential to good adjustment.
- **Sheppard:** Let parents know when it's OK to say goodbye. For those who want to linger, provide some gentle coaching to complete the transition. Say, "This would be a good time to say good-byes and we'll look forward to seeing you at the end of the day."

### Section III: Parent interactions and strategies

**The Sticky Parent:** Any parent who sticks around camp or their child way too long.

- Provide reassuring permission to go.
- They need you state “It’s time to say goodbye. We’ve got the situation well in hand.”
- Be positive yet firm with these parents. Tell them, “We’ll look forward to seeing you soon.”

**The Entitled Parent:** Any parent who something special or extra for their child, for no other reason other than it is their child.

- If they have reasonable requests, help out and accommodate them, without compromising your integrity or bending the camp’s rules. Special cases become dangerous precedents.
- If parents start to push the limits, that’s when you need to stand your ground by restating camp’s policy and its rationale.
- Remember, if parents begin to get irrational or unreasonable, that is a good time to bring them to the camp director for consultation.

**The Lost Parent:** Any parent who is disorganized, shows up too early or too late.

- Try to help them out as much as possible.
- Be patient and tolerant. Parenting is a tougher task than most non-parents realize. Your understanding will go a long way toward helping them get their bearings and think through the next step about what to do.

### Conclusions

Working with difficult parents comes down to one big issue... GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE! Think about some of the best or worst customer service you have ever received. How did it make you feel? Parents will respond and react to your customer service in different ways. Always try to leave parents feeling warmly and positively about their interaction with you. However, keep it in perspective as well. You will not please everyone all of the time.

If you are not a parent it may be hard understand this statement: “The most important child in any parents life is their own child.” Some parents will do everything in the world to provide the best possible situations for their kids. Remember, be patient and positive as you respond to these normal parenting instincts.

Notes about working with parents at your day camp or after-school program:

# Working with Difficult Parents

## Partnering with Overwhelmed, Anxious, Bossy, Defiant, and Unhappy Caregivers

Partnering with even the most difficult parents has the twin benefits of improving the quality of the camp experience for children and promoting your professional development. Rather than shy away from some of the leadership, policy, and customer service challenges that some parents bring to camp, strive to be a combination of interested, calm, patient, understanding, kind, realistic, practical, strong, respectful, and collaborative.

Gee, that sounds great. But good luck keeping your cool with a high-strung or angry parent in your face. Truth is, keeping your cool, setting limits, and spontaneous problem-solving all take practice. Here are some helpful sentence stems to get you unstuck when you're in a tough spot with a difficult parent.

### Sentences to get you unstuck in a difficult conversation:

- "This is a difficult situation, but I want to help find a solution. Here are some options to think about."
- "That's a good question. Let me consult with one of my colleagues over here and I'll be back in a minute."
- "There's a lot going on today and it can feel really overwhelming. Let's take this one step at a time."
- "I understand what you want, but I'm in a bind about what to do, given the camp's policy."
- "I can explain why the rule is set up that way and perhaps we can think together about next steps."
- "Thank you for telling me about this problem. Let me find out a bit more and get back to you right away."

In addition to these generic, empathic statements, it's essential to consider the needs of the difficult person in front of you. Although you may not always be able to grant them their wish, you can help them meet the underlying need. This taxonomy of difficult parents is artificial, of course, and there's a lot of overlap among the subtypes, but this table will help clarify your approach and put stressful situations in perspective.

### Different Approaches for Different Subtypes of Difficult Parents

Type	Underlying Needs	Helpful Approach to Meet Needs
<b>OVERWHELMED</b> The overwhelmed parent is stressed by the quantity of tasks at hand and their perceived inability to successfully complete these tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• order</li><li>• peace</li><li>• quiet</li><li>• assistance completing the series of tasks at hand</li><li>•</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• calmly outline how you will help</li><li>• outline the top two priorities to diminish the number of tasks at hand</li><li>• reassure the parent that all the necessary tasks will get completed</li><li>• restate that the staff are here to help</li></ul>
<b>* Anxious *</b> The anxious parent is imagining the worst case scenario. Because of all the unknowns swirling around in their heads, they become physiologically and emotionally stressed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• reassurance</li><li>• information</li><li>• physiological calm</li><li>• clarity</li><li>•</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• use a calm tone in all conversations</li><li>• explain policies and procedures</li><li>• repeat explanations as needed</li><li>• try sitting instead of standing to help relax the situation</li><li>• engage in a reassuring about how camp will care for their child</li></ul>

Type	Underlying Needs	Helpful Approach to Meet Needs
<b>BOSSY!</b> The bossy parent is angry that things at camp don't match his or her mental picture of the way things <i>should</i> be. Bossy parents aren't ready to problem-solve until they feel calmer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to assert authority</li> <li>• to express displeasure</li> <li>• to get their way</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• empathize with how the parent feels, even if you disagree with their opinion</li> <li>• respectfully explain the rationale behind any policies that upset the parent</li> <li>• brainstorm some practical solutions and compromises</li> </ul>
<b>DEFIANT</b> ⚡ The defiant parent is openly (or sometimes secretly) breaking obvious rules in order to shape their child's camp experience just the way they want it to be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to be different or special</li> <li>• to determine the outcome</li> <li>• to undermine authority</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• show interest in their child and emphasize putting his or her needs first</li> <li>• respectfully explain the rationale behind any rules the parent is trying to break</li> <li>• suggest that a conversation with the camp director may be productive</li> </ul>
<b>Unhappy</b> ☹️ The unhappy parent has received unexpected bad news from their child or feels dissatisfied with a staff member's decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to express displeasure</li> <li>• to be heard / understood</li> <li>• to improve the situation for their child at camp</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• kindly thank the parent for sharing their dissatisfaction with you</li> <li>• show interest by gathering information about what has happened</li> <li>• share your perspective on what can be done to make things right</li> <li>• promise to follow-up with the parent</li> </ul>

## Working Case Studies

Have the senior staff at your camp act out some realistic "difficult parent" scenarios from last summer or the summer before. Or, reenact some of the scenarios from the video training module series entitled "Working With Difficult Parents."

Take turns being the leader who interacts with the parent (either in-person or on the phone) and see what you learn about different approaches. What works? What doesn't work? What de-escalates conflict? What paths do people take toward solutions?

Although there is no recipe or one best way to work with a specific type of difficult parent, it's always helpful to show empathy and work toward meeting some of the parent's underlying needs. How can your personal style be put to work with difficult parents?

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# Rules Were Made to be Positive

## Creating Expectations Campers Want to Live Up To

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### **A lot of what we say to campers is about *creating expectations***

- Giving instructions and directions
- Stating rules

### **Why is this important? Don't think about a GREEN ball!**

- Our brains process negatives differently – so when we use a No, Stop, or Don't campers often have the wrong thing in their brains. Saying "Don't think about a green ball" has most people thinking about a green ball, not *not thinking* about a green ball. Our brains focus on the *thing* not the *negative*.
- Stating rules in the positive (turning don'ts into dos), helps create the right imagery in campers brains – It's the subject we want them to think about! Saying "Think about a red ball" has just the right effect.

### **How do we do it clearly? It's more than No, Stop, & Don't**

- In fact, what we do at camp is more than a collection of things we are NOT doing
- Skilled camp staff can almost always describe rules clearly, using positive language that's easier for our brains to process than negatives.

### ***Positive expectations and effective directions***

1. Start with a positive comment about activity – positive statements and upfront excitement
2. Ask questions – what are we supposed to do? How to do it, different variations, etc.
  - a. When we ask questions most kids respond with negative rules – use the opportunity to rephrase things into positive expectations
3. What should we try and remember or what are the rules? You may have to work to rephrase your questions into the positive
4. Rephrase, support, and clarify their answers – then gently ask why or how come?
  - a. Asking why or how come gets kids thinking about the consequences and creates ownership & responsibility as well as helps them understand and get more involved.
  - b. They have power to make their own choices
  - c. We tap into their existing common-sense knowledge and understanding

### **With older campers – same idea, different expression**

- Support what everyone says – creating positive expectations
- Go through more in-depth rules or expectations – push or challenge their ideas more
- Keep them engaged and talking, but don't talk down to them... ask Why? and How come?

### **Write three rules at your camp using only positive language:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



# High Impact, Nominally Taxing Leadership

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*Working as a youth development professional requires energy and stamina. Energy is needed to ignite enthusiasm, inspire compliance, and keep pace with active children. Stamina is needed to sustain your efforts over the course of a day, a week, a session, and the entire season.*

*HINT is an energy-saving, stamina-preserving approach to leadership. These high-impact, nominally taxing strategies are best used for day-to-day interactions and routine hassles. They are not a substitute for wild enthusiasm and forceful direction, both of which have important places in your leadership repertoire. HINT leadership should leave you with **more** energy for the times you need it.*

*To test whether you “get the HINT,” use the Tic-Tac test. (You know, those little candies that supposedly have just 1½ calories?) If your strategy is effective **and** takes no more energy than a Tic-Tac, you’ve gotten the HINT.*

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**Case Example:** You’ve become exasperated because your campers constantly forget to close the cabin door when they enter and exit. This leaves plenty of room for mosquitoes to infest the cabin. Having been kept up all night by the buzz of bugs, you have resorted to yelling and lecturing your campers in a vain attempt to get them to close the door. Instead, you could get the HINT:

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>1. LOOK</b>   | Give a look that conveys your message.<br><u>Example:</u> Raise your eyebrows, look at the camper, and then at the door.                          |
| <b>2. LABEL</b>  | Say what you want in a single word, no more.<br><u>Example:</u> “Door.”   |
| <b>3. NAME</b>   | Say the name of the camper, who probably knows what to do.<br><u>Example:</u> “Sam.”  |
| <b>4. SIGN</b>   | Point to the thing that needs to be done.<br><u>Example:</u> Point at the door.   |
| <b>5. NOTE</b>   | Post a small note, in a prominent location, with a reminder.<br><u>Example:</u> Stick a Post-It note on the door that says, “Close me.”           |
| <b>6. JOKE</b>   | Use humor to draw attention to the problem and its solution.<br><u>Example:</u> Start buzzing loudly or smile and say, “Could you open it wider?” |
| <b>7. IGNORE</b> | Let the natural consequences or positive peer pressure take hold.<br><u>Example:</u> See whether the campers become motivated to resolve things.  |

# HINT Case Studies

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**Case Example:** Write your own example of a scenario that might exasperate you this summer. Think of some minor, annoying misbehavior that might be typical for the children you'll work with at camp. Then, think of one or two ways you might use one of the HINT strategies to change the behavior and conserve your energy. Can you think of any other HINT strategies besides these seven?

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|------------------|--|
| <b>1. LOOK</b>   | Give a look that conveys your message.<br><u>Example:</u>                            |
| <b>2. LABEL</b>  | Say what you want in a single word, no more.<br><u>Example:</u>                      |
| <b>3. NAME</b>   | Say the name of the camper, who probably knows what to do.<br><u>Example:</u>        |
| <b>4. SIGN</b>   | Point to the thing that needs to be done.<br><u>Example:</u>                         |
| <b>5. NOTE</b>   | Post a small note, in a prominent location, with a reminder.<br><u>Example:</u>      |
| <b>6. JOKE</b>   | Use humor to draw attention to the problem and its solution.<br><u>Example:</u>      |
| <b>7. IGNORE</b> | Let the natural consequences or positive peer pressure take hold.<br><u>Example:</u> |

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# Good Sportsmanship

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*Pop culture has celebrated “trash talk” or “dissing in sports, but that doesn’t mean that because the behavior is common, it is acceptable. What starts as innocent fun for campers may turn ugly and become poor sportsmanship or bullying behavior. The key to a good camp experience, especially in the sporting world, is knowing how to distinguish poor sportsmanship from good sportsmanship and learn the tools and skills to create positive motivation to promote teamwork, pick fair teams and prevent relational aggression in sports.*

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## Poor sportsmanship and Foul play:

- Sportsmanship is not something that you can take for granted or think your campers will practice on their own or naturally know how to do.. It has a set of skills that you can teach to help them feel good about themselves and connect to others.
- Kids who experience poor sportsmanship *may show certain upset expressions*. These include a dejected look, slumped shoulders, head turned down, emotional reactions such as tears, anger or irritation, and a growing disinterest in the sporting activity.
- Poor Sportsmanship and Foul Play can be initiated by staff when a staff person ignores the teasing or taunting of a camper towards another camper. If a staff person stands by and does nothing to stop it, the teaser actually gets the message that their behavior is acceptable. This creates a poor example for others.
- Sometimes staff members actually join in and promote poor sportsmanship because they get pulled into immature behavior done by the teasers.
- Other times, coaches may think that winning is the most important thing in a camp sports event, and encourage undesirable Foul Play and bullying behavior just to get the “victory” or to compensate for their own feelings of inadequacy.
- When a staff member allows poor sportsmanship to occur, it can have serious effects on the camper’s interest and future desire to play the sport. A staff person may be contributing to the belief in the camper that they don’t belong in camp playing a sport, and create disinterest and loss of motivation on the camper’s future play. The staff negativity may make young athletes feel badly about themselves, in general.
- Staff need to understand that their behavior, even if it isn’t meant to hurt a camper, may actually be hurtful, because the staff person does not see the “message” they are giving to a camper who looks up to them. Therefore, you as the staff person need to be clear that your own role-modeling will be observed by your campers and seen as even more powerful than the words you use.
- Be mindful of your acceptance of foul play/poor sportsmanship which you may think is fun or part of a joke and watch the expressions of the camper who may be the target of it to really see how they feel. .
- Staff, in their effort to motivate campers through negativity and harsh criticism, may actually be creating a team that is de-motivated. This critical type of motivation, through put downs, yelling and targeting players who didn’t play well, can actually hurt your teams performance.

## Relational bullying in Sports

Relational bullying is when a camper or group of campers tries to hurt another camper by making them feel excluded by their peers, bunk mates or others. Exclusion happens frequently on the sports field, usually to less athletic children or to those campers who are very emotional, and usually, when you, the staff person, is not paying attention.

- A staff person who sees that a couple of campers are excluding another by not passing them the ball, frisbee, etc. is allowing relational aggression to occur.
- The staff person must immediately call out the kids doing the excluding for their misbehavior.

### **Picking Fair Teams**

Picking teams can almost always lead to social laddering from best to worst as campers pick teams based on popularity and athleticism. For kids on the bottom of the social ladder, this is painful. Instead of fostering unhealthy team picking, try this method:

- You Pick and I Choose- First, the counselor picks two team captains, which should be a rotating responsibility. Next, let one of the captains pick both teams. Next, let the other captain choose which team to join.
- This technique discourages social laddering, and eliminates resentment towards others who may want to pick teams because the pressure is on the chooser to create fairness. Good sportsmanship will prevail as all members of both teams are looking to the captains to do this right.

### **Promoting Good Sportsmanship**

The key to promoting good sportsmanship is to use positive motivation to promote teamwork and encouragement.

- Positive motivation is not limited to encouraging members of your own team. It also includes treating members of the other team fairly and even encouraging them.
- Staff members who step in at the first sign of poor sportsmanship (through negative words, gestures meant to hurt, or exclusion create good sportsmanship.
- A good, talented coach uses positive motivation to encourage teamwork and avoids joining into negativity amongst players.
- What helps campers perform better is the last thing told to them. Remember to provide encouragement to your campers even if you have been critical of their behavior.

# Case Studies of Sportsmanship

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## Case Study #1

It's the first week of camp and Jeremy, an 8 year old boy wants to join in with two bunkmates who are kicking a soccer ball around. Jeremy calls for the ball and the two bunkmates ignore him. You notice that Jeremy has started to look sad, puts his head down and begins to walk away upset.

- What counselor interventions are needed to deal with this problem?
- What do you say to the boys who are doing the exclusion?

## Case Study #2

Ashley, an 11 year old girl, has been playing baseball for a couple of years. In camp she was the pitcher for her travel team. During an away game, she made a couple of bad plays and her team began to turn on her, calling her a loser and other bad names.. She became really distraught and didn't want to go out and play again in the next inning.

- How would you handle the situation?
- What would you say to the rest of the team to encourage motivation?

## Case Study #3

You and your campers are playing a game of Frisbee with another bunk, and the counselor from the other bunk starts to put-down your campers for bad throws. He then looks at you and says you're the worst Frisbee player he's ever seen.

- What do you say to your team about the counselor's behavior?
- What do you say to the counselor directly?

## Case Study #4

*Write your own case study below, followed by two questions for the group.*