



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# SUMMER STARTS HERE

**Day Camp Fundamentals: A Guide for Day Camp  
Directors, Volunteers, and Staff**  
YMCA OF THE USA



APRIL 2016



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# PREFACE

The premier organization for accrediting and supporting camps is the American Camp Association (ACA), which is why YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) encourages all day camps to use the ACA standards for accreditation when planning and reviewing each year's program.

So where does **Day Camp Fundamentals** fit in? Just as your summer day camp has significant differences from your afterschool program, we hope that there are also significant differences between a generic day camp and one run by your YMCA. **Day Camp Fundamentals** is designed to help you create the best day camp ever. In addition to this guide, Exchange houses a number of tools and resources you can use to increase the positive impact you have on youth in your day camp program. Visit the day camp site on Exchange (<https://yexchange.org/Day-Camp/>) to explore all of the resources available to you.

## UPGRADE YOUR DAY CAMP

Achievement, relationships, and belonging: Taken individually, these concepts help define well-being in youth. Put them together and you have a simple recipe for giving kids the skills and support they need to be successful in life. This is the focus of the Y's Day Camp Upgrade. Launched in 2014, the Day Camp Upgrade focuses on helping children build skills, develop strong friendships, and feel like they are part of something great.

Find out more about the Day Camp Upgrade and commit to implementing it on Exchange (<https://yexchange.org/YouthDevelopment/Pages/day-camp-upgrade.aspx>). Once you do, you will receive access to a number of tools and resources designed to help you nurture achievement, relationships, and belonging at your camp.

# PART 1: THE FOUNDATION

As a nonprofit dedicated to strengthening community, the Y focuses its work in three key areas: youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. Since the early 20th century, day camp programs have been an integral part of the Y's focus on youth development and its commitment to nurturing the potential of every child and teen.

## THE HISTORY OF DAY CAMP AT THE Y

While the YMCA was taking boys on overnight trips as early as 1867, the first known day camp began in 1922, at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colo. While no single person is credited with the invention of day camping, the Y Movement contributed greatly to the concept, with a dedicated staff that consolidated

### Did you know...

- Over 76 percent of all Ys nationwide conduct day camp.
- Approximately 750,000 youth at 1,850 Ys around the country participate in day camp each year.

the results of many experiments and developed practices that transformed day camp into a uniquely Y experience.

Day camp was initially looked on as an alternative to resident camp, allowing children whose parents or caregivers did not want to send them away overnight to still reap the benefits of a camp environment. In fact, in the 1950s, some day camps began to sponsor wilderness trips, outings, and tours as comprehensive as those offered by resident camps.

By the 1980s, an increasing number of homes with two working adults made day camp more than a voluntary experience for some. To accommodate such families, many Ys added extra hours at the beginning and end of the day for child care. This extended-day option met an important and growing national need and was well received by working parents and caregivers.

In the early 1980s, multipurpose day camps gave youth more choices and started to attract a wider range of campers. Sports and specialty camps, for instance, kept children coming to day camp into their teen years. Teens were given opportunities to become Counselors-in-Training (CITs). And day camps began to offer half- and full-day programs for children as young as age 3. To accommodate these changes, counselors were trained accordingly, and programs were adjusted to fit the developmental needs of different age groups.

Day camps continued to evolve, and by the 1990s, programs became more specialized, especially for older campers. Additions such as language and math enrichment, technology, journalism, and photography offered focused learning, and camps placed an increased emphasis on outdoor environmental education. Collaboration was fostered between other community groups and day camp programs, and more effective use of the CIT program helped teens prepare for the workforce. In addition, flexibility in day selection allowed parents and caregivers to bring their children to camp two or three days a week, paying accordingly.

## CAMP TODAY: A FOCUS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Today, day camp is more vital than ever. To deliver on the Y’s commitment to nurture the potential of every child and teen, day camp programs now more intentionally foster achievement, relationships, and belonging. Achievement, relationships, and belonging are essential dimensions of well-being that the Y can cultivate through day camp:

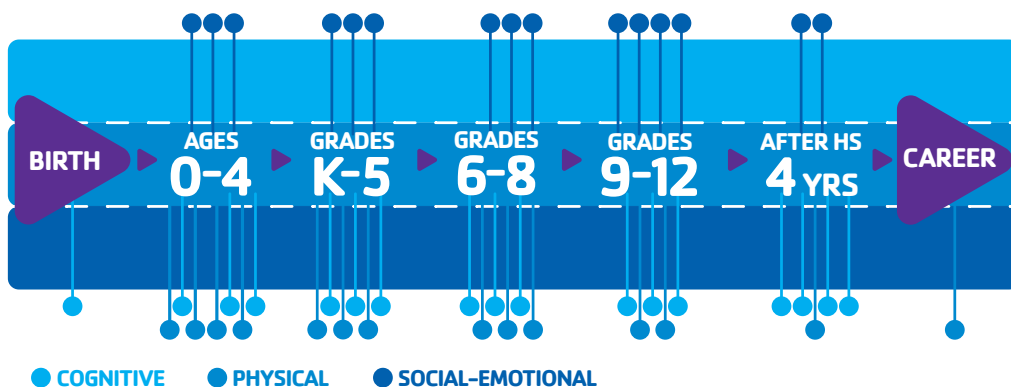
- **Discovering skills (achievement).** Campers experience achievement when they try different activities, learn what they like, and discover what they are good at.
- **Building friendships (relationships).** Campers have the opportunity to form healthy relationships with other children, caring adults, and role models, which helps them feel good about themselves and learn to get along with others.
- **Finding a place to belong (belonging).** Campers connect through significant camp traditions and rituals that create a sense of belonging, so they feel included, accepted, and part of a community.

With this emphasis on achievement, relationships, and belonging, day camp at the Y is more than a mechanism for keeping kids busy during the summer; it is an opportunity for Y staff to intentionally develop youth.

Youth development is the social-emotional, cognitive, and physical processes that all youth uniquely experience from birth to career. The youth development road map (below) offers a visual for understanding the key milestones kids must reach to become active, thriving, and contributing members of society. You can learn more about the road map milestones and the importance of developing youth at the Y on Exchange (<https://yexchange.org/YouthDevelopment>) and through the Principles of Youth Development eLearning, available on the Learning & Career Development Center (<https://lcdc.yexchange.org/Catalog/Class/Detail/176045>). By incorporating youth development into the fun, active experiences offered through day camp, the Y holistically equips children to realize their potential in school and in life.

Though day camp at the Y has changed throughout the years, one thing remains constant: it has the same distinctive emphasis as all Y programs—to strengthen community. Our activities do not simply keep campers occupied—every experience is used to nurture the potential of every child and teen. It is this significant purpose that stands behind everything staff and campers do.

## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ROAD MAP





## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Parents and caregivers have the immense responsibility of teaching their children the values they feel are important. Day camp provides an environment, role models, and activities that promote character development. The four core character development values that the Y strives to teach follow:

- **Caring**—Show a sincere concern for others
- **Honesty**—Be truthful in what you say and do
- **Respect**—Follow the golden rule
- **Responsibility**—Be accountable for your promises and actions

On the first day of camp, let children know that character development will be part of their experience—that learning about values will be as important as learning camping skills. Also be prepared to talk to parents and caregivers informally about this portion of your program, so when asked which values you will be discussing and how, you are comfortable and ready with an explanation.

You can find activities designed to build character development in youth on Exchange (<https://yexchange.org/Day-Camp/Pages/Activities.aspx>).



## RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

What makes day camp meaningful and special for campers? A camp's traditions and rituals are a huge part of what makes camp feel like camp. They also are among the most powerful ways to foster a sense of belonging among campers of all backgrounds and abilities. While many camp traditions are simply fun, others are significant. They create memories and emotional connection.

The values beads program is an example of a camp activity that, when repeated over the years, gives the camp experience meaning and promotes character development in youth.

Each of the four core character development values has an assigned color: red for caring (like the heart), blue for honesty (true blue), gold or yellow for respect (the golden rule), and green for responsibility (like the earth). One way to focus on values is by rewarding campers with different colored beads for carrying out their values.

- **Be caring:** red bead
- **Be honest:** blue bead
- **Be respectful:** yellow bead
- **Be responsible:** green bead

Other colored beads can be added for additional values, such as:

- **Be healthy:** pink bead
- **Be your best:** gold bead
- **Have faith:** white bead

At the beginning of camp, give each child a necklace string and a packet of values activities to complete. When a child completes one of the activities, a counselor, parent, or caregiver signs off on it. The counselor then awards the appropriate bead, which is strung on the necklace string.



# PART 2: THE CAMPERS

The center of day camp is the campers. Few environments are as special as camp, where kids become a community as they learn both how to be more independent and how to contribute to a group during physical, social, and educational activities. Keeping that environment safe and welcoming for all involves understanding how to engage effectively with youth from all backgrounds and abilities at all times.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

One of the best ways to encourage appropriate behavior at day camp is to create a space in which campers feel safe and welcome to explore new skills, friendships, and traditions. Day camp staff have a responsibility to adhere to the child abuse prevention best practices included in their Y's policies and procedures. If you suspect a camper has been abused or if you see abuse happen, including sexual abuse, please follow the mandated reporter policies in your state.

Campers should always feel that staff care about them, even if a camper's behavior needs to change. Use positive reinforcement to involve campers in developing and committing to a solution for behavior problems. If a problem becomes chronic, it may help to have someone observe the camper to find the cause triggering the behavior. If inappropriate behavior persists, it may be necessary to report incidents and consult with the camper's parents or caregivers.

At the beginning of a camp session, give children and staff an opportunity to agree on a simple set of rules to follow in camp, as well as consequences for not following them. Campers are expected to follow the rules, and be held accountable by staff if they do not. When discussing behavior with campers, use the Y core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility as tools.

Allowing campers to make their voices heard when planning activities gives them an important opportunity to make individual choices and feel welcome. Involve campers in planning their experiences, and make sure they know what is planned for the day, the week, and the session. When switching from one activity to another, alert campers just before the change, then get their attention and give short, simple directions for the next activity. Of course, if something unexpected pops up that turns out to be more interesting than what was planned, the smart counselor goes along with it!

## WELCOMING ALL

The Y is committed to ensuring that everyone can access and thrive at the Y. Creating an inclusive camp environment that welcomes youth of all abilities and backgrounds begins with getting to know campers individually. Staff who understand youths' needs are best positioned to deliver an impactful camp experience, one focused on fostering achievement, relationships, and belonging.

Getting to know children and their families may involve informal conversations throughout the camp day and formal meetings with parents and caregivers. In both settings, take time to ask questions and listen actively and with empathy to responses. Remember that parents and caregivers are partners in positive youth development. And communication is essential to engaging them effectively. Day camp programs with strong parent and caregiver engagement policies typically have strong retention, high enrollment, families who are active in other Y programs, and a great reputation in the community.

## USING GROUP MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Group management tools help create a safe environment for all kids:

**Provide structure**—Set up your camp space so it matches the needs and energy level of the planned activities. Use the same group format consistently.

**Stay grounded**—Always start an activity from a point of orderliness. Help campers calm down with quiet time or deep breaths.

**Give children clear expectations**—Let campers know which behaviors are acceptable and which are not in different situations. Warn campers before you change activities, which may change what behavior you will expect.

**Provide cues**—Give campers gentle but firm reminders of rules. Notice when someone is not “on task.”

**Reinforce positive behavior**—Praise campers when they act positively and appropriately.

**Ignore negative behavior**—When it won’t create a dangerous situation, ignore campers who are seeking attention by acting negatively.

**Isolate or relocate misbehaving campers**—Move campers who are being disruptive to a different area, away from the group.

**Help campers understand what behavior is appropriate**—When campers behave inappropriately, ask them why they misbehaved, then talk about appropriate ways to express feelings of anger, boredom, or sadness.

**Build rituals**—Develop rituals such as chants, games, questions, or movements that campers perform regularly and predictably. You may wish to plan a specific ritual to use when the group gets out of hand.

**Use individual or group problem-solving**—If a dispute arises, bring together a few individuals or the entire group and follow these steps:

1. Listen to one person at a time. All must agree to be silent when another is talking.
2. When everyone has spoken, see if someone can state the problem and where the disagreement lies.
3. When the problem seems clear to everyone, brainstorm possible solutions.
4. Discuss the outcomes for each solution and choose one.
5. Have the involved individuals agree to follow the solution. You may wish to use a written or verbal contract.

**Provide developmentally appropriate activities that challenge campers**—Based on the age and development of your campers, try to choose activities that appeal to their interests. Give children an opportunity to provide input, and offer choices when you can.

**Offer small-group activities**—Sometimes participation in a small group is better for developing individual campers’ interests and providing them with more attention.

**Use peer pressure to help you**—Once you have created a healthy group climate, let campers remind each other of the rules and keep each other in line.

**Foster leadership**—Let the natural leaders of the group emerge. This way, campers who are demanding attention or pulling the group to follow them can become positive leaders.

**Give rewards**—Follow less desirable activities like group meetings with more popular activities like a game or snack. Let well-behaved campers earn the right to do something special.

**Transform the situation**—When everything seems to be falling apart, or a child is stuck in a negative groove, turn it around. Play with the dynamic or turn it into a game or contest.

**Redirect children who act inappropriately**—Suggest other ways misbehaving campers can act to get what they need.

**Chart difficult behavior**—When a child’s behavior is difficult to alter, develop a behavior modification system in which the child earns a check mark for performing specified behavior each day. Reward the child for earning a set amount of check marks with a toy, activity, or special privilege.

**Help campers save face**—Create opportunities for children to correct a wrong, change a behavior, and take responsibility for themselves.

**Use natural consequences**—If a group or individual is disruptive, irresponsible, or disrespectful, let natural consequences follow. For instance, bad behavior during an activity may mean that desirable materials or equipment will not be available next time.

Another behavior management tool sometimes suggested for group use is time-out—removing a child from an activity to sit alone for a certain period of time before being allowed back into the activity. Typically, time-out is not an ideal form of behavior management, as it does not give the child an opportunity to learn more desirable behavior. However, it can be used in extreme situations, such as when a camper is out of control or openly defiant, or when a staff member needs to cool down, after trying everything else without result.

After a reasonable time-out period has elapsed, both the camper and staff should review the current situation. The staff member should ask the camper to visualize how he or she could have behaved appropriately, rather than dwelling on what was done wrong. If the camper is not able to change the behavior, the staff member may choose to apply a consequence fitting the incident.

## ENGAGING POSITIVELY

When youth know how to meet their own needs, they are more likely to behave appropriately. Positive engagement with youth involves staff members working together with the child to identify the problem and find a solution. This places limits on a child’s behavior in a way that supports self-esteem—and helps the child understand self-discipline.

One method of positive engagement is problem-solving, a five-step process that can be used under most circumstances:

### 1. Ask campers to describe their inappropriate behavior.

Children have to know what behavior needs to be changed before they can change it. Help them by asking questions like, “Can you describe to me what you did?” If they begin to talk about another’s actions, gently steer them back to discussing their own behavior. If they don’t want to describe their behavior, say something to the effect of, “I’m not trying to get you in trouble. I want to help you solve the problem, and I need to understand what happened.” If that doesn’t work, you might ask if they will listen to what you or someone else observed.

### 2. Help campers determine whether their behavior is desirable.

Help campers see the problem with their behavior by asking, “Is this behavior helping you, me, or others?” If they insist that it is, ask them further about how the behavior is helping. For campers who won’t acknowledge that their behavior is causing problems, describe the difficulties it is creating or how it is violating Y rules. If you already have a good relationship with campers, this usually persuades them to admit that the behavior needs to change.

### 3. Once campers recognize a need for change in behavior, help them develop a plan to make it happen.

Let campers decide how to change by asking a question like, “What do you think you can do so you won’t [inappropriate behavior] again?” Though they may not be used to making such decisions, you shouldn’t accept a vague, “I won’t do it again.” Instead, encourage them to come up with creative and specific plans.

- 4. Make sure everyone understands the plan, and get a commitment from campers to see it through.** Summarize the campers' plan so that you are sure what campers are supposed to do to change the inappropriate behavior. You may want to put the plan into writing, depending on the situation.
- 5. Follow up, and if the plan doesn't work, reassess it with campers.** Be positive about campers' ability to execute their plans, and praise them for doing so. Check in periodically, and if the plan isn't working, stay supportive and start the process over again. If you sense that a camper is not committed to change, or if the behavior is dangerous or disruptive, you may have to mention what the consequences will be if the behavior continues. However, weigh consequences against the welfare of the camper.

Here are three valuable concepts: First, you get more of the behavior that you reward. Make a big deal about minor bad behavior and you may get even more of it. Rewarding kids with positive comments for appropriate behavior will cause all campers to repeat it. A most valuable tool is "catching kids being good."

Second, kids are still growing emotionally and require patience. They will make lots of mistakes; that's how they learn. Don't get angry with them because they're trying new things and not always getting it right.

And third, don't confuse patience with tolerating or ignoring bad behavior. There are some actions that cannot be ignored, even once. These include picking on each other, put-downs, and crude language. Mixed messages from adults in this area, such as laughing at sarcastic put-downs on TV or tolerating a child's sarcastic comment about another camper because it's "funny," tells campers that they'll be rewarded if they "get it right."

Campers look up to counselors, so positive modeling and reinforcement carry powerful weight.

# PART 3: THE STAFF

The work of day camp staff involves more than just moving kids from activity to activity. When camp staff see themselves as cause-driven leaders, empowered to nurture the potential of youth of all abilities and backgrounds, they are positioned to create a camp environment that fosters achievement, relationships, and belonging. The Day Camp: Staff & Volunteers page on Exchange (<https://yexchange.org/Day-Camp/Pages/Staff-Volunteers.aspx>) includes a variety of tools and resources to help with the following:

- Staff selection
- Staff supervision
- Training

Specifically, **Hiring Cause-Driven Camp Counselors** (<https://yexchange.org/HumanResources/Resources/HiringCauseDrivenCampCounselors.docx>) includes tips as well as tools and resources to use in the hiring process.

## DEVELOPING STAFF

To develop your staff as cause-driven leaders, involve them in planning and decision-making and encourage them to own their development path. Help staff members grow by delegating tasks to them. Whenever you assign a new task, do the following:

- Tell staff why the task must be accomplished.
- Explain what you want as a final result.
- Set a deadline and give staff the necessary authority to take action.
- Have staff repeat back to you the task and the completion date to confirm that you both have the same understanding.
- Set up controls or times to check on the staff member to make sure everything is going according to plan.

Another way to promote personal growth is for you and your staff to write out at least five specific, measurable, actionable, results-oriented, time-based (SMART) goals, two of which are personal, at the beginning of camp. Everyone can then share their goals so you can help each other reach them. Give staff time during one of the staff meetings halfway through the summer to self-evaluate those goals; then look at them again at the end of the season.

While there are many ways to help your staff be their best, perhaps the most important thing you can do for them is to present yourself as a good role model. Adhere to high personal and professional standards, and discuss those standards with your staff so they know your expectations.

## ENGAGING EFFECTIVELY WITH STAFF

Communication and recognition are essential to staff engagement. Establish two-way communication with your staff, and make it easy for them to talk with you about their concerns by doing the following:

- Actively listen when they speak.
- Express interest in what they say, and repeat key ideas to ensure you properly understand them.
- Ask open-ended questions to find out what they think and how they feel.
- At the end of the discussion, summarize what you think are their main concerns.
- Empathize with their position and respond constructively.

When camp problems arise (and they will!), work together with your staff to find solutions. Follow these steps to resolve problems:

- Look at the problem as a solvable one. Don't blame it on caregivers' or campers' personalities. Try to define the real causes so you don't just treat the symptoms.
- Brainstorm as many solutions as possible. Don't ignore or judge anyone's contribution.
- Examine the positive and negative aspects of each suggested solution, and then agree as a group which one to try.
- Talk about how to put the solution into action and agree to discuss it again later to make sure it is working and not causing other problems.
- Put the solution and action steps in writing, especially when dealing with safety or child behavior action plans.

Effectively engaging staff leads to greater staff retention and a more impactful experience for campers. Use the ideas that follow to keep day camp staff engaged:

#### Ideas for keeping staff engaged

- Reward good work...tell them when they have performed well.
- Surprise them with T-shirts, visors, and so on.
- Hold social activities.
- Listen to their frustrations and offer understanding.
- Send them personal thank-you notes.
- Create a staff board, with quotes, jokes, a thought for the day, devotions, and so on.

## REFLECTING THE COMMUNITY

Day camps bring people together, not only campers of all backgrounds and abilities, but also diverse parents and caregivers and staff. Design your program with an eye toward inclusion, actively seeking staff who reflect the community served by your Y and developing them to understand and embrace all dimensions of diversity.

Look for opportunities to celebrate the various dimensions of diversity present in your program. For example, if one of your staff members was born in another country, incorporate that as a theme for the day or an activity.





# PART 4: THE PROGRAM

## A TYPICAL DAY

A successful program includes daily schedules that create an intentional and well-paced experience for campers. Including several different components helps create balance so that there is a good mix between low- and high-energy activities, small-

and large-group assemblies, and quiet and not-so-quiet time. A good schedule can keep campers interested, enthused, and energized while providing plenty of opportunity for them to build achievement, relationships, and belonging. Here's an example of the type of components to include in your daily schedule:

**Camper Choice and Play.** Camper-choice program periods—supervised, but not directed, by camp counselors—provide campers with an important opportunity to make individual choices and feel a sense of belonging. Use the time to encourage outdoor and imaginative play, either during extended hours or during the normal camp day.

**Camper-Planned Events.** Engaging campers to select, organize, and run an event builds collaboration skills and offers important leadership opportunities. Consider using camper-planned events as a way to end the week with a celebration, performance, or showcase and include campers in planning or conducting daily ceremonies.

**Crew Service.** Cleanup time or other responsibility activities encourage campers to feel a sense of ownership for maintaining the camp. Crew activities offer a simple and fun way to build character through the Y's core values: caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Begin inserting crew activities into your days by instituting cleanup following lunch or delegating tasks to groups throughout the week.

**Family-Engagement Events.** Family orientations, family nights, and parent and caregiver lunches connect families to the camp experience, giving them firsthand knowledge of camp.

**Huddle Group.** Getting to know campers' names, interests, and qualities during small-group interactions creates a positive social environment, promotes friendships among campers, and reduces and resolves behavior conflicts and bullying.

**Mastery Activities.** Giving campers a chance to select an activity to practice at least three times during a camp week helps them build a sense of achievement. When campers return to an activity with a clear goal in mind, they are able to build skills in that activity.

**Opening and Closing Ceremonies.** Acknowledging the start and end of each day with a ritual gives your camp the chance to assemble as one large group, participate in fun and engaging routines, recognize and celebrate campers and counselors, and experience an inclusive and positive social environment.

**Reflection.** It is easy to jump from one activity to the next in the excitement and rush of the camp day, but counselors can best support youth development by building in time for individual or small-group reflection on activities or the day's events. These few moments are an important ritual to support belonging and foster relationships among campers and between campers and counselors. To ensure reflection occurs, plan for it as a way to end each activity and each day.

**Variety Activities.** Exploring a range of activities throughout the camp session allows campers to discover their interests and talents. Variety activities tend to be more general than mastery activities, focused less on skill building and more on trying new things and connecting with others.

## SPECIAL DAYS AT DAY CAMP

Not all days at camp will be identical, and that is just as it should be. For instance, the first day of camp will call for variations in the typical camp day, as will the days and evenings devoted to theme-related activities or family programs. On some days, rain will cause the usual outdoor activities to be altered or replaced, and on others the reason will be field trips to new and exciting places or special guests who visit camp to give special presentations.

### The First Day

Perhaps the most significant of the special days is the first day at camp. Programming for the first day in each session can be similar—although, as some campers may be returning, avoid using identical activities. (Take advantage of the presence of continuing campers by asking them to help with the orientation of the new group.) Begin the first day with activities that help campers feel at home. As they reach the campsite, move them to a central location where they can be entertained with songs, skits, and cheers until everyone has arrived.

After a brief welcome by the administrative staff and an introduction of counselors and other staff members, assign campers to small groups. Each counselor can then begin a camp orientation period with their small group, beginning with attendance. Next, have counselors lead the campers on an orientation hike around the campsite, pointing out various activity areas and explaining what will take place there during camp days. Counselors can use this tour of the camp to enthusiastically encourage campers' interest in what they see and put campers at ease about matters such as swimming, lunch, and emergency procedures. Give special attention to the location of the bathrooms and any other special facilities for hygiene and safety. This is also a good time to review basic camp rules and explain the cooperation needed to make the camp community work well.

The small-group setting is especially important on the first day of camp because it is where counselors and campers get to know each other best. Some activities are especially conducive to this process—the best being icebreaker activities that allow campers to introduce themselves and share their interests, giving the group a chance to listen and ask questions. This is an important opportunity for campers and counselors to learn each other's names so everyone feels more at home. For campers who miss the first day, have a similar follow-up orientation.

### Theme Days

One of the most effective ways to keep day camp fun and interesting, even for returning campers, is to use a theme for each week's activities. Themes unite campers and staff into one community and are limited only by your imagination. From "The Fifties," with Hula-Hoops and sock hops, to "Pirate Week," with a treasure hunt, rowboat regatta, and pirate dress-up, themes generate fun and variety. An especially useful aspect of themes is that they allow you to incorporate activities appropriate to campers across a wide range of ages and skill levels. For instance, in a circus theme, younger campers can plan and present circus acts at their own skill level that are just as important to the whole show as acts contributed by older children. And even the more sophisticated and complex acts developed by older campers need the support of hardworking "crews" of younger children who can make posters and paint scenery.

## Special Events

Special events are focused activities that carry out the theme for each day. Often these events are regarded as the most exciting part of camp when campers think back on their experience—making them important both for the fun and variety they offer, as well as the memories they create.

Counselors are the key to getting campers excited about special events. One way to generate enthusiasm is to announce the upcoming event well ahead of time, and then refer to it as it approaches. For example, on the day before “Halloween” is celebrated during a theme week devoted to holidays, a counselor disguised as a witch might appear just before the campers go home, shrieking out a message that tomorrow is costume day. (Keep parents and caregivers informed of each week’s theme and activities, especially if campers need to bring special materials or clothes.)

Visual messages about upcoming special events are also effective in building anticipation, and can give parents and caregivers who visit the camp a taste of the fun activities. Posters or a chalkboard that lists “coming attractions” are good advertising devices, and music and costumes can be used to present “previews” for events. For example, if a day is devoted to Paul Bunyan, having a counselor dressed like Paul Bunyan at the opening ceremonies gets campers ready to enjoy the logrolling contest planned for later in the day.

## Family Night

Engaging families is an important part of Y programs. Make family night an integral part of any day camp session. Family

Family can be defined in a variety of ways and includes, among many other groupings, single-parent and blended families and grandparents who are raising children. Be sensitive to the needs of all family groups.

night generally occurs at least once during each day camp session, usually near the end. It is a chance for loved ones to visit the campsite and see campers perform some of the skills they have developed during camp. Plan family nights with several objectives in mind:

- Staff and families can get to know each other so they can better understand the impact of home and camp on the children.
- Families can learn about their child’s daily activities at camp as staff members present an overview of the typical day and the camp program in general.
- Campers can present entertaining programs that display their achievements during the camp session.
- All participants can share and affirm the mission and cause of the camp and the Y: strengthening communities.



## Rainy Days

Rainy days can mean revised schedules and relocation of activities. With adequate preparation, adventurous events and activities can be inserted into the camp day. Seasoned directors recommend planning at least four days’ worth of rainy day activities for each two-week session. If the camp is in an area with an especially hot climate, rainy day ideas may also be appropriate when it is too hot for the usual camp activities.

Whatever the weather, campers need activity and physical exercise, mental stimulation, and outlets for creativity. Keep in mind that bad weather at day camp calls for special emphasis on good humor, a happy atmosphere, and laughter. Some indoor and outdoor ideas for fun “bad weather” activities are listed on the following page.

## Indoor Activities

Keep a box of equipment and supplies on hand for use only on rainy days, and decorate it to add an air of mystery and surprise. The contents should be appropriate to indoor activities and could include the following:

- Table games not used at other times
- Pencils and paper for quizzes and games
- Crayons, watercolors, and other art supplies
- Nature flash cards
- Balloons for games
- Rhythm band instruments
- Soap bubble pipes
- Table tennis balls, playing cards, and marbles
- Paper plates, soda straws, and other craft supplies
- Shelf paper, newsprint, and aluminum foil
- Clothespins, toothpicks, and pipe cleaners

In addition to a special box of supplies, designate a collection of costumes for use only on rainy days. If you have adequate space, you might also consider acquiring some indoor versions of outdoor sports equipment. Nerf and Wiffle balls can be used indoors in simulations of outdoor games. Some games are even designed for indoor use, including rubber darts, shuffleboard, hopscotch, and jump rope. Some popular indoor activities include the following:

- Indoor Olympics or track meets
- Scavenger hunts
- Carnivals
- Talent shows
- Mock TV shows
- Animal imitations and indoor zoos
- Puppet shows
- Arts and crafts
- Storytelling and singing
- Production of a camp newspaper
- Folk dance

If you'd rather spend your time indoors but off-site, some indoor field trip destinations may not require advance reservations. If you have transportation available, call local museums, roller rinks, movies, and planetariums for a fun adventure on a rainy day.



## Outdoor Activities

As long as there is no lightning in the area, outdoor activities in the rain are permissible—and in some cases may even be more fun. Water play, such as sailing model boats in a puddle or swimming in the rain, offers a twist on a familiar activity. And practicing camping skills in bad weather requires campers to concentrate more—starting a fire and cooking take extra care and planning, and finding shelter becomes increasingly important. Wet weather also allows campers to compare the environment on a rainy day to normal weather conditions—wind direction and clouds change, and wildlife act differently. Have campers pay attention to things that may seem different from what they see, feel, hear, and smell on a dry day. A rainy day may also be a chance for children to witness soil erosion and make plans to prevent it.

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATH

From creating an edible, working volcano and constructing a tiny city out of sticks and stones to dismantling an old toaster from the junkyard, becoming a scientist, inventor, or architect for the summer is a blast for campers. Little do they know that while they are knee-deep in dirt, goop, and grime, they are actually learning about scientific principles, recycling, and the arts. Explore the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) site on Exchange (<https://yexchange.org/STEM>) to find STEM activities to incorporate into your day camp.

## ARTS INTEGRATION

Arts programming enhances well-being through the promotion of self-expression; personal achievement; character and relationship building; and an increased sense of inspiration, belonging, and meaning. At the Y, the arts are defined as creative self-expression through the following disciplines:

- **Dance**—awareness and movement of the body
- **Drama**—composing, writing, acting, or producing plays designed for theatrical performance
- **Music**—ordering tones or sounds in succession to create or perform a vocal or instrumental piece
- **Visual arts**—creating an object that one can look at
- **Digital arts**—combining an art discipline with technology during the creation or presentation process
- **Literature**—written creations that may include illustrations, reading, and speaking

Integrating the arts into Y programs like day camp tends to increase long-term retention. In addition, kids are more engaged and have a chance to learn and practice new skills. To find out more about integrating arts into day camp programs, visit Exchange (<https://yexchange.org/Arts>).

## CAMP READERS

Research shows that a significant percentage of children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade do not graduate from high school on time. The Y's free Camp Readers program easily integrates into existing day camp programs, helping to tackle this statistic by motivating youth to do the following:

- Read for fun
- Build general reading skills
- Increase their reading confidence when they are out of school

Explore the Camp Readers site on Exchange (<https://yexchange.org/YouthDevelopment/Pages/Camp-Readers.aspx>) to register for the program and gain access to webinars, the Camp Readers app, and other resources to assist with implementation.

## FIELD TRIPS

While field trips are exciting, they should also relate to overall camp activities and particular themes. Because field trips usually take up all or most of a camp day, they should be planned carefully and announced in advance to campers and families. The following are some guidelines for planning field trips:

- Build the cost of field trips into the camp budget when possible. Parents and caregivers can become irritated by unplanned costs.
- Give adequate notice to the appropriate authorities at the field trip destination.
- Make sure that the field trip offers campers something truly new.
- Limit trips to those requiring no more than 30 minutes of transportation time each way.
- Plan the trip to ensure it is organized and safe and use appropriate adult-child ratios (<https://yexchange.org/Day-Camp/Resources/Day-Camp-Staff-to-Child-Ratios.pdf>). Keep a trip itinerary with a designated staff member on the vehicle and back at camp.
- Have a complete roster of all staff and campers on the field trip, and do a head count often. (Keep a roster at the camp

office as well, in case of an emergency.) Every camper should be within sight of a counselor at all times.

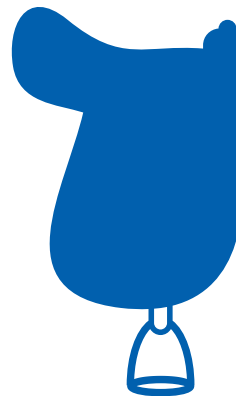
- Consider having campers wear badges that identify the group name and YMCA phone number, as well as any special medical information like food allergies.
- If junior counselors are used, ensure they are at least two years older than the campers and are supervised at all times.
- Make sure campers and staff know how and where to obtain assistance in case of emergency. Have the senior staff member carry originals of all health forms for each camper on the trip in case emergency treatment becomes necessary. Have each head counselor travel with a first aid kit and carry a cell phone.
- Review child abuse prevention procedures with staff. Through the Y's partnership Praesidium, YMCAs can get access to a number of child abuse prevention resources (<https://yexchange.org/ProgramAdministration/Pages/Child-Abuse-prevention.aspx>)
- If the trip destination includes a pool or body of water, make sure lifeguards are on duty in the necessary ratio for the size of your group, or bring the appropriate number of Y lifeguards with you.
- Choose locations appropriate for campers with diverse abilities.

Possible field trip destinations are unlimited. The following are just a few ideas:

- Businesses and factories: bakeries, pet stores, TV and radio stations
- Transportation facilities: ferries, train stations, airports, shipping docks
- Public agencies: city halls, courthouses, humane societies, post offices, fire stations, police departments, libraries, fish and wildlife services
- Nature and ecology facilities: farms, bird sanctuaries, dams, wildlife refuges, fossil beds, recycling centers, state parks, outdoor education centers, weather stations
- Recreation and education facilities: museums, historic sites, art galleries, colleges and universities, planetariums, skating rinks, horseback riding academies, zoos

Of course, a cheaper alternative to field trips is to bring information to the campers through a series of guest speakers. Some people you might ask to speak to the children are:

- A fisherman
- Someone from 4-H
- A high school biology teacher
- An amateur astronomer
- A farmer
- An Audubon Club or Sierra Club member
- Someone from the humane society or local zoo
- A veterinarian
- A local sports figure
- Someone from a local cultural center or museum





## EXTENDED-DAY CONSIDERATIONS

Most day camp days run from 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., but almost all camps also keep kids before and after regular camp hours for the convenience of working parents and caregivers. YMCAs that provide such care need to decide whether it will be supervised by camp counselors or additional staff, especially because counselors will be tired by the end of the day. It is not a good idea to hire staff to work early morning care plus half the camp day, then another set of staff to work the second half of the camp day through after-camp care, as this arrangement doesn't give campers the staff continuity they need. Other issues to consider when you set up your extended-day care are the following:

- **Pricing**—Will you charge separately for the extra time or include it in the cost of day camp?
- **Location**—Will the care be done at camp or a different location? If at a different location, what transportation will be necessary?
- **Activities**—How can you plan activities that will not be disrupted as children leave at different times?

- **Communication with parents and caregivers**—If a separate staff is used during extended hours, how will they get messages to parents and caregivers of day campers in case of accidents or behavior problems?
- **Security**—How can you ensure the safety of campers as they are dropped off in the morning and picked up at night? What sign-in and sign-out procedures will be necessary?

Because children are in a structured program most of the day, the extended-day portion of day camp tends to be loosely structured with a lot of camper choice. Coloring and drawing, doing puzzles, playing board games, reading, and resting are typical activities. The table on page 18 shows some characteristics of staff, campers, and parents and caregivers during extended-day care and some suggestions for how they might be treated.

## During Pre-Camp Care

Staff may be...	Campers may be...	Parents and caregivers may be...
Tired/sleepy	Energetic	Uneasy
Hungry	Impatient	Rushed
Cranky	Curious	Frazzled
Anxious	Competitive	Feeling guilty
Disoriented	Angry	Critical
Not motivated	Nervous	Demanding
Not yet moving comfortably	Shy	Apologetic
Eager to talk with each other	Feeling left out	Relieved
	Feeling too old for camp	Feeling separated from children
	Feeling separated from parents or caregivers	
Staff need...	Campers need...	Parents and caregivers need...
Direction	To be welcomed individually	Daily communication
Planned activities	To be asked to be included	Easy sign-in procedures
Easy-to-lead activities	Simple instructions or rules	Clearly identified staff
To arrive early to prepare	A choice between quiet or active activities	To observe teamwork and supervision
	No-lose/all-win activities	

## During Post-Camp Care

Staff may be...	Campers may be...	Parents and Caregivers may be...
Tired	Wound up	Rushed
Hot, dirty, and smelly	Hot and smelly	Tired
Ready to go home	Bored	Stressed
Ready for adult conversation	Unwilling to play	Uninterested
Hungry and thirsty	Hungry and thirsty	Curious
Out of patience	Unwilling to share	Demanding
Frazzled	Exhausted	Looking for new friends
Not motivated	Lethargic and whiney	
Staff need...	Campers need...	Parents and caregivers need...
A change of pace	A change of pace	Daily communication
Preplanned activities	Simple instructions or rules	Easy sign-out procedures
Easy-to-lead activities	No-lose/all-win activities	Time with counselors
Time with parents and caregivers	A choice between quiet or active activities	To observe good supervision
Adequate staff coverage	Food and drink	Flexibility of pickup time
Food and drink	Individual time with a counselor	

# PART 5: THE CAMP OFFICE

Your registration procedure, the forms you use, the processes you create to handle the paperwork...these are the last places you need to spend your time “getting creative.” Start with the last person who held your job. Find out what worked best and what he or she would do differently. Interview your front-desk staff about what worked best and their advice for improving service.

The book **Day Camp From Day One**, published by the American Camp Association, includes a CD-ROM with 40 customizable forms and procedures illustrated in the book. Additional solutions are available through the American Camp Association’s online bookstore.

No matter how you gather your forms, policies, and parent and caregiver guides, have your YMCA’s human resources administrator and legal advisor review your final adaptations **before** you use them. Also ask a select group of parents and caregivers to review them for ease of use. A little extra time up front will save hours of problems later.

## KEEPING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS INFORMED

### Methods

- Family handbook/information packet
- Camp website information pages and FAQs
- Website daily photo updates and camp newspaper
- Parent and caregiver phone calls from staff
- Greeting parents and caregivers at drop-off and pickup
- Session newsletter
- Flyers for special days
- Family activity nights

### Information to Give Before Camp Starts

- Staff profiles, backgrounds, or résumés, including photos of staff (in their nice, crisp, new camp T-shirts, also wearing unstressed, start-of-summer smiles!)
- Philosophy of the camp and the Y mission
- Typical activities
- Specific rules and guidelines the campers must follow
- Camping attire requested or required
- Special events: field trips, overnights, family nights, and so on
- Discipline procedures
- Drop-off and pickup procedures
- First aid and emergency procedures
- Summer schedule (sessions, themes, days off)
- What to bring: lunches, swimsuit, towel (reminder to label everything)
- What **not** to bring: toys, valuables, money, music players, guns, video games, knives
- Directions to camp or bus pickup locations (if transportation is provided)
- Specific policy information (e.g., fee payments, cancellation policy, refund policy, rainy day/smog/high heat index or other inclement weather procedures)
- Who to contact at the YMCA

### Information to Give During Camp

- Special activities during session: field trips, family nights
- How the camper is doing
- Updates on staff
- Any problems that occur (e.g., head lice)
- Any changes in facility, scheduling, or procedures
- News about camp activities and how special events went
- Take-home activities (like recipes for special projects)

# PART 6: SAMPLES TO GO

The following are samples of activities, worksheets, policies, and forms from day camps across the country. The same advice applies here as to anything else you create or borrow for your Y: have your human resources administrator and legal advisor review new documents before you implement them, and practice activities on your peers and other volunteers before you try them on your staff and campers.



Note: Lists and sample forms in this manual are provided for general information purposes and are not intended to substitute for legal advice on specific issues.



## DAY CAMP: BACK-HOME ACTION PLAN

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PROGRAM** (goals, activities, structure, schedules)

**FINANCES** (budget, enrollment tracking, expense control)

**HUMAN RESOURCES** (employees/volunteer/staff supervision, development, personnel issues)

**FACILITIES** (management, contracts, use plans)

**COMMUNITY/GOVERNMENT RELATIONS** (promotion, communication plans, regulatory issues, public policy advocacy)

**VOLUNTEER AND FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT** (committee involvement, donor development, alumni development)



## BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

It is the Y's goal to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all day camp participants. Children who attend the program are expected to follow the behavior guidelines based on the Y's four core values and to interact appropriately in a group setting.

Behavior Guidelines:

- We will **care** for ourselves and for those around us.
- **Honesty** will be the basis for all relationships and interactions.
- People are **responsible** for their actions.
- We **respect** each other and the environment.

When a camper does not follow the behavior guidelines, we will take the following steps:

1. Staff will redirect the camper to more appropriate behavior.
2. The camper will be reminded of the behavior guidelines and day camp rules, and a discussion will take place.
3. If the behavior persists, a parent or caregiver will be notified of the problem.
4. The staff will document the situation. This written documentation will include what the behavior problem is, what provoked the problem, and the corrective action taken.
5. Staff will schedule a conference with the parent or caregiver so they can determine the appropriate action to take.
6. Staff will schedule a progress check or a follow-up conference.
7. If the problem persists, staff will schedule a conference that includes the parent or caregiver, camper, staff, and program director. The program director will have all documentation and the notes from the previous conferences for review. If subsequent conferences have to be scheduled, a counselor may also be present.
8. If a child's behavior at any time threatens the immediate safety of that child, other children, or staff, the parent or caregiver may be notified and expected to pick up the child immediately.
9. If a problem persists and a child continues to disrupt the day camp program, the Y reserves the right to suspend the child from the program. Expulsion from the program will be considered in extreme situations.

The following behaviors are not acceptable and may result in the immediate suspension of a camper for the remainder of the current day and the next day:

- Endangering the health and safety of children or staff, members, and volunteers
- Stealing or damaging Y or personal property
- Leaving the day camp program without permission
- Continually disrupting the program
- Refusing to follow the behavior guidelines or day camp rules
- Using profanity, vulgarity, or obscenity frequently
- Acting in a lewd manner

If any of these behaviors persists, staff may suspend the camper a second time before expulsion. Immediate expulsion may occur if a camper is in possession of or using tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs, firecrackers, firearms, or explosives.

### Parent or Caregiver Signature

I have reviewed with my child the Behavior Management Guidelines. I understand and agree to all of the terms presented in this document.

---

Parent or caregiver's signature

Date

---

Camper's signature





# COMPONENTS OF DAY CAMP TRAINING FOR COUNSELORS AND OTHER STAFF

## 1. Get-Acquainted/Team-Building Activities

(New games, icebreakers)

Time	Content	Method	Materials

## 2. Orientation and Training

(Mission, program objectives, history of local program/Y, unique characteristics of Y camp, introduction of key Y staff, camp structure)

Time	Content	Method	Materials

(continued)



## COMPONENTS OF DAY CAMP TRAINING FOR COUNSELORS AND OTHER STAFF (CONTINUED)

### 3. Camp Activities and Schedule

(Specific project and activity ideas, including field trips, tips on leading activities, walk-through of typical schedule)

Time	Content	Method	Materials

### 4. Working With Campers

(Child abuse prevention; focus on achievement, relationships, and belonging; group management tools; welcoming all at day camp)

Time	Content	Method	Materials

(continued)



# COMPONENTS OF DAY CAMP TRAINING FOR COUNSELORS AND OTHER STAFF (CONTINUED)

## 5. Communicating With Parents and Caregivers

(Phone calls, camp newsletter, family nights, dealing with complaints and concerns, informing parents and caregivers of injury/illness and behavior issues)

Time	Content	Method	Materials

## 6. Administrative Issues

(Job descriptions, personnel policy [absence, being late, signing in and out, use of lockers, appropriate dress, use of foul language, smoking, personal phone calls during work], payroll procedures/forms, crisis management plan, safety and risk management, purchasing supplies, day camp standards, expectations of performance, etc.)

Time	Content	Method	Materials



## BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT ROLE-PLAY

Role-plays are a good way to practice and discuss how to effectively develop youth. During staff training, write out short scenarios of potentially negative interactions during typical camp activities (examples below).

Use as many actors as necessary to depict the scenario outlined. Run through the action like it was a little drama, showing what leads up to the counselor's involvement, and then how the counselor deals with it. Encourage staff to "tag-team" it and have additional "counselors" ready to go up and take over if the first "counselor" runs into any issues.

There are many different ways to approach a situation. It can be hard for people to perform in front of each other in this way, but observing others deal with real-life situations and practicing it ourselves, is the only way to truly prepare.

### Sample Role-Plays

#### [Campers, ages 12 to 15]

Two teenage campers are walking together, hand in hand, away from the athletic field during a group activity time. You are a counselor. What might you do?

#### [Campers, ages 6 to 10]

Your campers are preparing for swimming by getting into their swimsuits. From around the corner you hear, "Get your filthy hands off my stuff, you idiot!" You head into the changing room just as a wrestling match breaks out between two campers. What might you do?

#### [Campers of any age]

In tennis class, one of the older campers has a habit of ridiculing the poorer players, especially when they are serving. He's doing it now, to the server of his doubles opponents. What might you do?

#### [Girls, ages 9 to 12]

You have a group of girls who have selected one girl to be their scapegoat. They talk about her behind her back, exclude her from conversations, put down her suggestions, and obviously avoid sitting next to her at lunch and at flagpole. You've just walked in on them making fun of her hair. She's yelling back at them, with tears in her eyes. What might you do?

#### [Campers of any age]

You find out at lunch that one of your campers didn't show up for swim lessons that morning. He is here at lunch, and the nurse says he didn't go to see her. What might you do?

#### [Campers of any age]

A staff member from your group is habitually late to flagpole. He spends a good deal of time talking with other staff, and doesn't go into the locker room until the kids are out the door and on their way. He's always saying, "You go ahead. I'll be right there," or "I'll only be a minute." You've found out that while you were at the nurse with an injured camper, your group was disciplined by the camp director for being "unruly." What might you do?

#### [Campers of any age]

You're playing kickball and one of your campers refuses to play. She'll take a position in the field (but not chase any balls), but she outright refuses to have a turn kicking. What might you do?

#### [Boys, ages 10 to 14]

You're at the waterfront and a camper you don't know is using some graphic sex talk to describe a teenage girl camper who is playing volleyball. He's talking with a group of mixed-aged boy campers he's sitting on the sand with. What might you do?

#### [Campers of any age]

You have a camper who shows his displeasure with every activity you propose with very negative body language. Sometimes it's just a sigh and a roll of the eyes, other times he comes right out and says, "Jeez, how stupid." He never makes suggestions, has no energy, but often participates when activities really get going. You're picking a sports activity at rest hour to do this afternoon, and he's acting as usual. What might you do?

#### [Campers, ages 8 to 10]

You have a tattletale in your group of young campers who comes running to tell you every little thing that any other camper does that he doesn't like. He's just come running to you to say, "Montell didn't throw his lunch bag away!" What might you do?

#### [Campers, ages 8 to 12]

It's Thursday free swim time and you see a camper sitting by herself on a picnic table. Two of your campers come running to you and say, "Safaya's crying. She's homesick and wants to go home." (Safaya will be very quiet and respond to questions mostly with shrugs and, "I don't know." She'll eventually say she misses her mother and doesn't want to sleep at camp tonight for the overnight.) What might you do?



# PROGRAM BUDGET PLANNING FORM

Program: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Session: \_\_\_\_\_ Days: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_ Budget prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

Fees  
 Full-fee member: \_\_\_\_\_ Program member: \_\_\_\_\_ Nonmember: \_\_\_\_\_

## INCOME

# of campers			Fee
_____ Full-fee members	x \$ _____	= \$ _____	
_____ Program members	x \$ _____	= \$ _____	
_____ Nonmembers	x \$ _____	= \$ _____	
<b>Grants:</b>		\$ _____	
_____ Sponsored scholarships:	x \$ _____	= \$ _____	

Total income: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## EXPENSE

Direct expenses		
Salary/staff	_____ x _____ hrs. x \$ _____	= \$ _____
Part-time/staff	_____ x _____ hrs. x \$ _____	= \$ _____
Taxes: FICA	_____ x _____	= \$ _____
Unemployment	_____ x _____	= \$ _____
	(varies by state and experience)	= \$ _____
	(varies by state and association plan)	= \$ _____
Benefits: Worker's compensation		= \$ _____
Health		= \$ _____
Retirement		= \$ _____
Supplies		= \$ _____
Equipment		= \$ _____
Rental/occupancy		= \$ _____
Transportation		= \$ _____
Other (_____)		= \$ _____
Miscellaneous		= \$ _____
Indirect expenses		
Printing		= \$ _____
Promotion		= \$ _____
Telephone		= \$ _____
Insurance		= \$ _____
Administrative overhead (% of income or expense)		= \$ _____
Other (_____)		= \$ _____
Miscellaneous		= \$ _____

Total expense \$ \_\_\_\_\_



## DAY CAMP PREPARATION CHECKLIST

September	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate successes with staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize records; keep all attendance and health records		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize insurance report and risk management incident reports		
<input type="checkbox"/> Add staff evaluations to personnel files		
<input type="checkbox"/> Compile report on end-of-summer staff evaluations		
<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate campsite and incident reports for risk management		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize summer repairs and maintenance plans for fall		
<input type="checkbox"/> Close campsite and winterize equipment, as needed		
<input type="checkbox"/> Do final inventory review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Mail early bird registration and brochure to current year's campers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update parent and caregiver communications		
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect recyclable arts and crafts supplies and sports and outdoor equipment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Pay attention to final checks and expenses		
<input type="checkbox"/> Close out all summer records and bookkeeping activities		
<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm staff training dates for next summer		
<input type="checkbox"/> Organize all camp information by session and camper names		
<input type="checkbox"/> Contact key staff to participate in annual campaign		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update camper list to prepare for annual campaign		

October	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Initiate early registration for return campers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize budget for next year		
<input type="checkbox"/> Review enrollment trends and community demographics		
<input type="checkbox"/> Set fee structure for next year		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize marketing plan		
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify program needs for next year		
<input type="checkbox"/> Review staffing needs; lead staff-selection strategy		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send evaluation report to appropriate individuals or committee		
<input type="checkbox"/> Debrief with other Y departments		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect recyclable arts and crafts supplies and sports and outdoor equipment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare holiday cards for staff and campers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet with parent and caregiver advocates		
<input type="checkbox"/> Address any issues arising from evaluation with key vendors and partners		
<input type="checkbox"/> Give executive summary report to board of directors		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send fall camper newsletter		

(continued)



## DAY CAMP PREPARATION CHECKLIST (CONTINUED)

November	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Set first staff meeting with returning staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure returning staff have achieved necessary recertification		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold Turkey Bowl or other Thanksgiving appreciation event		
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare holiday mailing to campers, vendors and partners, and staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update any forms (e.g., parent and caregiver information, camper information)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update job descriptions		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Establish needs list for equipment and supplies		
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect recyclable arts and crafts supplies and sports and outdoor equipment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Ask returning staff to recruit new staff (e.g., hold fun events)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Contact colleges about staff-recruitment opportunities		
<input type="checkbox"/> Find volunteers for family open houses		
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare early marketing for new campers and their families		
<input type="checkbox"/> Get quote for marketing collateral and finalize contract with vendor for work		
<input type="checkbox"/> Together with staff, finalize next summer's themes and program schedule		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

December	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Send holiday mailing to campers, vendors and partners, and staff (from the last two years)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold holiday appreciation dinner or holiday reunion event		
<input type="checkbox"/> Begin new staff recruitment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send out staff hiring packets to returning staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect recyclable arts and crafts supplies and sports and outdoor equipment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Set up college visits or host winter break hiring event		
<input type="checkbox"/> Set up job fairs		
<input type="checkbox"/> Begin camper enrollment reports and registration tracking		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize early enrollment issues		
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan parent and caregiver information and registration–confirmation communications		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

(continued)





## DAY CAMP PREPARATION CHECKLIST (CONTINUED)

January	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Review budget and enrollment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Begin registration–confirmation communications (mail and online)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Establish leadership staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Initiate leadership–staff work projects		
<input type="checkbox"/> Review camp standards (American Camp Association [ACA], YMCA)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Begin contracts for returning staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect recyclable arts and crafts supplies and sports and outdoor equipment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Check status of job postings		
<input type="checkbox"/> Set up Counselor-in-Training (CIT) and Leader-in-Training (LIT) interviews		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send winter camper newsletter		
<input type="checkbox"/> Attend camp conference with key staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Implement planned marketing steps (mail, online, personal)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize key vendors for special programs and services		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize any site or collaboration needs		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

February	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Review budget and enrollment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue registration–confirmation communications (mail and online)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue leadership–staff work projects		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold first family open house		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct CIT and LIT interviews		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct new staff interviews		
<input type="checkbox"/> Give school presentations to recruit new campers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect recyclable arts and crafts supplies and sports and outdoor equipment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize nurse		
<input type="checkbox"/> Implement planned marketing steps (mail, online, personal)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Draft all summer schedules		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

(continued)



## DAY CAMP PREPARATION CHECKLIST (CONTINUED)

March	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Review budget and enrollment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue registration-confirmation communications (mail and online)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue leadership-staff work projects		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send flyers out to schools		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize transportation and other program vendors		
<input type="checkbox"/> Order arts and crafts supplies		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold second family open house		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold first aid and lifeguard training for staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect recyclable arts and crafts supplies and sports and outdoor equipment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Book any outside contracts for frontline staff training		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold spring break get-together with returning staff and new recruits		
<input type="checkbox"/> Order staff shirts and camper merchandise		
<input type="checkbox"/> Order staff recognition gifts for end of summer		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send spring camper newsletter		
<input type="checkbox"/> Implement planned marketing steps (mail, online, personal)		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

April	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Review budget and enrollment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue registration-confirmation communications (mail and online)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue leadership-staff work projects		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold in-person staff meeting		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect recyclable arts and crafts supplies and sports and outdoor equipment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Order any supplies and equipment still needed		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold third family open house		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold CPR training for staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Order first aid supplies		
<input type="checkbox"/> Implement planned marketing steps (mail, online, personal)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send family letter and camper forms (mail and online)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Contact alumni about presenting to current staff during training		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

(continued)



## DAY CAMP PREPARATION CHECKLIST (CONTINUED)

May	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Review budget and enrollment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue registration–confirmation communications (mail and online)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize updates for staff training manual		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize staff training schedule		
<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm staff training resources and speakers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate final time–off requests and schedules		
<input type="checkbox"/> Create plan for summer staff games and get prizes		
<input type="checkbox"/> Clean up all camp facilities		
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete final maintenance inspection with support staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold final pre–camp work and volunteer days		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send pre–camp information to parents and caregivers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare all outdoor equipment (e.g., pools, lakes, horses, boats, range)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate vendors for healthy meals and snacks and water		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

June	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Review budget and enrollment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold supervisory staff training		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold general staff training		
<input type="checkbox"/> Take pictures for promotional pieces and staff contact		
<input type="checkbox"/> Take video for promotional pieces and staff contact		
<input type="checkbox"/> Review camper information		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold first family night		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sign birthday cards for campers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sign birthday cards for staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Mail parent and caregiver letters or cards after each session		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold late–arrival staff training		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send parent and caregiver and camper evaluations after each session (mail and online)		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

(continued)



## DAY CAMP PREPARATION CHECKLIST (CONTINUED)

July	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Review budget and enrollment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send letter of intent for CITs		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send letter of intent for LITs		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct mid-season staff performance evaluations		
<input type="checkbox"/> Review camper information		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sign birthday cards for campers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Mail parent and caregiver letters or cards after each session		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct mid-season in-service staff training		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send parent and caregiver and camper evaluations after each session (mail and online)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Implement mid-season staff and program updates and refreshers		
<input type="checkbox"/> American Camp Association (ACA) standards site review (visitors or internal)		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

August	Due	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Review budget and enrollment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Update website and social media		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send letter of intent to returning staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Review expenses for creating next year's budget		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct end-of-summer staff evaluations		
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize staff roster		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold staff thank-you event		
<input type="checkbox"/> Write personal thank-you notes to all staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sign birthday cards for campers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Mail parent and caregiver letters or cards after each session		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send parent and caregiver and camper evaluations after each session (mail and online)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete end-of-season take-down and cleanup		
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete end-of-season camper and family event		
<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm post-summer contact information for staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct staff exit interviews		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

(continued)





## SAMPLE SEASON PLANNING FORM

WEEK	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>#1 Fantasy</b>	Paul Bunyan Day (log rolling relay using large stump or barrel; logger tug-of-war; tell tall tales)	I'd Like to Be (senses scavenger hunt for things in nature)	Backwards Day (run backwards relays; sing progressive songs backwards)	Circus Day (circus planning)	Circus Day (circus performing)
<b>#2 Old West</b>	Election of Camp Mayor (speeches; posters; election parade)	Watermelon Day (seed-spitting contest; greased watermelon in water contest)	Pony Express (Pony Express game in which teams race to finish a series of challenges)	Boomtown Day (build a fake town)	Gold Rush (skits; all camp hunt for "gold" [painted rocks])
<b>#3 The Strange and Unknown</b>	Future (life-sized puppet dressed as a figure from the future; discussion of future)	Wizard of Oz (wizard story and game)	Trip to Mars (game in which each team tries to capture flags from the other)	Dinosaur Day (dinosaur egg hunt)	
<b>#4 International</b>	African Safari (game where campers stalk and photograph "animal" counselors)	Create Your Country (imaginary nations with flags, greetings, and traditions)	Olympics (games and competitions among "nations")	Same	
<b>#5 Earth-Friendly Week</b>	Focus on Trees (county forester or botanist leads activity learning; discussion of wood and paper products)	Focus on Water (have hydrologist or county water commissioner as guest; learn about water pollutants)	Focus on Soil (county agriculture department staff speaks; learn about soil problems; see crops; eat raw fruit and veggies)	Focus on Sun and Air (weather forecaster visits; talk about effects of too much sun)	Recycle and Reuse Day (guest from municipal or private recycling agency; learn how trash becomes new products; learn about recycling projects)

(continued)



## SAMPLE SEASON PLANNING FORM (CONTINUED)

WEEK	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>#6</b> <b>Seafarers</b>	Shipwrecked (skit; game in which campers pretend to be shipwrecked)	Pirates' Day (create insignias and pirate names; treasure hunt)	Beach Day (trip to the beach)		
<b>#7</b> <b>Holidays</b>	Birthday (camp birthday party)	Halloween (decorate trick-or-treat bags; do trick-or-treating in camp)	Fourth of July (Independence Day parade)	Cultural Holiday like Chinese New Year	Christmas Celebration (decorate a tree; learn about customs from different lands)
<b>#8</b> <b>Real-Life Heroes</b>	Living With Diverse Abilities (discussion with one or more individuals with diverse abilities)	Athletes' Day (have local athletes speak)	Everyday Hero (local heroes who saved someone speak)	Local Sports Hero (visit from local sports hero who cares about youth)	Be My Own Hero (campers choose a person they would like to be like and share why; recognize everyone as a hero)
<b>#9</b> <b>World Tour</b>	Spain and Mexico (fiesta)	Germany (learning German greetings; Oktoberfest)	France (Bastille Day celebration)	World Service Carnival (carnival planning)	World Service Carnival (hold carnival)
<b>#10</b> <b>Let's Be Crazy</b>	Crazy Relays (crazy relay activities)	Dinosaur Egg Hunt (search for a dinosaur egg [watermelon] using written clues and activity stations)	Peanuts Picnic (Sing song "Found a Peanut"; play games with peanuts)		Sense It (trust walk)

(continued)





## SAMPLE SEASON PLANNING FORM (CONTINUED)

WEEK	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>#11 Summer Safari</b>	Going on a Safari (make passports and "visit" countries; have a guest speaker who took a safari)	Arts and Crafts Jungle (create paper bag/plate puppets; act out story)	Lions and Tigers and Bears (scavenger hunt following paw prints)	Caring for Animals (humane society staff visit with animals)	Zoo Field Trip
<b>#12 County Fair</b>	County Fair (start planning fair for Friday; have samples to show campers)	Blue Ribbon Day (judge baking, flower arrangements, vegetables; eat food entries)	Wild Animal Show (camp staff bring in pets from home)	Fair Field Trip (visit local county fair)	Camp County Fair (test-of-skill booths; pony rides; contests; petting zoo; picnic)
<b>#13 Olympics Sports Week</b>	Character Values (talk about Olympic ideal, fair play; plan rest of week; choose countries for teams)	Opening Ceremony (stage parade of nations with flags and songs; hold archery event)	Swimming Events (each group speaks about its country's characteristics)	Equestrian or Track and Field Events	Final Parade (parade and awarding of medals to each team)
<b>#14 Healthy Lifestyles</b>	Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards (do fitness checks; taste test of healthy foods)	Olympics Festival (have day of sport events; relate to being fit)	Sports Tournaments	Service-Learning Project (project to help others become more fit)	Recognition and Awards Day (recognition of each camper; visit from local coach or athlete)
<b>#15 Water World</b>	Water Safety Demonstration (demonstration of different types of water craft use)	Water Songfest (sing in boats on water or swimming in pool)	Beach Party Day (dress up and party at real beach or make-believe one)	Aquarium Field Trip (learn about underwater life and our responsibilities to it)	Water Carnival (water games and activities)



## SAMPLE WEEKLY PLANNING FORM

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Beginning	Opening Ceremony	Opening Ceremony	Opening Ceremony	Opening Ceremony	Opening Ceremony
Middle	Orientation	Huddle Group	Huddle Group	Huddle Group	Huddle Group
		Variety Activities	Variety Activities	Variety Activities	Variety Activities
Middle	Lunch	Mastery Activity	Field Trip	Mastery Activity	Mastery Activity
		Crew Service		Crew Service	Crew Service
End	Camper Choice & Play	Camper Choice & Play		Camper Choice & Play	
	Closing Ceremony	Closing Ceremony		Closing Ceremony	
	Beginning		Middle		End

Finding ways to build responsibility into the schedule through **crew** activities gives kids a sense of ownership and pride.

Structured free time is a great way to foster **camper choice**.

The **closing ceremony** gives campers a chance not only to reflect but also to feel as though they're part of a bigger community.

Adding **huddles** provides a home base where campers can build relationships within a small group.

**Mastery activities** help campers practice and improve their new skills.

A **closing event** gives campers a way to share and celebrate what they've accomplished, potentially with parents and caregivers.



## WEEKLY PLANNING FORM TEMPLATE

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY

**BEGINNING**  
Mentally and physically prepare kids to start the day.

**MIDDLE**  
Encourage campers to stay engaged.

**END**  
Help campers reflect on each day.

**BEGINNING**  
Facilitate campers getting to know camp and building relationships with each other.

**MIDDLE**  
Encourage campers to reflect on what's happened so far and what they still want to achieve.

**END**  
Showcase and celebrate what campers have achieved.

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