

# RISK MANAGEMENT

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## A Camp Director's Wish

Soon hundreds of children and camp staff from all over the world will be joining me here at my camp. This is the beginning of the much anticipated and long-awaited summer of 2013. My wish is that this will be the best summer ever!

Every summer begins the same way: full of excitement, energy, and possibilities! What makes a successful summer? What makes one summer better, more memorable, than others? The answer remains to be seen, of course, but the power to make this summer one of the best summers ever lies within you! Yes, it is up to YOU and every person at our camp who comes into contact with a camper to make this summer one of the best summers ever — one day at a time.

### **Great Summers Start with Well-Trained Staff**

Get a clear idea of your duties and responsibilities before camp begins, and refine your understanding of your duties during precamp orientation. Find out what you are expected to do. If you already have the skills needed to do your job, then commit to doing them well! If you need to acquire more skills, then make a promise to yourself and the campers to learn your new skills and practice them diligently until you are proficient. Then apply your new skills consistently. Cutting corners puts campers and other staff at risk for injury. If anything is unclear about your duties, ask questions. Clarifying your responsibilities is vitally important. It could make the difference between life and death. Lots of people are depending on you. Make a commitment to yourself, to your fellow staff, and to the campers in your care to do your very best every day.

### **Maintain a Positive Attitude**

Have faith and confidence in yourself and your abilities. Working at camp can be fun, even though the work isn't always fun or easy. Supervising children, especially very active children, can be exhausting and sometimes frustrating work. Be prepared for some adversity. You can expect to encounter some difficult situations. Always treat campers, fellow staff, and the directors with respect. Maintain the same enthusiasm and commitment you displayed when we decided you were "the one" for this job and hired you!

Everybody can have a bad day. When you encounter a camper behaving poorly, try to put yourself in your camper's sneakers. The directors, and especially the campers and their parents, expect you to concentrate on your job. Remember you are here to take care of the campers while they are away from their parents. This means you must look out for them and put their interests ahead of your own interests — even when you feel like you are having a bad day.

### **Supervision, Supervision, Supervision**

Supervision is the key to successful summers. You must pay attention at all times, even when campers are not under your immediate supervision, like when they are at the waterfront or receiving instruction from an activities specialist. This is not a period off for you. You cannot relax under these circumstances or let your guard down at any time.

I wish you would think of yourself as a "personal risk manager" for your cabin or group. Risk in this context is uncertainty — literally, the possibility that your plans for activities might not work and that someone might be injured while engaged in the activity.

Risk management is the process of identifying uncertainty and evaluating the possibility of injury on our property and in our activities. Once risks are identified and evaluated, the process continues with establishing practices and procedures to follow

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What makes a successful summer? What makes one summer better, more memorable than others?

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to reduce or avoid the risk from interfering with our planned outcomes. Safer programs are the outcomes of effective risk management.

It is in this capacity where you and your fellow staff can make a big difference. The directors have established risk management procedures and practices for various situations. It is imperative that you follow these procedures and practices and that you impress upon your campers that they must follow the practices as well.

An example of a risk management practice designed to reduce the risk is the use of personal protective equipment such as personal flotation devices (PFDs) during boating activities. Much to our surprise, we learned from a recent camp industry study that many campers and counselors were ignoring this risk management practice and not wearing PFDs. This is not acceptable at our camp! The fact is — no matter how capable a swimmer you are or think you are — if you strike your head when you fall into the water, you will become a statistic without a PFD. When staff members don't wear PFDs, campers will follow your example and not wear them. This is UNACCEPTABLE!

Another example of personal protective equipment is a seatbelt in vans and automobiles. Yes, the seatbelt. You may not think of a seatbelt in this manner, but it is personal protective equipment. Seatbelts reduce the risk of injury in auto accidents and prevent the ejection of passengers in van accidents. Mortality statistics are very high when passengers are ejected from vehicles. Seatbelts **MUST** be worn by all persons, at all times, in all vehicles used for camp business!

### **Risk Changes Constantly**

Besides the current risk management practices the directors have established, we are depending on you as personal risk managers for your cabin or group to be alert to changing circumstances that might increase the risk of injury to campers.

Examples of these circumstances include defects in the premises, like broken steps, or defects on the property itself, like holes on sports fields created

by erosion or animals. Equipment we use might become worn during the course of the summer, such as tires and brakes on vehicles and tow lines on water-skiing boats. So be on the alert for changing risk in your daily activities. We are depending on you to tell the directors about these situations and to take appropriate steps to avoid or reduce the additional risk in the meantime. When in doubt . . . ask. If you must make an immediate decision, err on the side of being conservative, or avoid the risk entirely.

### Drinking and Illegal Drugs

If you are under the legal drinking age, don't decide to start drinking this summer at our camp. If you are old enough to drink alcohol, it is my wish that you refrain from drinking during the summer . . . even on your day off. This may be a lot to ask, but our concerns are real.

Drinking and driving on your day off is just not good risk management. The summer is busy, and even if you are in tip-top shape, you'll be tired at the end of a busy camp day. Fatigue is a factor in injuries at camp, and when fatigue is mixed with alcohol, the stage is set for some horrible things to happen. It seems one camp or another each summer has staff fatalities caused by drinking and driving. We don't want this to happen at our camp. We don't want this to happen to you or your friends. Please be wise this summer; don't drink and drive.

Drinking on your day off is another concern. We don't know how much you may have consumed, and we are worried because effects sometimes linger into the next day. We need you 100 percent ready to do your job as the need arises. We care — so if you are of legal age, please refrain from drinking this summer, even on your day off. Using illegal drugs at camp is prohibited! Yes, this includes marijuana. The concerns are the same as with alcohol.

Drinking under age, using illegal drugs at any age, and drinking and driving are unacceptable and could also lead to criminal charges against you. This would be most unfortunate for you, be a bad example for your campers, and possibly have a negative impact on our camp's reputation.

### Minimize Distractions

While cool and valuable, personal communication tools and mobile devices are distractions at camp. Please put them away and turn them off. As a member of the staff, there is no room for the use of mobile devices while you are on duty or especially while driving.

Likewise, campers are requested not to use their mobile devices if they brought them to camp. Injuries resulting from distractions while using mobile devices are on the rise and are a growing concern for camp directors and their insurance companies.

### Fight Fatigue and Complacency

While taking care of campers is the number-one priority, taking care of you is also important. This means getting plenty of sleep, eating properly, and actually resting on your time off. As the summer wears on, fatigue increases the risk of injury to staff and campers as well.

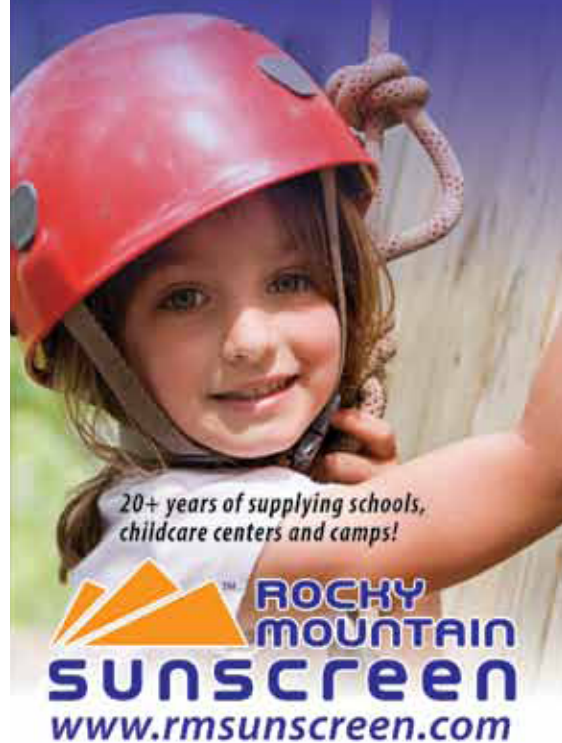
Keep your enthusiasm up all summer! Fight complacency. It is easy to become self-satisfied. Keep an open mind about your abilities and performance. Strive to be better every day at what you do. Commit to constant improvement. Make it a lifetime practice.

Follow through on your commitment to the camp, the campers, and their parents. Be true to yourself and stay the course. Take one day at a time. Who knows, you may be able to make this camp director's wish come true and be a part of one of the best summers ever!

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