

risk reporter

for camps and conference centers

Winter
2009

Vol. 3
issue 1

A quarterly publication by Church Mutual Insurance Company



Don't let bullying fly under the radar

It used to be easy to spot a bully. He was the guy with the overactive thyroid gland pummeling the 98-pound weakling for his lunch money at recess.

Fast forward to the 21st century.

Now, you can't even be sure it's a he, and in all likelihood, it's not physical. And it's not confined to the school setting but has become prevalent in camps as well.

"It's kind of similar to what it would be wherever kids get together," said Dr. Joel D. Haber, who goes by the moniker of "The Bully Doctor" and is a consultant to the American Camp Association on the subject nationwide. "It's one kid or a group of kids using their power with the intent of hurting someone with lesser power."

"I really focus on relational aggression," observed Dr. Cheryl Dellasega, who has served as a consultant to the Girl Scouts of the USA. "I think we as a society have really come to recognize the physical violence, but I look at the more subtle, covert, hurtful kinds of things where you're teasing someone, intimidating them or harassing them."

How can camps combat the issue?

The first line of defense

Staff training. Start by taking a long hard look in the mirror.

"You have to remember that counselors are not always the most mature themselves," Dellasega cautions. "And they're living in close conditions for a long time with people they may not particularly feel friendly toward. Although the summer doesn't seem that long to some of us, for a teenager or young adult it can be. There can be a lot of bullying that can go on between the counselors themselves."

"Lots of staff do some of these bullying things with each other," Haber agreed. "And if they role model some of these behaviors to their campers, that creates a fertile ground for campers to do it too. Counselors have to be good role models if you want to have a camp that provides emotional and physical safety."

Oftentimes, the staff is unaware it's participating in the bullying process.

"They do exclusion themselves," Haber pointed out. "They do eye

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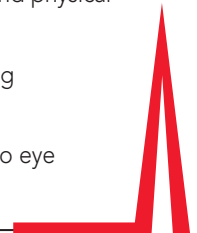
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rolling, gossiping and lots of things they don't necessarily think about."

The second line of defense

Recognition of both bullies and victims.

The former is tougher to spot.

"We used to think they were the kids who were insecure," Haber said. "Maybe different in some way. They would try to show their power by picking on other kids to get attention."

Times have changed.

"The real bullies are kids who are the hardest to think of as such," Haber added. "They are popular and smart, have good social skills and have friends. Those are the kind of bullies who create the most problems because they go under the radar."

Dellasega, who formed her Camp Ophelia and Club Ophelia for middle school girls, offers her perspective.

"We're less willing to think of girls as bullies," she said.

"Even girls themselves don't recognize that when they start a rumor about someone, text message somebody something mean or campaign to ostracize somebody, that's bullying. They think that's just normal OK behavior. I hear a lot of 'girls will be girls.' It has a really profound impact on the victim. We need to not be so cavalier."

And who is that victim?

"Targets usually have some vulnerability," Haber offered. "Lots of times, they have a big emotional reaction. They yell, they get angry and they get upset, which makes it easier for kids who bully to pick on them."

"It's the camper who seems to always be by herself, who doesn't seem to enjoy camp and who always wants to hang close to the counselor or an adult so that they don't get abused," Dellasega said. "They frequently seem to be outside of a group. She repeatedly wants to go home, and it's not necessarily homesickness, but they feel nobody likes them."

Extreme examples

Dellasega was enlisted by the Girl Scouts to develop a merit badge when one of their camps had bullying problems.

"The girls would sign hate contracts when they arrived, and they would all agree to hate another girl," she revealed.

"None of the counselors or directors knew about it until there was a pretty intense investigation. It made the campers' lives miserable."

Haber has also heard some horror stories.

"I've heard of campers being locked in a service closet or stuck in garbage pails with the covers put on, which is marginalizing a kid," he said.

"Or those who have had their things stolen and broken where they're really isolated and feel terrible."

Another unthinkable abuse he's heard of is putting urine in shampoo bottles.

Innocent bystanders

Do they exist?

"The line is really where kids aren't protective of each other emotionally and physically," Haber said.

"Even if they're not the bully or the victim, they see it happening, and it's really intimidating for them," Dellasega said, "because they want to do something to help, but if they do, they might be next. Even if they don't do anything to help, they always feel unsafe in that kind of environment where they see somebody getting continually harassed and nobody intervening to stop it."

Solutions

Can you implement zero tolerance?

Not really.

"It's a great idea, but there is no such thing," Haber said. "Zero tolerance would mean that if a little kid points a finger at someone and says 'Bang, you're dead,' he would be out of camp.

"You want to say that we don't tolerate bullying, but you have to be reasonable depending on age," he continued. "It's important to have a strong policy against bullying and clear consequences when it happens, but you have to be very careful of saying zero tolerance. It's very hard to enforce that."

"One of the very first things we do is set up guidelines of what will make you feel safe during the time you're with us," Dellasega said. "Sometimes girls will do things knowing they will only be here for a week. They think that it's only this amount of time, and I don't have to be best friends with her. But you have to treat her with respect."

Haber thinks campers can improve their own lot.

"I'm a big proponent of teaching kids skills to help them be less targeted," he said. "Not showing that it really upsets you. If you don't get a big reaction, it's boring for a bully.

"Because our time span with them is so short, we need to maximize our efforts on those kids who aren't able to do that."

- **For more information** visit www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov. This site is operated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



Managing Your Risks

Swimmer Safety

As the end of winter closes in—welcomed by many as record cold and snowfalls in many northern areas have made it a long one—camp and conference center directors are busy planning employee interviews, maintenance and renovation projects and the multitude of other tasks one has in the preseason.

Although early, I urge you to give thought to your water safety issues right now.

Each year, Church Mutual receives reports from the customer of drownings occurring at their facilities or at sponsored outings. In fact, over the last 10 years, there have been 41 incidents of drowning involving our customers. Almost all of them could have been prevented.

Church Mutual developed its Swimmer Safety Program to help our customers develop a program that's right for them. The program involves easy-to-use instructions to evaluate a person's swimming ability and the use of fluorescent, color-coded wristbands to denote the swimmers' abilities.

Whether you have a pool, pond, lake or river, knowing the swimming abilities of each and every camper is paramount. The evaluation step in our program takes about 1 minute per swimmer to determine a nonswimmer (red wristband) and an intermediate swimmer (yellow wristband). The evaluation for a qualified swimmer (green wristband) takes about 2 minutes.

The Swimmer Safety Program, including laminated evaluation guidelines, evaluation forms and wristbands, is free of charge. They can be ordered on our Web site, www.churchmutual.com, click on Safety Resources and select Swimmer Safety. You will be asked to enter the number of swimmers you will be evaluating this year.

Drowning is the No. 2 cause of accidental deaths among children ages 4 to 19 in the United States. Take the necessary steps today to prevent an incident from occurring at your facility. Order your Swimmer Safety Program now.

Richard J. Schaber, CPCU, CRM
Risk Control Manager



seasonal spotlight winter

Inspection vital first step prior to opening camp

For many camp directors, spring is the time introspection turns into inspection.

After reflecting upon what went right and wrong the previous season, for those camps not open year-round, it's time to open the doors in anticipation of another flock of wide-eyed youngsters.

But not before thoroughly going over the grounds and buildings for potential hazards.

Kevin Nugent has inspected more than 150 camps in his 23 years as a senior risk control representative for Church Mutual. His territory includes Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia.

He recommends the following plan of attack:

Look first at electricity.

"That's going to be the most dangerous thing they run into," Nugent pointed out. "A lot of camps — particularly those in remote areas — run their electric lines through the woods, not necessarily to telephone poles but just to trees. If you're walking down a trail and there's an electric line hanging eight or nine feet off the ground, I know when I was a kid we were always challenging each other to see who could jump the highest."

Other electrical issues?

"If they are using fuses, they have to have the proper ones for the wiring. In order to run a 30-amp fuse, you have to have a 10-gauge wire. Make sure the wiring is up to snuff before you start turning stuff on."

While you're out and about, check out the walkways.

"It's rustic, and that's what these camps want, but they need to go through and look for downed trees and eliminate as many tripping hazards as they can," Nugent said.

Check the plumbing.

"Even though they're winterized, they need to make sure that it still didn't freeze up," Nugent observed. "I did a camp two years ago in the Poconos, I got there the second day they had opened up. I must have come across 25 leaking pipes."

Beware of varmints.

"Make sure nobody's made their home in there over the winter, because they will," he said. "Raccoons, squirrels and mice will chew their way in."

That's not the extent of the damage they can do.

"They can create carbon monoxide issues," Nugent pointed out. "A lot of cabins have a short through-the-wall vent that looks like a cap sticking out of the wall, and you get mice, squirrels and birds building nests in there so they don't vent."

Don't forget to inspect the heating system, bunk beds and their railings and the railings at the entrances of buildings. Check the fire extinguishers and smoke detectors.

Q | a

A Perspective

Assembling your team is an important first step annually for camps across the United States. With that in mind, Risk Reporter spoke with Marla Coleman, who is a past national president of American Camp Association (ACA) and owner of Coleman Family Camps in Merrick, N.Y., about job descriptions, training and attributes of counselors.



Risk Reporter: How many different positions and job descriptions should a typical camp have?

Coleman: Each camp is unique in its program, session type and scope, camper needs, parent expectations and government regulations. A wilderness backpacking camp, for example, will have very different positions and job descriptions than a municipal day camp at the local county park.

Risk Reporter: Should each position have a backup person, and how do you choose who backs up whom?

Coleman: There should always be a backup plan, though not necessarily a backup person. Sometimes staff are cross-trained to fill each others' roles, but often, if a person is not able to do the job, the location of the activity can be changed, or the group can be rescheduled for a different activity. If a staff member is filling in for another, the camp director can assess who has the competencies to do so or if the schedule needs to be changed instead. There are some extenuating circumstances, such as a special needs camp where there must be a trained backup staff member to provide specialized medical care.

Risk Reporter: What kind of training should be done to make sure camp personnel don't become too personally involved with campers?

Coleman: The key element is to train staff to set boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not. Since the camp experience itself is rooted in connections, it is important to set limits while still fostering positive interrelationships. Counselors often benefit from picturing an imaginary line between appropriate and inappropriate conversations and actions and then consistently enforcing them in their daily interactions with campers.

Risk Reporter: What traits and/or attributes make a good counselor?

Coleman: Good counselors make certain that they help campers make connections with others (teaching them how to make a friend be a friend, and keep a friend). They maintain an emotionally safe environment for their campers, they coach life skills in addition to physical skills and they help campers learn to solve their own problems.

Risk Reporter: How much time should a camp devote to orientation and training of its staff annually?

Coleman: ACA-accredited camps are required to cover certain topics during training. They include: supervision of campers, sensitive issues, boundaries, motivating positive behavior, appropriate consequences, bullying, child abuse, talking and listening with children, developmental characteristics, emergency procedures, goals and outcomes, operating procedures and rules of the community. The number of days or hours of training will vary based on camp variables and types (day, resident or travel) as well as style of training. Some areas are covered in online courses or assigned reading material — the subject matter needs to be presented in a manner in which it can be absorbed clearly.