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TAKE CARE



By [Michal Eisikowitz](#) | JUNE 25, 2014

Will sleepaway camp be a fond memory your child holds dearly — or an awful experience she regrets for decades? Your child’s counselor shoulders much of the responsibility for how her summer turns out. What camps are doing to ensure counselors understand — and are prepared for — their vital role.



"I was not fit to be a counselor," says Elisheva, now a mother of seven children. "It sounds horrible, but in retrospect, I'd never want my child to be cared for by the 16-year-old that I was."

Sleepaway camp offers children a welcome respite from the rigors of school and a sometimes-rare chance to shine in a nonacademic setting. But the setup has its snags: Parents entrust their most precious assets to often inexperienced adolescents who mean well, but may not have the maturity and skills required for safe, effective nurturing.

"My friends and I were deep in social stress, resolving identity crises — it was the most self-centered stage of our lives," Elisheva recalls. "And then we became responsible for ten impressionable nine-year-olds for two months! We were too busy making sure our campers thought we were 'cool' to actually focus on giving them a great summer."

Every child — even the most emotionally healthy one — requires enormous doses of patience, tolerance, and attention. What's more, when a child leaves for camp, he doesn't leave his problems behind — and the ramifications of a mismanaged issue can be tragic. Are today's counselors qualified?

“In camp, an 18-year-old is taking care of 12 kids 24 hours a day with different backgrounds, personalities, needs — there’s no parent in the world like that!” remarks Rabbi Ronnie Greenwald, veteran director of Camp Sternberg, now celebrating its jubilee year.

Happily, more and more camps are prepping counselors for the job: impressing upon them the importance of the role, transmitting critical counseling principles, and offering extensive senior staff support. In Camp Agudah, for example, in addition to a thorough precamp training, counselors attend weekly workshops where they meet division heads and discuss challenging real-time situations.

“We feel strongly about presenting realistic, common scenarios and giving over the right and wrong ways to deal with them,” says Rabbi Avraham Neiman, Agudah’s head counselor.

Camp Sternberg has gone further: For years, they’ve hired two on-site seasoned social workers who meet regularly with counselors to offer sound direction, but operate somewhat incognito with the younger bunch. Most campers know them as the “nice ladies who take me for a walk and make me feel better.”

At Camp Sternberg’s full-day orientation, every staff member must be present. “We offer tools for the most typical problems, but we strongly encourage counselors to seek guidance when they’re not sure,” says Rabbi Greenwald. “The hierarchy of who to ask is made clear.”

Most recently, Mrs. Debbie Fox, LCSW — creator of the now well-known Safety Kid program — streamlined this training task by developing Project SafeCamp, an interactive video training series in which eight professionals (the experts quoted throughout this article) offer presentations on topics like “counseling 101,” bullying prevention, and personal safety. In the year since the program’s inception, 16 camps have registered and over 2,000 counselors have been trained, numbers that underscore the increased demand for comprehensive counselor preparation.

“There is no place like camp,” Debbie says. “But without adequate staff training, the potential for mishandled situations is high.”

Counseling 101

Many counselors sign up for the job by default: They were campers for years, and now it’s time to move on, enjoying the staff perks they’ve coveted for a decade. (Night canteen!) Project SafeCamp lets counselors know their role must not be taken lightly.

“This is not something you do for money,” Dr. Shloimie Zimmerman, PsyD, tells counselors on the video. “You do it for yourselves and your campers — you’ll both grow from it.”

“The counselor is the ultimate role model, the mechanech-in-chief,” noted educator Rabbi Yerachmiel Milstein says with his trademark passion. “You will be watched for every nuance, every move.”

Rabbi Milstein recounts a story in which renowned Judaica artist Rabbi Yonah Weinrib met a former camper who — 20 years later — had become an esteemed maggid shiur.

“How did you become such a talmid chacham?” Rabbi Weinrib curiously inquired.

“You don’t know?” the camper-turned-maggid shiur replied incredulously. “Don’t you remember, you would wake up every morning before Shacharis to learn with your chavrusa on the porch? When I saw that, I wanted to become a masmid as well.”

At Camp Shira, co-program director Mrs. Naomi Sutton — formerly camp mother for 14 years — challenges her girls to create a mission statement. “I ask our counselors: What do you want to accomplish? Most tell me they want to build their campers, give them a fabulous time. But I caution them: ‘It’s easy to get sidetracked — spending too much time with friends, staying up too late.’”

The greatest counselor, says Mrs. Sutton, is super-focused on her charges. “It’s not about her or her ego. She loves her campers, and they feel it.”

But even the best counselor is neither a parent nor a therapist, and it’s imperative that counselors recognize their limitations. “Their role is to ensure every camper’s physical and emotional safety, but they can’t do it alone,” says Dr. Zimmerman. “When in doubt, counselors must bump it up to senior staff.”

Ari Sorotzkin, a social worker practicing in Brooklyn who has moderated several Project SafeCamp showings, reports that this knowledge provides great relief to teen counselors.

“They learn that they won’t have all the answers, they won’t solve all problems, and that’s okay. Their job is to be the first line of defense — to pick up on worrisome signs and pass them on.”

Some former counselors wish they had known this. Shimon Bachrach, now an actuary in Cincinnati, remembers dealing solo with a sticky social issue as a first-time counselor, mistakenly assuming that seeking help was a sign of incompetence.

“In the beginning, you’re worried about proving yourself as a counselor. You have to ‘know what you’re doing.’ After a bit, you realize guidance is really helpful. You start wanting to ask.”

The bump-it-up approach, of course, is only effective if counselors can clearly identify the chain-in-command. And if the counselor feels the point person is not handling the situation, he must know to climb to the next rung.

Former counselor Nina relates that the “just-seminaried” head counselors in her camp — designated as the first address for camper problems — proved singularly unhelpful. “I consulted them once and gained nothing. They composed great songs and motions, but why were they go-to people for sensitive stuff? The next time, I went straight to the camp mother.”

Former camp counselor Sara, in contrast, found herself groping for guidance. Her camper Dina would wake up at night crying hysterically, to her counselors' bewilderment. Thankfully, a fellow bunkmate inadvertently leaked a recent physical and emotional trauma Dina had endured.

"In hindsight, I understand she was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder," says Sara, today a Passaic speech-language pathologist and mother.

When, one morning, Sara found Dina crying and shaking on her bed — instead of at davening — she tried cheering her up, but eventually had to leave for her "day off." Dina was left alone in the bunkhouse, crying. And for the duration of the summer, she experienced ongoing anxiety attacks.

"I felt very ill-prepared," Sara reflects. "The senior staff member we consulted offered zero direction, and I didn't know who to turn to next."

Counselors have to use judgment in determining what can be handled in-house. Guidance is certainly indicated if a camper violates camp rules, or if a situation involves injury. For murkier cases, Dr. Zimmerman recommends using an easy mnemonic: IDF, or intensity, duration, and frequency.

"Intense behaviors, like a violent anger reaction, or behaviors that last more than a week — like homesickness — must be bumped up," he advises counselors. "A one-off tantrum can happen, but daily meltdowns are not okay."

Challenging Situations

Veteran counselors will agree it's inevitable. In every bunk, one camper will seriously ruffle feathers, upsetting the otherwise pleasant dynamic.

This is a cry for attention, asserts Project SafeCamp presenter Miriam Turk, LCSW, who has trained counselors at Camp Sternberg since 1992. "The kids who are hardest to love are the ones who need love most," she says. "They're wearing a badge that says: 'Catch me being good!'"

Miriam advises counselors to ignore negative behavior whenever possible, offering zero recognition or attention. When a counselor has no choice but to confront the behavior (e.g., when safety is compromised), she must speak softly and slowly, without any trace of sarcasm, eye-rolling, or anger.

"Be firm and consistent, not angry," Miriam says. "The more you demand respect, the less you will get."

When campers are defiant or speak with attitude, counselors must depersonalize: it's not a reflection of the counselor's abilities, it's about the child's struggles and insecurities.

Frayda, formerly a counselor of sixth-graders, remembers developing an intense dislike toward the camper who was "ruining her bunk."

"As an adult, I feel enormous compassion: this child was clearly acting out from deep pain. As a teenager, though, I was concerned with my image. All I could see was a child spoiling my reputation as a 'super-successful' counselor."

Ms. Turk suggests a thorough mental check before bed — "Did I connect positively at least once with each child today?" — and mentally combing for "yellow flags" (less urgent than red, but still worrisome). These include abrupt changes in sleeping or eating patterns, unusual clinginess, reluctance to change clothing, brooding or nonsocial behavior, sudden homesickness, unusual sadness or nervousness, and complaints of physical pains.

Children exhibiting these behaviors need extra attention. The counselor should observe them closely, communicating, "I'm here for you — let me know if you want to talk."

At the same time, warns Dr. Ditzia Berger, faculty advisor at Lander College for Women and senior psychologist at Camp Sternberg, counselors must give "easy" campers lots of attention too.

"Your attention is the most potent reinforcer," Dr. Berger tells counselors. "You don't want to create an unhealthy competition where the only way to get attention is to have a problem."

Excessive discussion of personal challenges is also inappropriate because it can cause "flooding," where the child reexperiences the trauma or pain all over again.

"DMCs can be dangerous," Dr. Berger says. "These problems weren't created overnight, and you are not going to solve them overnight. Your goal is to integrate the child back into camp — as quickly as possible."

If a child with an eating disorder brings it up, for example, a long, anorexia-related conversation is to be avoided. The counselor must validate the issue, speak for a few minutes, distract and segue, then bump it up.

Project SafeCamp moderator Ari Sorotzkin reports that female audiences in particular were surprised to hear this. "Girls are often focused on helping, nurturing," Ari explains. "In their zealotry to make things right, they can overstep boundaries."

"It is not your job to change reality," Miriam Turk sums up at the end of her presentation. "What you can do — through positive, supportive messages — is bring light into darkness. Even a little match can illuminate an entire room."

A Little Too Homesick

Perhaps the most immediate challenge counselors face is homesickness, the widespread malady that keeps "Camp Mother" in business.

According to research by Dr. Christopher Thurber, a psychologist with over 30 years working with campers, homesickness is an almost universal experience (though 81 percent of campers recover quickly when supported by friends and distracted by activities).

Camp Agudah head counselor Rabbi Avraham Neiman says homesickness generally comes in two forms: mild and temporary versus severe and long-lasting. “It’s natural for the average child to feel homesick his first time away from home. This kind is usually temporary, creeping up during off-peak hours when the camper is not active. The solution? Keep this child engaged until it passes.”

If a camper brings up homesickness, counselors must listen and acknowledge, advises Dr. Michael Thompson, author of *Homesick and Happy: How Time Away from Parents Can Help a Child Grow*: “Boy, I can see you really miss home. I can see it really hurts. That’s tough.” Generic platitudes or superficial reassurances (e.g., “Lots of kids feel homesick, but they get over it. You’ll be fine in a few days.”) are confusing and invalidating.

Longer-lasting homesickness is usually referred to the camp mother, who may involve the parents. Sometimes, severe homesickness can signal depression or another mental health issue.

Former counselor Rivka Lieberman used the IDF rule (intensity, duration, frequency) to determine that a homesickness case required bumping-up. Her camper Shulamit began crying uncontrollably within hours of arriving; “she was indistractable.”

Rivka immediately sought the camp mother, but after two days in camp, Shulamit still wasn’t participating in activities and lay in bed for most of the day. The final straw came when Rivka found Shulamit in a corner, biting herself: The anguished girl had resorted to self-harm.

“At that point, I knew I couldn’t leave her alone,” Rivka remembers.

The head counselor sent Rivka a specialty staff member who stayed with Shulamit throughout the day. Amazingly, just when the camp was about to send her home, Shulamit had a great interaction with a friend and wanted to stay.

“She ended up having a fantastic summer,” Rivka reports.

Sometimes, notes Rabbi Eli Hersh, Director of HaMachane, a yeshivah camp for 5th- through 12th-grade boys in Lake Placid, New York, it’s not the child who’s homesick; it’s the parents who are suffering from profound separation anxiety.

He recalls the mother who stayed the entire first day of camp and unpacked her son’s trunks, making sure he got the “best” bed and “best” bunkmates. “Parents want their child to have the experience of sleepaway camp, but they can hold him back by calling or visiting too often.”

Ultimately, both parent and child usually benefit from living apart for a short time. “Living in a cabin 24/7 with kids you like and kids you hate builds self-control and empathy,” Dr. Thomspen writes in a New York Times opinion piece. “True independence is something your parents cannot give you. You have to live it on your own.”

Bully-Free Bunks

One of the list-topping parental concerns about camp is bullying. Some school and camp administrators play down the phenomenon, claiming it’s “normal,” or “a rite of passage,” but survivors of bullying attest that the scars last for the rest of their lives.

“The number-one reason kids don’t return to camp is bullying,” says Project SafeCamp presenter Dr. Eli Shapiro, a clinical psychologist and sought-after lecturer who specializes in bullying and cyberbullying.

Bullying — an act of abuse that is entirely different from typical childhood conflict — can take several forms: physical, verbal (e.g., name-calling), or relational (e.g., excluding a child or talking about him behind his back). It occurs as a group, with the rest of the bunk enabling the bully by acting as passive bystanders, usually because they’re terrified of becoming the next victim.

“Bullies want reactive victims — they like when the victim cries, cowers in the corner, or even responds aggressively,” Dr. Shapiro notes. “They also pick on the child who is socially awkward, shy, or different in some way.”

With far less adult supervision and 24/7 bunk togetherness, camp is fertile ground for bullying. But, says Dr. Shapiro, with the right skills, it can be successfully prevented, identified — and aborted.

“You have enormous power,” asserts Dr. Rona Novick, an internationally renowned authority on bullying and a Project SafeCamp presenter. “You might unintentionally build up the popular girl and ignore the girl who is less powerful. But your job is to model caring and inclusion — making sure everyone feels valued — even if camper X is annoying or not as talented.”

Counselors must set rules early on, emphasizing the bunk as a bully-free zone where everyone is treated equally, and where name-calling and teasing are not acceptable. They must create an environment that doesn’t support bullying, perhaps by hanging signs with empowering messages, like “We can stand up to bullying” or “No bullies allowed.”

“When you empower bystanders to do the right thing — support the victim, distract the bully, or tell an adult — the bully loses his power,” Dr. Shapiro says.

Hilla Sage, a former counselor from Los Angeles, faced a classic case of bullying that was painful to watch. “The bully targeted Shira, a super-anxious girl. She convinced the other girls to block Shira out of her room, took her stuff, made her miserable. Every time she passed Shira, she’d give her a look, corner her a bit, then let her go.”

Shira was traumatized. She insisted on sleeping in the counselors’ room and refused to attend any activity where the bully would be present. While Hilla consulted with higher-ups and implemented their advice, she doesn’t know if Shira ever really recovered. “She was more relaxed by the end of the summer, but I don’t think she got over it.”

One critical prevention method Hilla employed was minimizing unstructured, “alone” time, the space in which most bullying occurs. Transitions between activities, rest hour, bedtime prep, lights out — counselors must be extra watchful during these low-supervision times.

“Bunks should never be left alone,” says Camp Shira’s Mrs. Naomi Sutton, noting that this rule prevents a variety of issues — not just bullying. “As long as there is a presence of authority, most problems don’t surface.”

Rivka Lieberman says the bullying situation she faced as a counselor was badly mishandled. One week into camp, Rivka realized that Mindy was bullying Chaya. When Rivka walked into the bunkhouse one day to behold the entire bunk sitting on a bunk bed, with Chaya standing sadly to the side, she went straight to the head counselor. But instead of following professional protocol, the head counselor gave the bunk a fluffy speech about the importance of being nice to each other.

“It was ridiculous,” says Rivka. “Mindy herself was acting all earnest and sincere, asking questions, getting really involved in the discussion. When the head counselor finished, she said to me, ‘Problem solved,’ and I thought to myself, Um... I think not. Sure enough, as soon as we got back to the bunk, it was business as usual.”

What would have been the right way to handle this? If, after employing all prevention methods, a counselor still encounters bullying, she needs to immediately distract the bully and cut the interaction short. She (or the camp’s point person) should meet with the bully and victim separately, conveying a zero-tolerance policy to the bully and complete support for the victim, saying “it’s safe to come to me — I will always respond.”

“The counselor is the most powerful bystander,” says Dr. Novick. “If even the counselor is passive, the camper soon realizes: There is no safe place for me this summer.”

If the victim insists “it doesn’t bother me,” counselors are still obligated to stop the bullying. That sort of response is usually a defense mechanism masking deep pain.

Most importantly, counselors must realize that there is no contradiction between laying down serious interpersonal rules and having a great time. “Camp should be fun,” Dr. Novick tells counselors. “But your job is to help campers understand the line between clean fun and fun that’s at someone’s expense.”

Keep It Safe

Unfortunately, camps provide an ideal framework for those seeking to harm children: plenty of opportunities for alone time, frequent changing of clothing, and no parental supervision.

What’s more, while a victim of molestation might report troubling behavior to his parents, many campers would feel uncomfortable sharing such an incident with a counselor. That puts the onus on the counselor to spot the signs, stresses Debbie Fox.

To aid in identifying abuse, Project SafeCamp presenters offer counselors a list of unacceptable behaviors, and then explain why children don’t usually report them.

“They may be too young to understand what happened,” says Barry Horowitz, LCSW, a psychotherapist who specializes in treating trauma and abuse. “They may have been tricked into it and feel guilty for going along. They may have been promised special treats or attention to keep it secret, or threatened that something terrible will happen to them — or their family — if they disclose.”

Counselors must constantly look out for these and other red flags and seek immediate intervention from the camp’s point-person:

- **expressing a desire to self-harm**
- **pain in a private body part**
- **discovery of inappropriate material in the bunkhouse**
- **demonstration of inappropriate physical boundaries — with either a fellow camper or counselor**
- **engaging in inappropriate conversations or sending inappropriate text messages**

Obviously, if the child discloses abuse, or engages in physically dangerous behavior, these too call for immediate attention.

Counselors must likewise take precautions to protect themselves, keeping healthy physical boundaries.

“Your intention doesn’t necessarily equal their interpretation,” warns Dr. Ditzberger. Besides abiding by the camp’s official touch policy, Dr. Berger cautions counselors never to share beds, give long hugs, offer chills or tickling, or touch a child without his permission.

“You should not be touching a camper below the shoulders,” she says. “Model tzniyus by getting dressed and undressed privately, and respect your camper’s boundaries — if she is getting dressed, do not look at or speak to her.”

If a camper wants to discuss something privately, professionals recommend a public place that is out of earshot, like an outdoor gazebo or bench.

Former counselor Gavriel, whose wilderness camp enforced numerous rules promoting transparency — like forbidding counselors from ever being alone with a single camper — was grateful for the protection. “You never want to be in a situation where it’s your word against his,” he says.

Special Cases

When a camper has unique medical or emotional needs, everyone benefits when counselors are in the know. If there was a divorce, bereavement, or trauma in the family, for example, an extra level of sensitivity is required.

Camp HaMachane Director Rabbi Eli Hersh urges parents to be completely open about their child’s condition.

“We had a camper who was exceptionally impulsive, frequently becoming violent,” he recalls. “We tried many approaches, but nothing helped. We were stumped. His parents eventually revealed that they’d been hoping to ‘wean him off’ his daily Ritalin dose over the summer — without letting us know.”

Ultimately, Rabbi Hersh felt compelled to send the child home, an outcome he describes as “very unfortunate.” Had there been dialogue from the outset with preparatory measures, the situation may have ended differently.

Particularly with embarrassing issues like bedwetting, parents who don’t tell the administration do a tremendous disservice to their child.

Gavriel discovered his camper’s bedwetting struggle when it was too late. The rest of the bunk had discovered it too, and the boy was terribly shamed.

In contrast, former counselor Yehoshua says he’s grateful for the thorough briefing he received on each camper prior to camp. One child took Ritalin (Yehoshua knew to be more compassionate about the hyperactivity), another had severe allergies (Yehoshua learned how to use an EpiPen for emergencies), and another camper — Moshe — was on an antidepressant.

“Moshe was a quiet kid who had no interest in being in camp,” Yehoshua recalls. “I was grateful for the heads-up because I knew to give him extra TLC, making sure to shmooze about topics that interested him.”

Knowledge is power. But Dr. Zimmerman warns counselors in-the-know not to define campers by their problems. “View the child as a whole person,” he enjoins counselors. “She is not Chani, the problem kid — she is Chani, who is experiencing a challenge.”

Most importantly, counselors must protect their campers’ privacy. “Do not share personal information with friends!” Dr. Zimmerman says unequivocally. “The camp, the children, and the parents trust you.”

Elisheva is contrite about her lack of inhibition when it came to a camper’s personal problem. “She had a terrible body odor, and the girls would tease her,” she remembers. “Eventually, I sought help from higher-ups — who were very responsive — and the issue resolved well. But looking back, I was so facetious about the whole thing.”

In most cases, Debbie Fox advises counselors, sharing confidential information with peers not only constitutes a major breach of privacy but likely incurs several issurim, including lashon hara.

Of course, if a camper divulges information that raises serious concerns about his physical or emotional wellbeing, a counselor is obligated to pass it on — to higher-ups only. “Do not make promises to keep a secret,” says Debbie Fox adamantly. “Control your emotions — don’t look horrified! — and calmly reassure them that they did the right thing by telling you. Say, ‘I will do my best to figure this out and keep you safe.’”

Project SafeCamp moderator Ari Sorotzkin says his audiences were taken by this point. “We explained to the counselors: there are times when you must break confidentiality. And if you promised you wouldn’t tell, you will have destroyed the relationship.”

Therefore, counselors should acknowledge the privacy of the info (assuring they’d never share it with a friend or co-counselor) but concede that they might disclose it to safe adults who can help.

A Transformative Experience

Complexities aside, sleepaway camp offers growth opportunities not available anywhere else. And for countless men and women, it has formed the backdrop of childhood’s sweetest memories.

“It’s where real techiyas hameisim happens,” attests Agudah’s Rabbi Avraham Neiman, invoking an oft-heard phrase from Rabbi Simcha Kaufman, the camp’s previous head counselor. “In yeshivah, you’re learning Torah. In camp, you’re living Torah — on the basketball court, interacting with bunkmates, competing in Color War. Kids go back to school uplifted and recharged, feeling the vibrancy and relevance of Yiddishkeit.”

Rabbi Ronnie Greenwald, pioneer of frum camping for over half a century now, could not agree more — but he has a caveat. “Camp has the ability to change a child’s life forever,” he states. “Comprehensive counselor training can help assure the change is positive.”

Healing the Homesickness Blues

For most kids, some degree of homesickness is inevitable.

Here’s how to minimize its negative effect:

- **Validate.** Tell your child in advance that homesickness is normal: “It means you have a home you love.” Empathize with his anxiety, but don’t internalize it; exude confidence.
 - **Practice.** Provide a taste of the experience by arranging for pre-camp sleepovers or overnight stays at relatives.
 - **Give a Mommy memento.** Offer a special charm, note, or stuffed animal to pack, to be taken out anytime your child misses Mommy or Tatty.
 - **Find a connection.** Make sure there’s a familiar face in the camp to whom your child can look for comfort.
 - **Talk strength.** If you subliminally plant weakness (“if you don’t like camp, I’ll pick you up”), your child will have a hard time overcoming the challenge. Both before and during camp, convey “I believe you can do this.”
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Protection from Afar

Do you want to make sure your child’s summer is a positive experience? Parents play a significant role in preventing problems:

- **Be Proactive.** Ask lots of questions. Find out what the camp does to train counselors and protect campers. Show the head counselors and directors this is important to you.
- **Have a Pre-Camp Talk.** This is your single most powerful tool in assuring your child’s personal safety. Project SafeCamp creator Debbie Fox says you need to clearly convey the following:
 - No one has the right to make you feel uncomfortable or “icky” in any way.
 - No one has the right to talk about, look at, or touch the private areas of your body (those covered by a bathing suit) while in camp. You also may not do these things to others.
 - Remain in public areas. You should never be alone in a bunk or anywhere else in camp with only one other person.
 - No matter what anyone tells you, you will never be in trouble for “telling” on someone who is making you uncomfortable or touching you.
 - No one in camp may tell you to keep a secret about anything from your parents or camp staff. If someone tells you to keep a secret, say “I am going to tell.”
- **Develop a Code.** Come up with a code for your child to indicate to you that he needs your help right away, like “I have one of those headaches,” or “Today is just a blue day.” Your child needs to know you will understand that he can’t talk in detail, but he needs your assistance immediately.
- **Listen to the Messages.** If you receive reports from camp that your child is:
 - having difficulty falling asleep
 - bedwetting (if this was not an issue before camp)
 - fearful about getting undressed, showering, or changing into a bathing suit
 - secretive about a relationship
 - showing signs of isolation or depression
 - Ask your child: “I’m worried about you. You just need to say ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Is someone making you uncomfortable or touching you?”
- **React Right.** If your child does disclose abuse, your response is critical:
 - remain calm and supportive
 - reassure him that it is not his fault
 - make sure he knows you believe him
 - thank him for trusting you; let him know you will help him and take care of things
- **Check In.** Call the counselor or camp mother periodically (but not daily) to check up. Show interest; show you’re on top of things.
- **Maximize Visiting Day.** Many travel-weary parents question the value of Visiting Day, but it’s an excellent opportunity to watch your child closely; does he look relaxed, at ease? How does he interact with his counselors? An intuitive parent can get a sense of whether camp is a positive experience for the child.

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