

## Camp Alleghany's No Gossip Policy for Counselors

This summer, we will be initiating a new No Gossip Policy, as recommended by the American Camp Association training materials. Its goal is to eliminate camp gossip, which can strain relationships between staff members and distract counselors from performing their duties in a focused and positive manner. The policy will prohibit gossip about fellow staff members, head counselors, directors, and campers, as well as exclusive cliques among staff members. The policy is aimed at creating a more team-oriented, positive culture among the staff.

We know that some of your best friends are here at camp and that you only get to see them for these seven weeks a year. In no way do we mean to say that you cannot enjoy those close friendships – these bonds are what keep you all coming back here each summer, and Alleghany thrives on that. But sometimes close friendships turn into exclusive friendships that make others feel unwelcome. We trust that you, as a caring, mature person, understand the difference between the two.

We also know that there are times when the actions of others at camp - campers, peers or leaders - cause you to want to vent to a friend. We are all human, and sometimes the stresses or frustrations of camp require us to blow off some steam. But in doing so, you need to ask yourself: is my discussion of this issue aimed at getting it off my chest so that I can return to my day feeling better, or, am I doing this in a mean-spirited way, aimed at hurting or mocking, rather than aimed at resolving the issue? Often, the better way to vent your feelings is to discuss the issue with the person who caused it.

There are also situations where you're not the one initiating the gossip. While you might not think you're "to blame" merely by listening, remember that if no one was there to listen, the negative statements would never be made in the first place. Even as a passive participant, just by going along with it, you are contributing to the negative environment.

We ask that you help us in establishing this new policy with honest self-reflection throughout the summer:

- Am I contributing to a team-oriented atmosphere, or am I (even unintentionally) making other staff members feel unwelcome in a conversation?
- Am I allowing a frustration to fester and then making it worse by discussing it with others?
- Am I disrespecting a camper, whose parents have entrusted me to care for her, by mocking her to my friends?
- Am I giving someone an opportunity to gossip by participating in the conversation?
- Am I repeating or promoting a rumor about camp about which I have no personal knowledge?

We can probably all look back on past summers and think of regrets we have in how we treated others. The "bubble" of camp life tends to magnify issues causing us to lose perspective until the summer is over and it's too late to repair relationships. This new policy is aimed to help you check yourself when you might get wrapped up in the drama and lose sight of how lucky we are to be in this wonderful community. We firmly believe that if you sincerely commit to helping us create this more positive environment this summer, you will benefit personally through individual growth and from being a member of a more cohesive staff that focuses on contributing to this place that has given so much to us all over the years.

Accordingly, we are asking you to pledge to help us establish this new policy as a sign of your commitment to make our staff morale the best it can be:

As an employee of Camp Alleghany, I promise:

- To be inclusive of others in conversations, activities, free time, and time off as a way to strengthen the camp community and the bonds of the staff members;
- To refrain from becoming a part of a clique or exclusive group, so as not to hurt feelings or make others feel unwelcome;
- To refrain from talking about anyone (directors, head counselors, staff, or campers) in a negative or destructive way, and to refrain from participating in conversations where others are doing so;
- To keep my negative thoughts to myself, or if necessary, vent them privately to an appropriate person, such as a leader, in an effort to resolve the frustration;
- To befriend new staff members and help them learn the traditions and rules of Alleghany in a friendly and non-judgmental manner;
- To refrain from spreading rumors that I do not have facts to prove as true, and, if necessary, to ask an authority figure if something is true before repeating it;
- To not tolerate staff members who do not adhere to the above behaviors.

Signed,

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(Name)

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(Date)

These standards are aspirational. That means that, due to the realities of the camp environment, there will be times that we will all fall short of these high standards. However, we are asking you to commit to upholding these standards and to help your peers do the same. We all must take responsibility for our camp community, and we thank you in advance for helping up to establish this new policy.