



Oswegatchie Educational Center

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Dear Parents,

We have always taken the safety and well-being of our campers—your children—very seriously. After all, giving your children over to the care of other people is perhaps the greatest act of trust you as a parent can engage in. We aim to do everything we humanly can to earn and keep that trust. We also know we cannot do this without your help. With more and more children using the Internet, cell phones and other technologies at younger ages, we appeal to you as parents to partner with us to ensure that your children continue to have the safest, most wholesome experience with us at camp as possible.

Please read our letter carefully. It will help you understand the challenges some technologies pose to the continued health and safety of our camp community. As always we invite you to call us if you have any questions or concerns about any of these issues.

Cell Phones

As you know we have a “no-cell phone” policy at camp. Aside from the fact that cell phones are expensive and can get lost or stolen and that the physical camp environment is not kind to such items, there is a fundamental problem with campers having cell phones at camp, and that is trust. When children come to camp they—and you—are making a leap of faith, temporarily transferring their primary care from you as their parents to us and their counselors. This is one of the growth-producing, yet challenging aspects of camp. As children learn to trust other caring adults, they grow and learn, little by little, to solve some of their own challenges. We believe this emerging independence is one of the greatest benefits of camp. It is one important way your child develops greater resilience. Contacting you by phone essentially means they have not made this transition. It prevents us from getting to problems that may arise and addressing them quickly. Sending a cell phone to camp is like saying to your child that you as the parent haven’t truly come to peace with the notion of them being away from you and in our care.

We agree to tell you if your child is experiencing a challenge in their adjustment to camp. You can help by talking with your child before they leave for camp and telling them that there is always someone they can reach out to, whether it is a trusted activity leader, a counselor, the Director or medical director. We are all here to help, but if you don’t trust us, your children certainly won’t!

Digital Photographs

Another drawback of having cell phones at camp is many of them have built-in cameras. It has happened at some camps around the country that children have secretly taken photographs of other campers or staff during inappropriate times and displayed them publicly. (If you belong to a health club, chances are it has “no cell phone” policy). We do not ban digital cameras but we do not recommend bringing them to camp. Oswegatchie takes almost 300 photos each week, which are edited and available inexpensively through our camp store. Please help us maintain a safe environment by explaining this to your child. You should know that *any camper that takes a compromising photograph of another camper or staff member and makes it public in any way may be subject to dismissal from camp or may not be allowed to return. If the law is broken, the appropriate authorities will be notified. This includes websites like, but not limited to youtube.com, myspace.com and facebook.com.*

Cyber-Bullying and Harassment

It has happened at camps around the country that a few campers have sent rude, demeaning, intimidating or vulgar e-mails or IMs to other campers or have created false screen names to harass members of the camp community or spread false and damaging information about them. To be sure most Internet communication is fun, positive, and for campers to stay in touch with friends, we have posted a Camp Policy for Campers and the Internet on our website. We recommend sharing and becoming familiar with these steps has a part of the overall safety and healthy practice you should have in place with your child if they are online, regardless of whether they attend camp or not. Sharing them with you is one way we felt we could support your effort to protect your children whether they are at camp or not.

You're Kids, Our Staff after Camp

Our pledge is to put your children in the company of the most trustworthy and capable young adults we can hire—counselors who are well suited to the task of caring for campers. The effort we put into screening and selecting our staff is part of that pledge. Our staff works with your children in the context of a visible, well scrutinized environment that has many built-in checks and balances. Counselors are supervised by senior staff guided by clear, firm policies regarding behavior. Their actions are also visible to co-workers and campers. By hiring them we do not recommend them as baby-sitters, nannies or child companions outside of camp. *In general we discourage our staff from having contact with your children after camp since we cannot supervise it. We hire our staff for the camp season. We do not take responsibility for their behavior off-season.*

As a parent you are, of course, free to make your own choice in this matter. While we cannot keep you from allowing your child to visit with one of our staff members, in so doing you take full responsibility. We also know that many children exchange contact information (e.g., e-mail address, profile names, cell phone numbers) with counselors without our or your specific awareness or permission. *We recommend that you as the parent supervise your child's online activities just as you do other aspects of their life in your home, and oversee any off-season contact our staff members and your child. You take full responsibility to oversee any contact that results.*

Working Together to Keep Your Children Safe

We see many positive, exciting ways for youngsters to enjoy the healthy benefits of the Internet and other technologies. As advocates for children we want to work with you to keep those experiences safe, healthy and positive. That is why we have taken the time to write these policies, include some resources for you and urge you to talk with your children—both about camp and their online activity in general.

Sincerely,

Bill Waite
Program Director

