

YMCA Camp Carson

An Experience That Lasts A Lifetime!

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Dear Parents,

Isn't it amazing how technology has changed our world over the years? We used to be impressed when we watched Star Trek and Captain Kirk with his "communicators". We have progressed from "bag phones" to the modern cell phone and many other beneficial products of technology. As with any progression, we must also consider how to establish socially responsible boundaries to go with it. Camp is no exception. While we certainly use all sorts of modern technology to conduct our day to day business at camp, the core of the camp experience for the campers requires virtually none! That's what makes camp so unique and something we want to protect. We create an environment that offers a child the opportunity to gain confidence while learning to manually steer a canoe, shoot an arrow, climb a tower, and on and on. All this happens outdoors in the presence of friends new and old, Friends made, not on Facebook, but through purposeful interaction at activity areas and in cabin life.

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 and encourage you to talk with your children – both about camp and their online activity in general.

In order to protect the camp environment and in order for campers to gain the most from the camp experience, we have taken on the difficult task of assembling this document – this is probably the most awkward/uncomfortable document we as a camp staff have ever tried to draft. Having consulted with parents and many colleagues in the camping industry, along with reviewing many other sample documents, we feel we have produced a responsible policy and explanation. I would ask that you please read through the attached document carefully. It will help you understand the challenges some technologies pose to the continued health and safety of our camp community. As with all boundaries we set at camp, we strive for a kind, but firm and fair tone. We hope that you will understand our desire to cover these topics and as always, we invite you to call us if you have any questions or concerns about any of these issues.

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 in which you as a parent can engage. We aim to do everything humanly possible 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 and the other campers continue to have the safest, most wholesome experience with us at camp.

Once you have read and reviewed the attached policy with your camper(s), please sign and return it to the camp office by May 21, 2010. We will need one signed copy for each camper attending.

Sincerely,



Mark Scoular
Executive Director



YMCA Camp Carson Cell Phone and Technology Policy

CELL PHONES

We have a “no cell phone policy” at camp. For your understanding, we have detailed our reasons for this policy below.

VALUABLES: Cell phones are expensive and can get lost or stolen. In addition, the physical camp environment is not kind to such items.

FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE: When campers have cell phones at camp, this can cause trust issues. When children come to camp, you are temporarily transferring their primary care from you as their parent to the camp staff. 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 and develops self confidence – important life skills. When campers feel they must have the ability to call home, this essentially means they have not made this transition.

We can assure you that if your child is experiencing a challenge in their adjustment to camp, we as a camp staff will contact you. If your child expresses concern about being away from you, you can help by sharing with them that there is always someone at camp available to help them. They will have access to trusted activity leaders, cabin counselors, camp directors and the medical staff. We respectfully ask you to consider that if you send a cell phone to camp with your camper “in case they need you”, you are essentially communicating to your child that you as a parent have not truly come to peace with the notion of them being away from you and that you have reservations regarding our ability to care for your child. If you don’t trust us, your children certainly won’t.

HIDING CELL PHONES: We appreciate that most families will honor our request and support our reasoning for not bringing cell phones to camp. We also recognize that some families may feel that hiding a cell phone in camper luggage is OK because their child won’t get homesick or won’t abuse the opportunity. Why we ask for your support: if your child brings a cell phone and passes the phone to another child to use, it can have and has had a negative affect on the camp experience of the other child and their family. We ask that you are considerate of ALL camp children and respect other families as they help foster their child’s independence.

TEXTING: We also understand that for many teens, and increasing numbers of younger children, texting is a favored means of communication. We certainly are not against this form of communication outside of camp. At camp, however, another goal of the camp experience is to connect with other people face to face and nurture the art of interpersonal communication. Texting friends outside of camp, during the camp session, impedes the ability of campers’ freedom to truly benefit from this special aspect of camp and the process of building these new friendships. By leaving the cell phones at home, this does not become an issue.

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS: Another drawback of having cell phones at camp is the built-in camera. As with schools, there are camps around the country where children have secretly taken inappropriate photographs of other campers or staff and displayed them publicly. (If you belong to a YMCA or health club, chances are they have a “no cell phone” policy as well). While we do not ban digital cameras, we do not recommend bringing them to camp. Each day Camp Carson takes 300-400 photos which are posted to our website. 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 and 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.

STAFF and CELL PHONES: We want you know that the camp staff are strictly forbidden to have cell phones in the camper living quarters and must restrict their personal cell phone usage to designated time periods away from campers.

iPOD TOUCH, IPODs and MUSIC/VIDEO STORAGE DEVICES

We maintain a policy banning the use of ipods and other types of music and video data storage devices at camp. Due to the capability of such devices to access the internet, download and store, in a private manner, easily available sexually explicit, degrading, foul and vulgar content, they are inappropriate for use at camp. In addition, it is our aim to promote activities, whether formally planned, informal, or spontaneous during free time, that are inclusive and group oriented rather than exclusionary for private personal use or benefit.

CYBER BULLYING AND HARRASSMENT

Again, as with schools, some camps around the country have experienced campers sending rude, demeaning, intimidating or vulgar emails 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 a great way for campers to stay in touch with friends. For this reason, we have included in this document a “Camp Policy for Campers and the Internet” and have also posted this on our website. We recommend sharing and becoming familiar with these steps as a part of the overall safety and healthy practice you should have in place with your child if they are online, regardless 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.

YOUR KIDS and 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 check and balances. Counselors are supervised by senior staff and guided by learning firm policies regarding behavior. Their actions are also visible to co-workers and campers. However, in hiring them, we are not recommending them as babysitters, nannies or child companions outside of camp. We regret that 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. While we trust and would like to assume they are all wholesome, 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 on full responsibility. We also know that many children exchange contact information (i.e. email addresses, profile names, cell phone numbers) with counselors with or 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 between our staff members and your child. We instruct all of our staff that if a child does contact them after camp, the staff member should gain permission from the parents and copy parents on all email correspondence etc. Again, we want it understood by all that the parent takes full responsibility to oversee any contact with staff that follows the camp session.

CAMP POLICY FOR CAMPERS AND THE INTERNET

We have a “no laptop and personal hand held computer” policy. We have installed internet capable computers and have decided to include these computers and limited supervised access to the internet as a resource tool to enhance learning and creativity for use in the camper/staff produced camp newspaper and radio station only. Our “computer use” policy limits camper use of computers to these supervised activities only. All camp computers are preloaded with censoring software that will immediately notify us and shut down if there is an attempt to access an inappropriate website.

Please sign and return this document to camp by May 21, 2010

Agreement:

I, _____, have read the YMCA Camp Carson technology policy and understand and agree to abide by this
(print camper name)
policy at camp.

Camper signature _____ Date _____

I, _____, have read the above technology policy and agree to the guidelines stated. I also understand that any
(print parent/guardian name)
cell phones or other electronic devices found will be confiscated and held in the safe in the camp office and will be returned at check out. I understand that if there is an emergency or concerns, I may contact the camp at 812-385-3597.

Parent Signature _____ Date _____