

Effective Communication with Campers

Listening Skills

1. Disarming

You find some truth in what the other person is saying, even if what they are saying seems totally unreasonable or unfair.

Camper: "Inspection is so stupid. The cabin's just going to get messy again."

You: "Sometimes it doesn't take long for the cabin to need another cleaning."

2. Empathy

You put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to see the world through his or her eyes.

- Thought empathy: You paraphrase the other person's words

Camper: "We did this yesterday and it's so boring."

You: "You wish there were more variety in the schedule."

- Feeling empathy: You acknowledge how he or she is probably feeling

Camper: "I hate this camp! It stinks."

You: "You're angry that you're not having more fun."

3. Inquiry

You ask gentle, probing questions to learn more about what the other person is thinking and feeling.

Camper: "The other kids are driving me crazy!"

You: "What about the other kids is bugging you the most right now?"

Self-Expression Skills

4. Pure "I" statements

You use "I" statements, such as "I feel upset," rather than "you" statements, such as "You're wrong!" or "You're making me furious!"

Camper: "You should have picked something better for cabin night. I hate Kick the Can."

You: "I have to tell you: I worked hard today and I feel kind of dumped on right now."

5. Pure factual statements

You simply state, in a calm tone and without judgment, what the facts are.

Camper: "I don't want to go to swim lessons because I like other activities better."

You: "The camp's policy is that all campers go to lessons and you like other stuff better."

6. Genuine Praise

You find something genuinely positive to say to the other person, even in the heat of battle. You convey an attitude of respect, even though you may feel very angry with the other person.

Camper: "I'm not going to dinner. I'm not hungry and I'm staying right here."

You: (calmly) "I appreciate your telling me exactly how you feel. You know, you contribute a lot of energy to the group and I think the other kids would miss having you around."

Some of this material is adapted from David Burns, MD, author of "Intimate Connections" and "The Feeling Good Handbook."



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