INTER-CAMP ACTIVITIES

BY EPHRAM CAFLUN

Inter-camp activities involve merging children from two separate camps, and having them compete in sports and other recreational activities. Inter-camps typically include team sports, such as soccer, basketball, baseball, softball, street hockey, gymnastics, volleyball, swimming and climbing wall, and individual sports, such as tennis.

Although participants play competitively and certainly like to win, emphasis is placed on participation and sportsmanship. Every child has an opportunity to participate, regardless of ability in a particular area. Inter-camps cut across the daily schedule. Coordination of multiple camp schedules, transportation and coaching often forces campers to make choices. In some cases these are a source of stress, for even the well-adjusted camper. It is important be sensitive to these potentially competing commitments, and attempt to address them before they arise.

General Rules & Tips For Coaches

As camp directors, we want guests to feel welcome and to treat our neighbors with warmth and respect. The following is a list of rules that must be followed, both for home and away activities:

- Teams must be in uniform and maintain a high level of sportsmanship.
- Plan for events in advance to allow for adequate practice and preparation.
- Prepare a team roster two days in advance, and turn it into the office for distribution.
- Recognize and plan for the many variables involved before, during and after every inter-camp. For example, departure times, meal provisions, travel directions, early/late meals, etc.
- For home inter-camps, be ready early—in uniform—and greet the opposing camp as soon as the campers arrive.
- For away inter-camps, leave early! If you are running behind schedule and expect to return late, *stop and call*! Remember to load lunches.

- If you ever encounter a negative experience at another camp, report it to the directors immediately upon returning to camp.
- Most importantly, always represent your camp in a professional manner. In doing so, never tolerate bad sportsmanship by a camper (or counselor).

Like other camps you may be competing against, it's important to remember these are not strictly sports camps, so be realistic in your expectations. Always strive for victory, but ask only that campers make the most of their abilities, and make sure each child is happy.

Establish the ground rules for a smooth schedule

Coping With Competing Commitments: Resolving Scheduling Conflicts

Since camps sometimes run several vigorous programs that expand beyond regular program periods, directors and coaches may have conflicting schedules from time to time. For instance, campers who participate in inter-camp competitions may also opt to be a part of theatre rehearsals, which take place during the elective hour as well. Here is how to cope with such conflicts:

1 Keep a sense of proportion. Remember that the ultimate goal is neither the game nor the show, but the campers' development and well-being. Although you never intend to put a team on the field that you know is not competitive, or hold a rehearsal that is unproductive, recognize that inter-camp sports are not on a professional level, and camp productions are not professional theatre. Compromise is necessary, and not every game or rehearsal will have the optimal combination of participants.

2 Do not make problems your campers' problems. Keep campers out of discussions about any difficulties. Under no circumstances should any staff member ask campers to decide which activity is more important; ideally, campers should not know a potential conflict exists. For example, when staff members seek sign-ups for events, they simply ask for those who want to participate, not those who are not in the play who want to participate.

3 Practice foresight, patience and flexibility. Use the following procedure to avoid problems stemming from campers' commitments: Coaches provide their department head supervisor with a list of all players as well as alternates by 1:30 p.m. the day before all inter-camp games, matches, meets, etc. Similarly, when the performing arts department plans to hold a rehearsal at any time other than elective hour or the program period scheduled for rehearsal, inform the group leaders by 1:30 p.m. the day before, providing a list of all campers who will participate. The group leader will return a list of eligible campers to the staff by camp evening meal (6:00 p.m.).

4 Keep in mind, campers cannot participate in inter-camp athletics if it conflicts with a rehearsal, or go out on camping trips when they have a role in a production that will be performed within 48 hours of the potential inter-camp event or camping trip, but are otherwise allowed to miss rehearsal. Lead characters sometimes are required to participate in rehearsals for longer than 48 hours before shows.

Sports Competition And Children

Children have been running, throwing, climbing and swimming throughout time, and there are many benefits to physical activity.

Children learn new skills and how to control them. Aside from developing physical skills and getting exercise, sports help children make friends, have fun, learn to play as a member of a team, learn to play fair, and improve self-esteem. American sports culture has increasingly become a money-making business. The highly stressful, competitive, "win-at-all-costs" attitude prevalent at colleges and in professional athletics affects the world of children's sports, creating an unhealthy environment. It is important to remember that the attitudes and behaviors taught to children in sports carry over to adult life. Staff must take an active role in helping campers develop good sportsmanship. To help a camper get the most out of sports, you need to be actively involved. This includes:

- Providing emotional support and positive feedback
- Attending games and talking about them afterward
- Having realistic expectations for campers
- Helping campers handle disappointments and losing
- Modeling respectful spectator behavior.

Campers' behaviors and attitudes reflect a combination of coaching and discussions about good sportsmanship and fair play. It is also important to talk about what campers observe in sports events. When bad sportsmanship occurs, discuss other ways the situation could be handled. While you might acknowledge that in the heat of competition it may be difficult to maintain control and respect for others, it is important to stress that disrespectful behavior is not acceptable. Remember, success is not the same thing as winning, and failure is not the same thing as losing. CB

Ephram A. Caflun *is the owner and director of Camp Wekeela in Hartford, Maine. Caflun, his wife, Lori, and their children have been at Wekeela since 1997. He has been working professionally with children since 1992. During the camp "off-season," he is a coach for each of his boy's sports teams. He can be reached via e-mail at ephram@campwekeela.com.*

Circle Reader Service #50