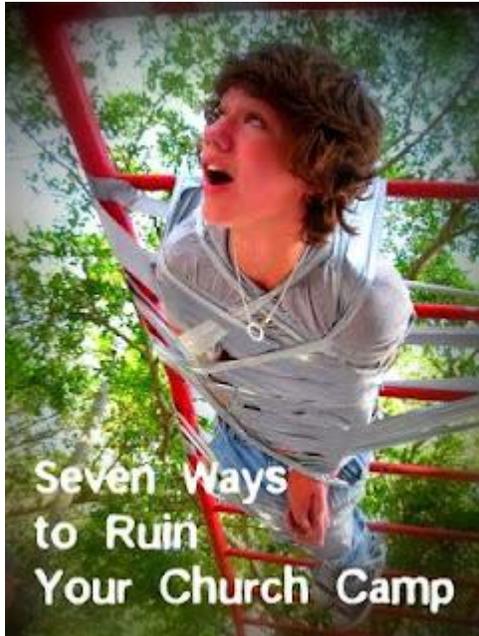


7 Ways to Ruin Your Church Camp



This is an update of one of our most popular posts from several years ago on the best things to do if you want to guarantee that some of your teens (and new staff members) have a really terrible experience at church camp:

1) Play games the first day that force physical interaction. Nothing will ensure that your shy teens and introverts have a terrible start to camp like making them participate in icebreakers and community builders the first day that force them to do things like getting tied into a human knot with a bunch of strangers or build a human pyramid. Those "repeat everyone's name in order" games are pretty intimidating, too. (Interaction is important, of course, but don't force it and don't introduce too much too fast. Community builders are great but it's important to allow the introverts to opt out as needed...within reason. My suggestion is to start with activities that are low threat -- like the "Would you rather" sort of games where there's not a lot of physical interaction and no single person has to be the focus of attention-- and then you work up to those more elaborate team-building games as the teens get to know each other.)

2) Do skits/pranks where someone is the butt of the joke. Don't you just love those camp skits where some unsuspecting teen gets a bucket of water dumped on his head (or down his pants) or a whipped cream pie pushed in her face? Don't you just love those pranks where the new kid gets his clothes thrown on the roof of the cabin and shampoo in her sleeping bag? (Well, many people don't. Even if the "victim" laughs and plays along, s/he may quietly resent being ridiculed for everyone else's amusement. I could write a book about the problem with camp pranks, but let's move on...)

3) Sing songs the first few days to which only alumni campers/staff know the words. How much fun is it going to camps where there are those clever gimmick songs ("Star-Trekkin!") that only the teens

who have been coming to that camp for 3 years know the words! Enjoy the hilarity as everyone else has to awkwardly stand around and just listen or else prove they are "one of the group" by anxiously memorizing the words by the end of the week! This approach will serve to alienate new members of the camp community and send a loud message: "You don't belong...yet." (Of course, shared songs are important. I didn't mean to imply you shouldn't sing old songs. But include everyone by providing written lyrics on paper or powerpoint so everybody can participate from the beginning.) Which leads us to #4...

4) Perpetuate inside jokes and "remember when" stories from camps past. Nothing is funnier than the counselors reminding everyone about "that wacky thing Phil did in the girl's cabin last year" or "the talent show skit that got Cindy into trouble with the staff," even though none of the younger campers have any idea what everyone is laughing at! (Again, this a great way to send the message "We of the inner circle have a history together. You gotta earn your way into the inner circle here by putting in your time.")

5) Encourage talent show acts that promote stereotypes and prejudices. What's a talent show without ethnic stereotypes: the napping Mexican in a sombrero, the "swami" with his head wrapped in a towel speaking gibberish. And don't forget the unwritten law that there must be camp talent show acts where guys dress in drag. (Ever stop to consider that for some teens, cross-dressing may be a reality in the life of a parent, relative, or friend...or may even be part of their developing gender identity?). And that leads us to #6...

6) Make a big deal about "purpling!" You know how it goes: boys are "blue" and girls are "pink" and if they get too close (e.g. amorous hugging, kissing, girls in the boys cabin and vice versa) they make "purple!" Talking about this a lot, particularly making a joke out of it, helps sends a silent message that we all know that everyone at camp is really fixated on hooking up and finding a date for the Friday night dance. (Consider that too much talk about this might alienate the youth who are not sexually mature and just came to camp to have fun. It also may send confusing and often alienating signals to youth at camp who are not heterosexual or who are not certain of their sexual identity yet. Perhaps consider including rules about "double blues," and "double pinks.")

7) Program every minute of the week. Youth live over-programmed lives. Why shouldn't camp be the same way? (Maybe because one of the ways to make camp unique and special is to provide space for youth to be quiet, to hang out, to experience Sabbath, to just "be" for awhile without any more stimuli than the feel of the breeze and the sounds of bees buzzing.)

<http://www.rethinkingyouthministry.com/2012/06/7-ways-to-ruin-your-church-camp.html>