

Youth Inspired

How Kids Want *You* to Behave

The authentic voices of children and teens in the video anthology that accompanies this handout provide candid advice to adults about the importance of balance, rules, having fun, keeping your cool and—above all—spending time with young people. Learn from children’s own experiences what leadership practices separate the best from the rest. Then, see what immediate enhancements you can make to your own leadership style.

Balance Fun and Firmness

- Have high expectations and push young people to succeed.
- Provide support as young people work toward achieving great things.
- Balance being fun and having a good time with being firm and enforcing the rules.
- Reward good behavior when you see it, rather than just pointing out rule violations.

Enforce Rules Fairly

- Understand that it is your job to enforce rules and boundaries.
- Use a patient tone when enforcing the rules. Provide reasons for rules.
- Be consistent. Follow your own rules, especially in front of young people.
- Balance giving freedom and responsibility with enforcing safe and reasonable limits.

Be Calm and Respectful

- Avoid yelling, shaming or getting overly angry. Stay positive.
- Avoid favoritism. Other young people will notice and will feel neglected.
- Be patient, because some young people won’t always listen or follow directions.
- Make young people your top priority. Let your behavior demonstrate how important they are.

Spend Time with Kids

- Get to know each young person individually. What is unique? What do they have in common?
- Remember that kids want to be kids and have fun and be a little crazy once in a while.
- Provide comfort to any young person who is feeling bad. Listen carefully to their experiences.
- You will gain the respect of young people by spending time with them. Turn off mobile devices.
- Lead by example.

Additional Points offered by Tom Giggi, Leadership Director at Camp Belknap

- All young people want structure and guidelines, even though they won’t ask for them.
- Establish guidelines and structure early on. Enforce those rules strictly and consistently.
- Young people will not do what they are told simply because they are told. Instead, they need a role model—a strong leader—to follow.
- Be consistent. Remember that little problems, if left uncorrected, turn into bigger problems.
- Inexperienced staff may not see that you can’t be solely a young person’s friend. You must also be the authority figure, the leader, the person who is not afraid to enforce rules.
- Great leaders “spread the love;” they never play favorites, even though they will have favorites.
- Great leaders also blend confidence with humility. They know when and how to ask for help.