

## **Parent Letter and Camp Policies Regarding Cell Phones, the Internet and Other Technologies**

Dear Parents,

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

Please read our letter carefully. It will help you understand the challenges some technologies pose to the continued health and safety of our camp community. Please also review and then read to your child the enclosed policies regarding the Internet, social networking sites and exchanging contact information with their counselors. As always we invite you to call us if you have any questions or concerns about any of these issues.

### **Cell Phones**

As you know we have a “no-cell phone” policy at camp. Aside from the fact that cell phones are expensive and can get lost or stolen and that the physical camp environment is not kind to such items, there is a fundamental problem with campers having cell phones at camp, and that is trust. When children come to camp they—and you—are making a leap of faith, temporarily transferring their primary care from you as their parents to us and their counselors. 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. Contacting you by phone essentially means they have not made this transition. It prevents us from getting to problems that may arise and addressing them quickly. Sending a cell phone to camp is like saying to your child that you as the parent haven’t truly come to peace with the notion of them being away from you and in our care.

We agree to tell you if your child is experiencing a challenge in their adjustment to camp. *You can help* by talking with you child *before they leave for camp* and telling them that there is always someone they can reach out to, whether it be their counselor, a trusted activity leader, the Head Counselor, the Director or camp nurse or health care provider. We are all here to help, but if *you* don’t trust us, your children certainly won’t!

### **Cyber-Bullying and Harassment**

It has happened at camps around the country that a few campers have sent rude, demeaning, intimidating or vulgar e-mails 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 one important way campers stay in touch with their friends. Our “Policy for Campers,” which we are asking you to read over and then read with your child, covers our response to this problem. In addition, *we have outlined the steps you or your child should take should they receive an abusive, demeaning or otherwise threatening or inappropriate Internet communication.* Being familiar with these steps is part of the overall safety and healthy practice you should have in place with your child if they are online, regardless of 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, 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 work with your children in the context of a visible, well scrutinized environment that has many built-in checks and balances. Counselors are supervised by senior staff guided by clear, firm policies regarding behavior. Their actions are also visible to co-workers and campers. By hiring them we do not recommend them as baby-sitters, Nannies or child companions outside of camp. *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. 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 full responsibility. We also know that many children exchange contact information (e.g., e-mail address, profile names, cell phone numbers) with counselors 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 our staff members and your child. You take full responsibility to oversee any contact that results.*

### **Working Together to Keep Your Children Safe**

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. That is why we have taken the time to write these policies, include some resources for you and urge you to talk with your children—both about camp and their online activity in general.