



CAMP COUNSELORS: SUPERVISOR BEST PRACTICES

This bulletin is a practical, set of best practices for a Summer Counselor Supervisor, written for youth camps, recreation programs, and municipal summer programs.

A summer counselor supervisor's primary job is to keep participants safe, staff supported, and programs consistent—while coaching counselors to succeed in a fast-paced, short-term environment.

Think of the role of Camp Supervisor as Leader + Coach + Safety Monitor + Problem Solver.

Set Expectations Early and Clearly

The first week determines the entire summer.

- Conduct a mandatory orientation before programs open
- Clearly communicate:
 - Behavior standards
 - Professional boundaries
 - Attendance and punctuality expectations
 - Chain of command
 - Mandatory reporting responsibilities
- Distribute written expectations (handbook or one-page code of conduct)
- Require staff acknowledgment/sign-off

Be Visible and Approachable Every Day

Counselors are more accountable—and more comfortable asking for help—when supervisors are present.

- Walk the program areas daily
- Observe interactions (not just activities)
- Stay accessible during transitions (arrival, lunch, dismissal)
- Use first names and build quick rapport

Prioritize Youth Safety Above Everything

Safety oversight is non-negotiable.

- Enforce supervision ratios at all times
- Confirm attendance counts and headcounts regularly
- Monitor:
 - Water activities
 - Field trips
 - Heat exposure and hydration
 - Playground and sports activities
- Reinforce mandatory reporting of:
 - Injuries
 - Behavioral incidents
 - Suspected abuse or neglect



Coach in the Moment (Don't Wait)

Real-time feedback improves performance faster than end-of-season evaluations.

- Address issues privately and immediately:
 - Tone of voice
 - Engagement level
 - Phone use
 - Discipline approach
- Balance corrections with recognition
- Model the behavior you want to see

Support Counselors Emotionally

Summer staff often face:

- Conflict with participants
- Stress
- First-job anxiety
- Burnout in heat and long day

Best practices:

- Check in regularly
- Normalize asking for help or clarification
- Rotate assignments when possible
- Step in when counselors feel overwhelmed.

Maintain Consistent Discipline Standards

Nothing undermines authority faster than inconsistent enforcement.

- Ensure everyone follows the same discipline protocol
- Deal with behavior issues early
- Don't "pass the problem" to another counselor
- Document repeated or serious issues

Communicate Daily (Short and Clear)

Avoid confusion by keeping communication simple and routine.

- Daily huddles (5–10 minutes)
- End-of-day check-ins during the first few weeks
- Group messaging for schedule or weather updates (approved platform only)



Address Performance Issues Promptly

Ignoring issues signals acceptance.

- Address:
 - Chronic lateness
 - Phone use on duty
 - Disengagement
 - Boundary concerns
- Use progressive discipline:
 - Verbal coaching
 - Written warning
 - Removal if needed

Recognize and Motivate Staff

Recognition strengthens retention and morale.

- Publicly praise good performance
- Highlight examples during staff meetings
- Rotate leadership opportunities
- Celebrate milestones (end-of-week highlights)

End Each Week With Reflection

Improve the program while it's still running—not after it's over.

- Ask:
 - What went well?
 - What needs fixing?
 - Who needs extra support?
- Adjust staffing or schedules as needed
- Share lessons learned with senior leadership