

# Camp Olympia Manual

## Section 5

### Camper Conduct



God is more concerned about our character than our comfort. His goal is not to pamper us physically but to perfect us spiritually.

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# CAMPER CONDUCT

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## THE MERIT SYSTEM

Every organization must have some form of discipline. At best this is accomplished through mutual respect at all levels of the organization. At worst it involves harsh action. The Olympia merit system is a form of discipline that walks a middle ground. It has its basis in teaching the kids that there is a natural consequence for their actions, good or bad. The respect is developed by showing them that the consequence is created by and thus directed at their actions and not them, and that they are still trusted, respected and dealt with as a human being by their peers and counselors. Along with our merit system, campers and their parents are asked to sign a Camp Olympia Code of Conduct that enforces our merit system so that they understand the consequences when a wrong action is made.

The system is very simple in its operation. Good actions are rewarded with a merit, bad ones by the taking of a demerit.

**Jr. & Intermediate Camper's D's = one merit**

**Senior I Camper's D's = two merits**

**Senior II Camper's D's = three merits**

Campers collect merits (they are "banked" daily by the counselors in the cabin book) and may thus purchase items of their choice from the Country Store. They start each day with five demerits. Each one they lose takes away a merit from their account in the cabin book. Losing all five indicates a more serious problem, ranging from laziness, mischievousness, or forgetfulness, to severe attitude, aggression, or other emotional problems. More serious problems are dealt with in the chain of command from Division Head to Assistant Director to Boys'/Girls' Camp Director and parents if necessary. Incurable children may be sent home where they can receive appropriate help rather than allowing them to ruin the cabin's behavior or good times.

The system is a very good one, it has worked well for us for over forty years. But its impact depends ENTIRELY on the fair administration of both merits and D's by all counselors. It is too easy for one complacent counselor to ruin the system for one

kid and/or even an entire cabin. Counselors seeking to feel a need to be friends with all their kids often mistake merit-giving with true friendship. Such an abuse of the system leads to breakdowns that are impossible to cure.

Campers should receive merits at the discretion of the counselor. **Give only one at a time.** There are a great many kids who would earn dozens of merits every day if given one for EVERY great thing they did. They are just naturally great kids. There are also those who go out of their way to earn merits, always running ahead to open doors, sweeping every morning, offering to fill up juice glasses for their counselors. These must be dealt with delicately. In the first case the counselor should set higher standards for the kid. Look for something in each kid that is truly outstanding. A very nonathletic kid may get a merit for hitting a single, but an outstanding natural athlete may have to hit a home run to earn one. The kid who asks to earn merits automatically breaks one of the cardinal rules of the merit system – **NEVER ASK FOR A MERIT.** Even though the request is not verbal, it is still an obvious request for a merit. This is tough to deal with because, even though merit-hungry, the child is still showing some genuine caring. Often a merit for the first time an action occurs, and a thank you after that will suffice. Try, without telling, to instill the idea that the things he/she is doing are wonderful things to do for others when done for the right reason. Be sure that the child still receives his/her share of merits.

Another problem is the child who earns few merits, and the ones who don't care (or pretend not to care) about merits. These can be most difficult since in almost all cases they REALLY do care about merits but will not voice that. All the kids like to go to the Country Store and look at the FUN things there. It can be very frustrating for the wallflower kid who just doesn't get many merits because the camper's quiet, or nonathletic, unskilled or uncoordinated. Also, don't mistake this child for the one who has few merits because he/she loses lots of D's. For the child this is the learning experience we are trying to accomplish, that they can't spend what they don't earn. We hope it will encourage better behavior.

The merit system is also a confidence builder. It allows kids, perhaps for the first time in their lives, to earn something on their own. They may spend

whatever merits they have when their cabin goes to the Country Store. There they can purchase many things with their merits including many kinds of shirts and shorts with the camp logo, as well as toys and utilitarian things like laundry bags and water-bottles. They also learn the advantages of being frugal. First, by saving 300 merits they gain entrance to one of Olympia's elite clubs, the Merit Club. And the more they save the better they are able to buy bigger and nicer things.

## PROBLEM KIDS

Rarely does a good kid lose all five demerits. It is simply a hard thing to do. Even forgetful kids who lose many demerits don't very often lose all five. It is expected then that a child who loses his/her entire set of D's is one who has failed, for the day, at living up to Olympian standards. We have a three-part means of dealing with such kids.

The child who loses his/her set of D's for the first time or is guilty of a serious offense (such as fighting) is given a conference with the camper's Division Head. The DH seeks the source of the problem and tries to determine whether it is because of a personality conflict, a series of unfortunate circumstances, an unresolved cabin problem, or whether the child actually has a personal problem that needs to be dealt with. Appropriate measures can be easily taken to remedy the former three circumstances. It is the latter which causes continued difficulty.

The DH, as would any counselor, tries to deal with the problem in a way in which common sense and logic dictate to the child what would be best. If the child is unable to solve the problem on his/her own AND see that it is in the camper's own best interest then there is little hope that it won't happen again.

Each DH will keep a card file for the problems that arise in his/her division. On each card should be the account of one session. It should list the date and time of the conference, the child's name and the counselor who referred the problem. The counselor should make detailed notes of the problem and what action was taken to solve it. After the discussion the DH and the child sign the card. The child is warned that further problems will result in other conferences.

The second time during a term that a child loses five demerits, the conference will involve the appropriate Assistant Director, who must also sign the card. The third transgression results in a conference with the Girls'/Boys' Camp Director and a phone call to the parents. They may be given the option to speak to the child. In any case this serves as a warning to the child and parent that one more will result in the child being sent home. The cards, as well as the end of term evaluations, are used as a means of weeding out problem kids in future years. Kids who have repeatedly had conferences will be warned also that it affects their eligibility to return to camp. When end of term evaluations are done by counselors on each camper, the counselors should consider the number of cards and conferences if any.

Evaluation of campers will be completed by each cabin counselor at the end of every session. The evaluation will be done on a number scale. Comments should be written for excessively bad behavior. This information is also confidential and should be used only by camp personnel. Remember, any camper receiving a four (4) should have discipline cards on file.

## PHYSICAL CAMPER DISCIPLINE

**At no time, and not for any reason, is there to be physical punishment of campers.**

If discipline cannot be achieved through the merit system and the approach of friendship and reason, the problem is to be brought to the attention of your Division Head. If the Division Head is unable to resolve the problem, then the Division Head will refer the problem to the Assistant Director in charge of the division.

Physical punishment is not the same as physical restraint. A camper hitting other campers, biting or using dangerous objects may need to be physically restrained for the protection of the other campers. Punishments, such as isolating problem campers from others, verbally threatening campers, or acts that involve campers' personal belongings are acts not permissive for use by the counselor. Remember,

stick with Olympia’s method of discipline, the merit system. Extreme or excessive discipline problems should be taken through the chain of discipline quickly.

Also, realize that this policy regarding physical punishment is for your own protection too. Even mild forms of physical punishment can be considered physical abuse. **NO** physical punishment is tolerated. Any physical punishment of campers will result in immediate dismissal of the counselor.

If you have a camper who continually is physically abusing or tormenting others, inform your Division Head, as from there, the problem will be handled. If circumstances warrant the camper will be sent home. Camp is for all and it is unfair to the other campers and the counselors as well to have to constantly watch a camper. You’re not doing a child a favor by letting him/her “get away” with wrongful actions. Be firm but loving. Never fail to recognize good behavior.

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## GENERAL CAMPER RULES

Campers should always be polite and cheerful. All kids need permission to leave the group at any time except to use the library after lights out. No more than two campers are allowed on a bunk at any one time. No swinging from the rafters. Kids may not touch the medicine kit, or library cleaning materials. The following are **NOT** allowed in the cabins: **\*\*money, candy, food items, guns, knives, firecrackers, silly string, radios, iPods/MP3 players, video cameras/GoPros, iPads/tablets, Kindle/Nook, laptop computers, video game players, Apple watches/smart watches, hoverboards, diffusers or cell phones.** Campers are also discouraged from bringing expensive clothing and jewelry or valuable equipment, such as digital cameras, that might get damaged at camp. Cameras are permitted but may only be used at designated times deemed appropriate by counselors. If digital cameras are not used in an appropriate manner, they may be taken up and returned to the camper on closing day. Merits are not to be used for gambling in any form.

They cannot be transferred. Campers may not give them to others (or switch from cabin book accounts) even siblings. They may request that their merits be saved for their children.

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## BULLYING

### QUICK TIPS for Counselors

**BULLYING** is any intentional hurtful act, committed by one or more persons against another. Bullying occurs when there is an imbalance of power between a bully and a victim. The main types of bullying include:

**Physical** — punching, hitting, shoving, stealing personal things, or getting into someone’s personal space when asked not to.

**Verbal** — name calling, hurtful teasing, taunting, unwanted nicknames, gossiping.

**Relational** — exclusion, humiliation, blackmailing, manipulating friendships.

Who are the “**bullies**”? Bullies are often smart, popular, well-liked, and have good social skills. They may look like leaders and be liked by counselors and other campers, but bullies lack empathy. The “**victims**” on the other hand show some vulnerability that makes them easy targets. As a counselor, you need to be aware of those kids that may be left out or have a difficult time fitting in or making friends.

As a **counselor**, your role is to be a **hero**! You need to discuss camper rules and role model the behavior that you ask them to follow. Let campers know that bullying is unacceptable and won’t be tolerated. Do not play favorites with some campers since that would show them that it is okay to “exclude” others. Bullying usually occurs in places when counselors are not around, so it is important to make bullying a regular topic of discussion with your campers on a weekly basis at a minimum, so they know you take it seriously. When a counselor observes bullying of any kind, they must intervene by stepping in and separating the children involved. **Support the**

**victim**, and report any bullying behavior to your leadership team immediately. Teach your campers to be a real “caring” community and let you know when they see someone left out, teased, or upset by someone else. Teach campers the difference between **reporting**: getting kids out of danger and into safety and **tattling**: telling on others with the intent to get someone in trouble. When a camper reports that he or she is being picked on, support him or her and keep an eye on the situation.

When you **role model** to your campers that you want them to be heroes themselves and step in to help another camper or find a counselor when there is a bullying problem, you have done a great job! Campers follow your actions much more than they follow your words. Make camp a place where everyone feels valued by how you bring everyone together.