

Social Emotional Learning for Summer Camp



Vermont
Afterschool

At the Beginning of the Program: Set the Stage for Success

PRONOUNS

Ask campers the name they prefer to be called at camp and introduce preferred pronouns to use such as she/her or he/him.

GROUP UP

Encourage group identity: pick a group name and a mascot. Encourage kids to think about animals or figures that represent character values such as honesty, caring, loyalty, or bravery. Invent a group song or handshake. Introduce the idea that you are a group that watches out for each other, helps each other, and leaves no one behind. Try a group challenge where campers help each other.

RULES

Set rules and expectations as a group. Ask campers for input into what your group norms and rules should be as a way to establish what's most important to keep everyone's bodies and feelings safe during camp.

FEELINGS

Remind kids that camp days can be long and that they are going to feel LOTS of different feelings at camp throughout a single day from bored to silly to disappointed to excited. And all the feelings are okay to have.

CALM-DOWN PLANNING

Brainstorm ideas for what kids can do when they feel an uncomfortable feeling at camp such as bored, sad, homesick, or angry. Give kids time to draw a picture or act out what they might do to handle uncomfortable feelings during camp. Ask what friends and counselors can do to help. Normalize that everyone will have times when they feel great and times when they are struggling.



Throughout the Summer: Practice Expressing Feelings



FEELINGS GAMES

Play feelings charades. Have kids take turns acting out feelings and guessing what others are feeling.

CHECK IN

Use the “thumb-mometer” as a check-in on how everyone is feeling. Ask the group to give you a silent thumb down, thumb sideways, or thumb up to check in on what everyone is feeling. Encourage kids to look around and notice each other.

KINDNESS

Find ways to recognize kindness publicly each day. Have everyone get their water bottles and toast to different campers who have shown kindness or caring.

COMPLIMENTS

Have kids practice giving each other compliments in a circle or individually during the day. Paint a compliment stick as a group and pass it around the circle while kids compliment each other.

PROTECT TOMORROW

If a child has had a hard day, always repair the same day before pick-up. Consequences should ALWAYS stay in the same day as a transgression or mistake. This way you can say goodbye with easy hearts and minds and look forward to a fresh day together the following day or week.

At the End of the Summer: Reflection and Celebration

TRADITIONS

Give kids a sense of tradition at your program. Tell them about years past and have a culminating event each week or at the end of the summer, i.e. a community circle or special performance or display of their skills.

FAMILIES

Invite families to come and celebrate their campers' accomplishments or find a way to bring camp home such as making a craft they can share with their families or hang on their walls at home.

AWARDS

Give paper plate or popsicle stick awards recognizing social skills and character qualities among campers. It does not need to be fancy or expensive. Kids love a simple award with a thoughtful message.

GOODBYES

Plan a short and simple goodbye circle for kids where you recognize that saying goodbye to new friends is bittersweet. Provide a ritual for saying goodbye such as a pass the squeeze or high-five line-up.

THANK YOUS

Thank the kids in your care for their efforts and for the lessons they have taught you. Tell them how honored you are to have been a part of their summers.



Thank you:

We are grateful to the Northfield Savings Bank Foundation for supporting our social emotional learning work.