

Camp Forum: For Campers/Parents: Camp Scholar: Raising a "Cool Kind Kid"

Barbara_Gilmour

New User / Moderator



Aug 7, 2008, 10:00 AM

Post #1 of 1 (2536 views)

[Copy Shortcut](#)

Raising a "Cool Kind Kid"

by **Barbara Gilmour**

It hasn't been that long since people were talking about it "taking a village" to raise a child. Different people, in differing roles, all contribute to shaping and guiding a child. Each one has an impact on the kind of adult the child becomes.

Past generations had the advantage of their "village" including extended family members who lived in close proximity to the child. Their frequent input into the child's life was based on a genuine love and concern for that child. Everyone benefited from these interactions – parents, children, and other members of the community.

Extended families today are literally "extended" from one coast to another, or even living in several different countries. The nuclear family is often on its own, far from other relatives, removed from the support group that families used to rely on. But just because the support is not readily available doesn't mean that people no longer yearn for it. Families feel the lack, and consequently seek other social networks to fill the gap.

Camps have a major role to play in this search for community. They are key participants in providing the "village" that it takes to raise a "Cool Kind Kid." Camps have opportunities all day, every day, to impact campers' lives in positive ways so that they become healthy, stable adults, and contributing citizens who look out for the needs of other members of the community.

Using the concepts in the poem below, let's consider ways that camps can train and encourage their campers to become "Cool Kind Kids."

Raising a "Cool Kind Kid"

It all starts in the home
When a young child first says "please"
We follow him to preschool
Where he learns not to tease

Along the way with others' help
He soon learns how to care
To be kind and honest
And play fair, and share

When he steps outside his door
He then begins to see
That many different people

Live in his community

Asking what he can do to help
Gladly doing his chore
He puts the needs of others first
And cares about the poor

He learns respect for others
Himself and property, too
He appreciates what's done for him
And always says "thank you"

At camp he is the friendly one
A really kind, cool kid
He stands up to the bully
"We don't like what you did"

He respects our flag and freedom
Knowing what they mean
He'll make a terrific C.I.T.
When he becomes a teen

He's learned to live The Golden Rule
At home, camp, sports and school
His kind heart clear to others
They see he's "kind" and "cool"

Children, from an early age, want to do the right thing. They want to please the people around them, and they especially like to receive praise for what they do right.

They are open and receptive to learning new things. It is often the case today, however, that the "new things" they are learning at home don't include the basic social skills they need to get along with others, and so they are not equipped to succeed in society.

Camps can give kids the interpersonal tools they need by encouraging their counselors and campers to use The Magic Words, like *please* and *thank you*, and then praising them when they do. These little words go a long way toward smoothing daily social interactions. Campers feel proud and their self-confidence increases when they master an attainable goal like remembering to say The Magic Words.

Throughout the day, counselors can introduce and demonstrate the need to say *I'm sorry* and *excuse me*. They can also encourage campers to use the "Greeting Magic Words" *hello*, *good-bye*, *good morning*, and *good night*. A fun way to do this is to establish "Hello Day" when campers compete to see how many people they can say the greeting words to.

"We follow him to preschool..."

Many children do not have the opportunity to attend preschool and may not be learning the social interaction skills needed to get along in groups. Camps know that if they want their campers to get along with one another, some of this training falls on them.

There are many opportunities for camp staff to introduce social skills as situations naturally arise. For instance, whether changing in the cabin or locker room or playing a game, campers can be encouraged to not make negative comments about or tease others.

It's fun to have a "Compliments Circle" where kids take turns offering a positive comment about the child sitting opposite them.

"Along the way with others' help, he soon learns how to care..."

As every camp director and counselor knows, children are naturally self-absorbed and self-centered. Teaching a child to care about others is not easy, but teachable moments arise every day.

Counselors provide a powerful model of caring and are in a unique position to guide and change behavior. They can encourage kids to generate ideas about kind alternatives to unkind behaviors, and then give these ideas some legs by applying them to real-life situations. Campers can then explore how kindness extends "beyond the fence" to the outside world, to improve the life of another person.

"And play fair, and share..."

Children who have not had experience interacting appropriately in groups have a hard time playing fair and sharing, but can learn quickly as they participate in fun activities designed to help them. An effective way of accomplishing this is to have them play a game with no rules, or unfair rules, and then share how they felt when they observed that others were not playing fair. Following up with camper-generated role-plays gets the message across in a way that is more effective than a simple lecture.

Kids enjoy creating and performing role-plays to demonstrate, for example, how cheating and dishonesty can have an impact on the whole group. These activities are especially effective when they emphasize how other campers feel about the one who is being dishonest. Children can learn that a person who engages in inappropriate behaviors is self-defeating.

"When he steps outside his door..."

We are a multi-cultural, diverse nation and world. Camp is sometimes a child's first exposure to people from different races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions.

Counselors and other staff benefit greatly from receiving diversity training to enable them to interact with all children equally, sensitively, and without a hint of prejudice. As we know, children pick up on discriminatory attitudes very readily in people they look up to. Counselors can be encouraged and trained to create an atmosphere of acceptance within their group and to know what to do when problems arise.

"Asking what he can do to help..."

Part of learning to be kind and caring includes offering to help. Most children need to be reminded to help, and also need guidance in recognizing situations where they can help. When kids are helping to clean up the cabin, art supplies, and mess hall, counselors can praise them for being "Cool Kind Kids."

Children can be encouraged to take ownership of the importance of helping others by considering what chores need to be done, and who is going to do what. These concepts can be converted from the abstract to the concrete by asking them to make up chore charts for themselves. When they complete a job, they delight in marking their charts. Counselors can offer rewards or incentives for a job well done. They can take advantage of many opportunities throughout the day to emphasize how the group functions more smoothly when all the members do their share of the work.

"He puts the needs of others first..."

Being naturally self-centered, children must be taught to think of others first. A fun way to expand their capacity to do this is an exercise called "After You." It can begin with some brainstorming about ways to put someone else's needs ahead of their own, such as letting a friend get in line in front of you at the water fountain, letting your friend have the last cookie, or stepping aside to let an elderly person go before you.

Once they have grasped the examples, they benefit by role-playing letting someone else go first. The next step is to for them to apply the concept to their daily behavior. A fun option is to have them say, in an exaggerated way, "After you!" (complete with dramatic hand motions) whenever possible. As always, counselors can reinforce polite behavior by watching for chances to praise campers.

"He learns respect for others, himself and property, too..."

The core value associated with being a "Cool Kind Kid" is respect. Some children come to camp having received a lifetime of disrespect from their caregivers, and therefore they have difficulty respecting anyone, especially themselves. Counselors can be trained to understand how self-respect is injured when children are disrespected at home. They can help repair the damage by modeling and requiring respect in every interaction.

Children have a hard time respecting others if they don't first respect themselves. Encouraging children to take care of themselves physically (hygiene, grooming, dress, etc.) improves their self-respect and helps them not become the objects of teasing and rejection.

All day long, counselors can reinforce the message that each person has value. They can help each child discover his strengths, and set up activities that allow a variety of abilities to be celebrated. For example, artistic performances can give children who are not athletic a chance to excel, thus building their self-confidence.

As children increase in respect for themselves and other people, they learn to respect the things that belong to others. Any camp setting has numerous places where children can learn how to take care of camp property and the environment. To make this fun, counselors can take their group on a tour of the facility and ask how they think each area deserves to be treated, and then take appropriate action if possible.

"He appreciates what's done for him..."

As children become more other-centered, they learn to be more caring and compassionate. They also begin to understand how gratitude is the opposite of being spoiled and self-centered.

Counselors have multiple occasions when they can guide campers to think about being appreciative for all that they have. Campers can make a list toward the end of their camp stay of all the staff who helped them have a good time at camp, and then go on a camp "Appreciation Tour" to personally thank those people. They enjoy writing and decorating brief thank you notes to the people responsible for providing their camp experience (younger campers can draw a picture). Knowing how to say the "Magic Word" *thank you* and how to write (or draw) a thank you note empowers them to behave in socially appropriate ways for the rest of their lives.

"At camp he is the friendly one..."

Counselors can help kids not be fooled into thinking that the bully is the cool kid. Rather, the kind, caring, and respectful kid is the cool kid. Children who have been taught these things have many friends and high self-confidence. They are the ones the other kids will gravitate to. And, they are the ones who will become

the leaders; the ones who have the confidence to stand up to the bully—to reject bullying and being bullied. As counselors encourage kindness, caring, and respect in campers, they will see improved behavior and more cohesiveness in their group.

"He respects our flag and freedom..."

Respect is central to successful human interactions on the personal, family, community, and national levels. Thus, patriotism is an outgrowth of respect for others.

Camp staff are in a position to help young people appreciate the freedoms and privileges that others have won for them at great cost. Campers can understand that it is appropriate to remember and honor the sacrifices that many people have made on their behalf.

The poem was originally written a few months after 9/11/01, and the original version had a chorus:

I'm a citizen of the USA
And proud to say I care
I'll fly our flag so high
They'll see it everywhere

I'll respect our rights and freedom
Until the day I die
And be happy when I see our flag
Fly in a clear, safe sky

"He'll make a terrific CIT..."

Camp directors know that "growing their own staff" is an effective way to meet future staffing needs. They can reap the benefits of having a high quality, dedicated, caring staff tomorrow by instilling important values in the kids attending their camps today. By teaching them what is important for them to know to be good citizens, they will develop into the kind of people that are desirable to hire.

"He's learned to live The Golden Rule..."

"Treat others the way you want to be treated" is the foundation of pleasant and productive social interaction. Most world religions and philosophies include a similar principle, and therefore it is now commonly referred to as The Global Golden Rule. When counselors teach and encourage this principle in their campers, they see positive results. No matter where children go, training and encouragement to be kind, caring, compassionate, and respectful will follow them. They will be assured of friendships, self-confidence, and success, with a demeanor that will attract others to them.

As camp professionals, having made these principles a centerpiece of your program, you can feel confident that you have contributed to providing the benefits of a "village" for each child who walks through your gate.

Barbara Gilmour is the CEO of Etiquette, Etc., LLC, and creator of [Tanner's Manners](#) , "Cool Kind Kid" **Camp Kits for ages 4-6 and 7-9.**

Barbara, along with co-authors **Sydelle Mason, EdD.**, and **Wendy McDermott, PhD.**, has also developed the Tanner's Manners: Be a "Cool Kind Kid" Social Skills and Character Values Curriculum for elementary schools, and the "Cool Kind Kid" music CD. The CD and its 17 fun, original songs, has won 8 national awards including Teachers' Choice, Parents' Choice, and Toy and CD of the Year.

(This post was [edited](#) by Barbara_Gilmour on Aug 7, 2008, 10:29 AM)

[Summer Camps Main](#) | [Summer Camps Directory](#) | [Summer Camp Jobs](#) | [Camp Forum](#) | [Vendor Outlet](#) | [Resources](#) | [Camp Owner](#) | [About Us](#)
[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Link to Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Summer Camps](#) | [Summer Camp Guide](#) | [Find Summer Camps](#)

©MySummerCamps.com 2003-2008. All rights reserved. [My Summer Camps Network](#).