

Camp Forum: For Campers/Parents: Camp Scholar: Redefining "Cool"

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Redefining "Cool"

By **Barbara Gilmour** — Creator of [Tanner's Manners](#)

We've all met the type . . . the boy who tries to make himself look cool by bullying others . . . the girl who goes out of her way to put someone down, expecting to receive praise from her clique in return.

Kids are confronted on a daily basis in their neighborhoods, at school, and on television with role models sending the message that the unkind person is cool. They think "Is this what cool really looks like? Do I have to act like a jerk to get into the cool kids club?"

Camp leaders, educators, and families need to equip kids to avoid this trap. Character education and social skills development are key roles for camps, schools, and after-school programs. This is especially true for addressing bullying, which is the ultimate in being "uncool."

We need to go beyond dealing with bullying after it happens or teaching kids how to react to it when it does. We need to work with kids to equip them to resist the deception that bullying is cool.

Camps have a huge role to play in helping kids redefine cool. We're all born as self-centered, demanding creatures, but we can learn that respecting ourselves and others leads to a more fulfilling life. We need to teach kids that the kind kid is the cool kid, not the bully. It's cool to live the Golden Rule. You can't be truly cool if you are unkind.

Manners help kids navigate these issues. Manners are not rigid, out-dated rules for snobs. Learning manners is all about getting along with people, treating others as you would like to be treated.

Manners are about social skills. Many children feel uncomfortable in social situations because they don't know what is expected of them. They grow up to be socially uncomfortable adults who are unable to relate to the people around them.

Having good social skills does not mean being a doormat. Being "nice" is too often equated with being boring and weak. On the contrary, cool people are able to be themselves without imposing themselves on others.

Having a good foundation in manners frees you up to be yourself because you are not worried about how to act. What is more appealing than a well-balanced, joyful, genuine person who knows how to make others feel welcome and accepted?

Camp has always been a great place for kids to develop character and improve their social competence because camp leaders are out-of-the-box thinkers when it comes to education. Camp professionals know that children move ahead faster and better when relevant programs are designed to be fun learning

experiences instead of leaving campers' progress to chance.

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 Jul 5, 2007, 9:54 AM)

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