

Anxious Parents: Intervening Before, During, and After Camp

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Introductions and Goals

- Workshop atmosphere throughout
- Walking out with a plan which involves the entire staff
- **E**ducation
 - Parents who are well-informed are likely to be less anxious
- **S**etting limits
 - Enabling anxiety can make things worse
- **P**revention
 - Stopping problems before they start

Camp's Benefits for Nervous Parents

- Critical information regarding:
 - Social development
 - Response to criticism and challenges
 - The ability to function independently
 - How other people perceive their parenting ability
 - Another viewpoint on "where the child is"
 - Proof positive that these kids might just be more capable than parents think

Starting off with...

- Stories of nervous parents: Examples?
- Were these negative? Why?
 - We all shoulder the blame here.
 - “Helicopter parents”, etc.
- Anxiety, itself, is both normal and (usually) indicates something positive at its core.
- Anxious parents care, and they each represent an opportunity for a success story.

Education: Starting Positive

- **Before camp!**
- Positive parent communication with the three E's:
 - **Engagement:**
 - What are your goals for your child? What are your concerns?
 - **Empathy:**
 - Reflective listening, checking in, and normalizing.
 - **Evidence:**
 - How has your child handled similar situations?
 - Outcomes and homesickness research data
- Role plays and handling tough situations
- Resources: Books and other materials you have used

Education: Training Staff

- Helping staff understand parental anxiety
 - Activities
- Communication between parents and counselors before camp
 - Safety, knowledge, and structure
- First day issues
 - (See setting limits, later)
 - Training counselors in the three E's on the first day
 - Backup plans involving more experienced staff
 - Role plays

Setting Limits

- Boundaries are important for anxious parents, especially.
- Rule #1: Caring but firm.
- Rule #2: We can't always solve every problem right away.
 - Anxious parents, like all anxious people, need exposure to anxiety-provoking situations.
- Rule #3: Referring back to #1 and #2 will help parents and campers in the long run.
- Set limits before and during camp, using the whole staff

Setting Limits

- Group Activity: Examples of challenging scenarios.
 - Rank them 1, 2, and 3, three being the hardest to deal with.
 - Remember the three E's and the benefits of helping people learn to "sit with their distress."
- Realizing where your job starts and the anxious parent's job begins.

Prevention

- Prevention of problems is really our overall goal.
- Prevention focuses on:
 - Getting parents the right information
 - Stopping the transfer of anxiety from parents to children
 - Preparing parents (some would say inoculating) them for challenges their child will face
 - Letters home, homesickness, etc.
 - Communication, within limits, during the season
 - Camp-initiated calls, positive updates, etc.
- Group activities and role-plays

Developing the Plan

- How are we going to identify parents who need help?
- Who will be assigned to help these parents?
 - The benefits of a “therapeutic” relationship
- How do we make sure that all staff are on the same page regarding communication, education, etc.?
- Creating an organizational structure to increase accountability and prevent things from falling through the cracks
 - Regular meetings and follow-ups.

Conclusions

- We need to see anxious parents as an opportunity, and reserve judgment.
- Moderate distress promotes growth.
- A positive, structured relationship that starts months before camp should be enough for most parents.
- Thanks for attending!
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