



REMEMBER

- Many distracting behaviors come out of brains that process the world differently. This is how the camper has been made - not an issue to be cured. We need to adjust our expectations and provide support strategies if these young people are to be included at camp.
- Some campers have structured support in place at home to help them manage their behavior. This may be the first time the camper is managing on their own. Notice effort, not just achievement and repeatedly recognize the courage and strength it takes to get through the day. We need to watch for places to affirm not just correct behaviour.
- Respond - don't react. Your calm response can help campers de-escalate their big feelings, but you may not feel calm in the moment. Choosing to manage your reactions and "act your way into feeling" is necessary for the camper and good for you as well!
- God made each of us unique and able to connect to Him. Ask God to show you the unique pathway to his heart that this camper needs to discover.



RECOGNIZE

- Some campers - such as those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADD/ADHD, or home-life challenges - may not be able to bring their best selves to camp. The uncertainty of this new environment will likely stir up anxiety within them, resulting in a fight, flight or freeze response.
- For campers with a "fight" response, behaviourally "acting out" is a form of communication. It tells us that the camper is feeling threatened or overwhelmed. Thinking beyond camper actions to what might be the root of their struggles can make it easier for us to see campers as people not behaviors.
- Camper outbursts or defiance likely have very little to do with you. Difficult behaviour may be pointing to a sense of not belonging, a desire for peer approval, a reaction to past trauma or feelings of fear, powerlessness, hurt, boredom or stress. Figuring out what the behaviour is saying can be helpful in guiding the camper to a better way of communicating what they need.
- Some misbehaving campers may seem like they are "showing off", but the part of the brain that thinks about good decisions and self-control is still developing and isn't providing them with guidance.
- Voices around you might suggest that kids with disruptive behaviour are just "looking for attention." Attention is a legitimate need that we can meet at camp! Having a staff designated to step in one-on-one is a great way to provide support - no matter where the behaviour is coming from.



RESPOND

- **Be prepared.** Diagnosed struggles will be listed on camper forms. Be sure to ask parents in advance or at drop off for strategies that they would suggest for managing behaviour. Ask the camper what they feel they need from you to have a great week at camp.
- **Communicate clearly.**
 - ▶ Share your specific expectations for behaviour in a clear, precise, and specific way at the beginning of the week. Plan this ahead of time.
 - ▶ Use statements rather than questions to get campers' attention.
 - ▶ No sarcasm or shaming when getting campers to comply
 - ▶ Focus on what you're telling them to do rather than what to stop.
 - ▶ Address disruptive behaviour quietly, calmly and firmly. Don't ignore it.
 - ▶ Notice when campers meet expectations and thank them out loud!
- **Stick to routines.** Many campers will manage their behaviors better within a predictable schedule. Make sure you outline each day's schedule and provide guidance for students who need it during chaotic periods, transitions or downtime. Designate a quiet space option for those who need time to decompress from the overstimulation of camp.
- **Find places for contribution.** Campers with challenging behaviors may have difficulty finding their place at camp. Be creative and ask for their help with something they can contribute.
- **Create a diversion.** Don't try to over-talk or over-power a disruptive camper. Instead, consider abruptly changing directions to disrupt the disruption! This might look like suddenly standing up and saying "Follow me!" as you run out the door and around the cabin once or jumping into a silly song or a story. Have a few "positive disruptions" in your back pocket and use them when needed.
- **Ask for help.** When behaviors escalate, safety of staff and other campers needs to be considered first. Brainstorm with other staff to find the best way forward.



RESPONDING TO DISTRACTING,
DEFIANT AND DIFFICULT
CAMPER BEHAVIORS



RESOURCES

<https://lakelouisecommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/positive-approaches.pdf> - This guide, written just for camps, offers practical ideas for responding to over 20 typical misbehaviours at camp.