

A Camp Climate for Personality Growth

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As senior counselor in a summer camp, I was deeply desirous of establishing a healthful growth climate. I mean by this, an atmosphere in which the individual children could breathe and stretch and make strides in healthy psychological development.

To set such an atmosphere or climate, it was necessary that all the staff workers keep certain principles in mind. We met for discussion on this subject and developed these general rules:

1. Making each child feel that he is important in the group, that his help with the work is needed, that his ideas are worth considering in connection with our problems, and that his participation in our activities is vital to all.

2. Praising effort involved, rather than actual achievement, as this gets beneath surface talents and is as fair to the slow, discouraged child as to the quick, show-off youngster, to say nothing of the children in-between.

3. Letting logical consequences carry through, so that the child has the chance to experience the results of his own acts. Illustrations of the way this policy works will be given farther on in this article.

4. Avoiding all mention of "good," "bad," "better," "best," when it comes to children or to their forms of behavior.

5. Never fighting verbally with a child (of course never physically). This necessitates an attitude of good will in one's approach, an expectation that the child wants to do his part, and in case of refusal, a recognition that we cannot meet the difficulty with force, but must work it out matter-of-factly through natural consequences or through mutual agreement after discussion.

6. Never indulging in bribing, or rewards or punishing. If natural consequences won't take care of the situation, a friendly discussion by the two involved may be indicated, or even a group discussion.

7. Never humiliating a child, either in private or in a group.

With these principles or rules to guide us, we were ready to start our work, realizing that we would need frequent meetings to remind and to encourage us in the high goals we were striving to reach.

Some of the problems we had to meet and how we met them were as follows: The boys in one cottage failed to quiet down at their curfew hour. Since several boys were involved, the counselor called a meeting of the group and explained that the hours of sleep needed for their growth was determined by the camp doctor. It was their problem to work out an arrangement whereby they would get that amount. A chart system was decided upon. The boys made the chart, and the counselor marked on it the actual time the boys became quiet. The minutes after curfew hour were made up the next night by setting ahead the hour at which

they had to retire. The boys tested this out and convinced themselves that they preferred to quiet down at the regular time rather than miss a part or all of the evening program.

Certain children were prone to come to table with dirty hands and face, so another group discussion was held. The group decided that the ones who didn't clean up should not eat. Thereafter the counselor said to those who came dirty, "I'm sorry, but you can't eat with us this noon." This system proved effective immediately.

In the youth camp, many of the girls were 13 or 14 years of age and had never had any attention from boys before. Many amusing incidents occurred.

The girls' camp was a fifteen-minute walk from the main building where the evening programs of singing and folk dancing were held. One night a shy young girl came to my bedside and said softly, "I had the most interesting experience! A boy walked me home tonight and I got along all right. I had thought that I wouldn't know what to talk about, but it was just as easy!" May she always continue to "get along all right."

Of course with this set-up the time was sure to come when one of the girls would stay out talking beyond the curfew hour. It happened to Ruth (to use a fictitious name). She was twenty minutes late. I waited the next day for her to come to me, but since she made not attempt, I went to her when she was by herself reading, and sitting down beside her, I said, "Ruth, you were out after curfew last night. I know that sometimes two people get into a serious conversation where it would be an insult to personality to end it on a set minute by a clock. If that happened to you, don't hesitate to tell me, I will understand, but I don't enjoy having to come to you about your failure to keep a rule made by the group." Ruth apologized for not taking the initiative and explained her lateness of the night before. This nipped carelessness in the bud and yet paved the way for handling any deviations in a fashion which assumed mutual respect.

Those campers who fell down on their housekeeping duties were left a share of the work and refused participation in other activities until their share was done. Again a quiet, "I'm sorry but——."

Lateness to meals was handled the same way as dirty hands and faces. In this case it was, "I'm sorry but we don't eat if we come late."

At another camp of my acquaintance, the whole group waits until all are present to start a meal. This causes social pressure to operate. Either method is sure to be effective, if pursued in a kind, but matter-of-fact fashion.

At our camp some of the children had many boxes of food and candy sent them from home while others received none. By means of a group discussion, we worked out the idea of saving all gifts of this kind until there was enough on hand for a group party. In this way no chil-

dren lost their appetites filling up on sweets, and the parties were enjoyed by all, so that group rapport was increased.

We noticed distinct development on the part of many of our campers through the summer months. Some of the shy youngsters blossomed into confidence. Certain very aggressive children learned a degree of cooperation which helped tone down their "loudness." The ability to take responsibility developed in many, and I believe that all of them left camp with a broader outlook and a better idea of how to get along with others as a result of our group working and thinking together.

FROM OUR FRIENDS*

New York Group: had a very active and successful season according to the report of its secretary, Danica Deutsch. The program included the following:

LECTURES: at Hunter College—Lydia Sicher, M.D., "Reconversion to Constructive Living", January 23; N. A. Shoobs, "Pupil Groupings and Emotional Growth", February 13; Alexandra Adler, M.D., "Childhood and Economic Level", March 6; Abraham D. Zweibel, "Interpersonal Relationships", March 27; and Paul Lazarsfeld, "Alfred Adler's Contribution to the Social Aspects of Psychology", April 17.

WORKSHOP: at 333 Central Park West—Lydia Sicher, M.D., "Terminological Mischief", January 26; Lee R. Steiner, "Commercialization of the Inferiority Complex," February 26; Frieda Schlesinger, "Influence of Analytical Work upon the Psychotherapist", March 25; and Elvira Kaufmann, "Importance of Pre-school Education", April 22.

COURSES: each course 6 sessions—Danica Deutsch, "Counselling Technique"; Asya Kadis, "Self-Expression in Various Techniques"; Elvira Kaufmann, "Problems of Youth"; Sophie Lazarsfeld, "Structure of Character"; Eleanor L. Pirk, "Case Histories"; Blanche C. Weill, "Through Children's Eyes".

During the season, Dr. Lydia Sicher of Los Angeles presented the following series of lectures which were very well received: I. A Course for Parents—"Pre-Child Family," "Is Parenthood an Inborn or Acquired Faculty?", "Success and Failure in Marriage", "Reconversion of the Family". II. A Course for Professionals—"Counselling Techniques", "School Guidance". III. Seminar for Teachers, Dalton School—"Adequacy of the Personality-Preparation for Life", "Is Knowledge an Aim or a Means?", "Is Teaching

* We invite all our readers to send us information in regard to our old friends with whom we have lost contact. We have the addresses of all those about whom we publish reports. Anyone who wishes to write to one of them may secure the address through the Bulletin.