

# Success Counseling

## How To Handle Discipline Problems

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*Editor's Note: This article is the second in a two part series on success counseling. The first installment, which appeared in the November/December 1993 issue of Camping Magazine, discussed the foundation of success counseling and step by step procedures for use in general counseling situations.*

Camp counselors have always been our front lines problem solvers, handling all manner of individual and group issues presented to them by campers. It's encouraging to know that counselors who are equipped with success counseling techniques are rarely caught unprepared.

Put simply, success counseling offers a way to empower campers to be their own personal problem solvers. If a camper is not happy, a counselor schooled in success counseling can help her determine for herself how to resolve things. Through success counseling, the camper learns to focus on how she wants to be feeling, and then to determine herself what actions will accomplish the change. She learns that by changing her

actions, she can change how she feels.

The ideas of success counseling do not just apply to situations involving individual issues. They are also applicable in more serious behavioral situations, incidents that involve the breaking of camp rules or the hurting of other people.

The six-step procedure described in the first article in this series (Boffey & Boffey, 1993) should serve as the base for dealing with such problems. Emphasis should be placed on the latter three steps: look at your options and make a plan to do better, follow through and commit; and never give up.

In situations where campers have broken the rules, the focus should not be on the behavior they chose but on what they wanted to achieve by using that behavior. We know that if we can help them get what they want in a way that also conforms to the rules, they will probably choose that new behavior. If we just focus on the old behavior and create a consequence for what they have done, it will not lead to a better behavior. Better behaviors come from planning better

behaviors; they do not come from punishing people for behaviors that don't conform to our ideas of what is appropriate.

### **Reframing the Situation**

In discipline situations, the success counseling model attempts as quickly as possible to frame the incident as a counseling situation rather than a discipline situation. There are three major steps in making this shift:

1. Campers must understand that the goal of the conversation is to work out a better way for them to get what they want.
2. They must be aware that if they refuse to work it out they will lose the privilege of participating in the activity where the problem occurred *until* they work it out.
3. The consequence of their behavior should be that they "make things right."

We are not interested in creating appropriate punishments for behaviors. We are interested in campers restoring balance to a system of relationships they have thrown

out of balance through their behavior.

The first of these steps meshes with basic success counseling concepts. While most discipline approaches focus on the behavior of the individuals and what should be done as a “consequence” for that behavior, success counseling focuses on the relationship between what the campers wanted and what they did to get it. We know they will give up the old behavior when they have a better one, so we focus on finding a better one. We also know that if they don’t find a better way, they will continue to use the rule-breaking behavior and probably choose to suffer the consequences over and over again.

The second step is to be clear with campers in a discipline situation that we expect them to “work it out.” We are not interested in punishing them, and we expect their help in looking for better ways to meet their needs. We must also be clear about the options they will have if they choose not to work it out. In general, the major option is always the same: removal from activities until we have worked it out. If they break the rules during cabin clean-up, then they would be asked to stay in with the counselor until they have worked out a plan. When the plan is done, they can go out and play. If there is unwillingness to work it out, their privilege to participate is curtailed.

The third step in shifting from discipline to counseling is to focus on a goal of restitution—“making it right.” We attempt to surpass the traditional two methods of dealing with

discipline, punishment and/or logical consequences, by asking the offender to create a situation where everyone’s needs are again being met. Responsible behavior in the success counseling model is defined as meeting one’s own needs in such a way that others can also meet theirs.

Irresponsible behavior curtails others’ ability to meet their needs. Restitution attempts to restore the love, power, fun and freedom that has been lost in the system, including that which the disrupter herself lost. In a situation where someone has gained power at the expense of others (sarcasm, physical interactions, cutting in line, taking someone’s things without asking), restitution is the way we give back the power and freedom to the people who have been wronged. At the same time, it provides an opportunity for the disrupter to be responsible and come back into the community with his power and freedom intact. Restitution brings to light the difference between *accountability* (where you traditionally pay the price) and *responsibility* (where the individual takes responsibility for what’s wrong and attempts to make it right).

### **Counseling Scenario: Discipline**

An example might clarify these ideas. A camper named Matt and some other boys were roughhousing and wrecked Johnny’s trunk several minutes after Johnny had asked them to stop and leave his quarters. Their actions involved a violation of someone else’s

property and a violation of that person’s privacy (freedom).

In this situation, though, there were really four problems.

1. The counselor’s problem: how to get these kids to see the significance of what they did;
2. The camp’s problem: the rules have been broken and rules are the fabric of the camp community;
3. Matt’s problem: “he was just having fun and didn’t mean to do it and now it’s not fair he’s in trouble;” and
4. Johnny’s problem: his trunk is wrecked and everyone is mad at him for telling on Matt.

Traditionally, institutions and organizations deal with numbers one and two first, and may neglect the perpetrator’s or victim’s problem altogether. But to work towards restitution, the counselor must deal with the camper’s problem first and worry about the other three only after he (the perpetrator) is working towards making it right for himself.

The ideal outcome for this incident would be if everyone feels good about the way it is handled, from Johnny, to Matt, to the director, to the unit head. In the following scenario, it is important to note that the dialogue is shortened for the purposes of this article. In reality, this conversation would take sufficient time, a number of steps and commitment to follow through.

### **Traditional Counseling**

*Counselor:* We’ve got to talk about what happened to Johnny’s trunk. Why didn’t

you leave when you were asked?

*Matt:* I don't know, Johnny's a jerk. What's the big deal? Johnny doesn't have to be such a baby about it.

*Counselor:* Well, whether he's a baby or not, you have no right to destroy his property. It's against the rules, and now you have to have some consequences for your behavior. What do you think would be fair?

*Matt:* I don't know.

*Counselor:* Okay, well then I think you'll just have to miss the dance on Saturday. Something has to happen here so you understand what you've done.

*Matt:* I don't understand. It's not fair I should have to miss the dance.

*Counselor:* Well, I think it is fair, and if anything like this happens again, the consequences could be worse.

*Matt:* But it wasn't just me.

*Counselor:* Well right now you need to think about what you did.

*Matt:* Okay, I'm sorry.

*Counselor:* Sorry isn't good enough. Maybe after you miss the dance you'll think twice about this next time.

*Matt:* But...

*Counselor:* No excuses. You brought this on yourself. If you'd left when you were asked, none of this would have happened.

### **Success Counseling/ Restitution**

*Counselor:* I'm not interested in punishing you for this. I'm interested in dealing with it so we can all feel good about how it's resolved. With this in mind can you tell me the story about

what happened to Johnny's trunk?

*Matt:* I guess you already know what happened but Johnny's a jerk.

*Counselor:* Well, you may feel that way, but what are we going to do to make it right?

*Matt:* I don't know.

*Counselor:* Well, I think we need to make it right and we have a number of alternatives. We can talk with Johnny, the three of us, and work it out, or you can come up with some ideas as to how to work this out. I believe you think Johnny's a jerk: Do you want to be a better friend with him?

*Matt:* Yeah, but he makes fun of me.

*Counselor:* If we could figure out a way to have you two respect each other, would that help you?

*Matt:* I guess so.

*Counselor:* Okay, so that may be part of our plan...to work on respecting each other. Is that what you want?

*Matt:* I don't know.

*Counselor:* Well, if the three of us sit down and talk about everyone treating each other respectfully, would that be better than it is now?

*Matt:* Yeah, I guess so.

*Counselor:* Now, how are we going to deal with the broken trunk?

*Matt:* I guess I should fix Johnny's trunk or figure out a way to make him feel better.

*Counselor:* Okay, I think you're on the right track. The trunk needs to be repaired, Johnny needs to feel well treated and not pressured from the rest of the unit for reporting this, and I need to see that you understand the implications of damaging others' property. I think that the rest of the kids in

the unit also have to know that we have dealt with this so they don't think that "nothing happened."

*Matt:* Oh, but I don't want to get up in front of the whole unit. Do you think I could tell people before lineup?

*Counselor:* That sounds great. How are you going to show me that you've thought about the implications of what went on here?

*Matt:* I don't know, what do you want me to do?

*Counselor:* Well, what I want is for you to feel that I've heard your side of the story and that you've heard my concerns. How about if we sit down for 20 minutes and talk about the issues without arguing about who's right or wrong?

*Matt:* Okay, but what about the other kids?

*Counselor:* Same rules.

They'll have to talk with me too. I also need to tell you that if we can't figure out a way to make this right, I'll have to ask you not to participate in unit activities until we work it out.

*Matt:* Okay.

*Counselor:* Good. Why don't you get back to me after dinner tonight and we'll see how things are progressing. We'll plan on meeting until you've done what we talked about. Okay?

*Matt:* Okay.

One of the advantages to the success counseling approach is that the counselor immediately gets Matt working *with* him. In this case Matt and the other boys had four major tasks before restitution was accomplished:

1. Repairing the trunk either aesthetically, financially, or both.
2. Making sure that Johnny felt good about the end result. His trunk was destroyed and yet he could also end up a scapegoat if punishment was used as an alternative. If the counselor chooses to punish Matt by taking away a dance, he and his friends might pressure Johnny relentlessly, and Johnny might end up feeling worse than he did before his trunk was destroyed. The counselor would then be left with two unhappy campers - one scapegoat and one who could not attend activities - and nothing would be resolved. In restitution, Johnny takes part in the problem solving and Matt and he work it out before going back to business as usual.
3. Working with Matt so that he understands the implications of using other's property. Matt needs to take responsibility for his actions. If he is punished by taking something away, chances are that he will not take that responsibility.
4. Having Matt somehow let the rest of the unit know what

happened and how it was resolved. The reason for this step is that most of the unit already knows what is going on, and when they see that Matt and Johnny have worked it out, there will be no reason to try and gain power by creating divisions or altercations between groups of campers.

Success counseling and restitution are by no means a *cure* for misbehavior, and there is no way to be successful 100 percent of the time. In the situation where a camper refuses to work it out, counselors may have to resort to "reasonable consequences" as an appropriate fall back position. But levying consequences should not be the first choice.

It will take practice for most counselors to feel comfortable using a success counseling approach. But armed with the proper skills, counselors will feel more effective than ever before. Ultimately, they will be able to create a good interpersonal environment in which campers are willing to accept personal responsibility and solve their own problems.

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