

# Putting Kids to Bed at Camp



*“You cannot experience life at its best if you don’t first experience sleep and rest.”*

-Unknown

One of the greatest challenges you might face at children’s camp is how to put your kids to bed at night. Your kids will be excited and full of energy and getting your kids to fall asleep on the first night of camp can become a difficult experience for some leaders.

Unfortunately we’ve seen both sides of the extreme:

- (1) Sponsors who allow their kids to stay up at all hours of the night and the result is that the kids are so tired the next day, they can’t enjoy camp and miss out not only on a lot of fun but they also miss out sometimes on what God wants to do in their lives. They have trouble focusing. They fall asleep during spiritual times. They are grumpy and if they are allowed to take a nap in the afternoon, they have all the more trouble going to sleep at night and the cycle begins all over again.

(2) Sponsors who get frustrated and angry and yell at kids and threaten to send them home, which just creates a bad scenario for everyone.

### **Bedtime Pattern**

Here's the pattern we suggest for putting kids to bed. It's simple and easy and should always be done with love and consistency.

Before bedtime, gather your students together and explain to them the process of going to bed. Say something like:

We always want everyone to know what to expect and what our rules are. There is a certain pattern we'll use every night when it's time to go to bed and I want you to know what it is.

*Later on tonight, we'll tell you when to get ready for bed. Some of you will need to take your showers tonight and some tomorrow morning. We'll give you plenty of time to get ready for bed but as we get close to lights-out, we'll give you a 15-minute warning, a 10-minute warning, a 5-minute warning, a 3-minute warning and a 1-minute warning. When the lights go out, everybody needs to be in their beds. In other words, at that time, everyone is done brushing their teeth, taking showers (by the way, don't get in the showers if you don't have time to get in and out and ready for bed before the lights go out), going to the bathroom and whatever else you need to do to get ready for a good night's sleep.*

*Once the lights go out, we'll let you talk and have your flashlights on. We'll give you 15 minutes to start with. At the end of 15 minutes, if you all are being quiet and doing good, we'll give you a little more time. In other words, the quieter you are, the longer we'll give you. At some point we'll tell you to turn your flashlights off. When we say no more flashlights, that means no more flashlights. If you turn your light on after we've told you not to, we'll take your flashlight away. We won't be mean about this—We just know that for you to have all the fun that we've planned tomorrow, you need to get a good night's sleep.*

*At some point we'll cut off all talking – In other words, at some point, there will be no more whispering, no more talking, no more noise...It's time to go to sleep. For you to get the most out of camp, you need to get your rest. That's why we won't stay up late. We want you to be in a good mood and ready to experience what God has in store for you.*

*When the time comes for no more talking, I will be very clear. I will say, "It's time now to go to sleep. From this point on, there is no more talking and no more noise." Then I'll pray for us all and it will quiet from then on. Don't make noises. Don't ask questions. It's bedtime.*

*Now, there is usually always someone who wants to know what will happen if they talk after this point and I'm not going to tell you. If you break the rules, there will be consequences but I expect instant obedience from all of you.*

*When we say it, we mean it. When we mean it, we say it but we'll never say it mean.*

**Go over any other "cabin" rules with them as well such as:**

- Stay out of the kitchen unless you are asked to help
- Keep the bathrooms clean
- If you make a mess, clean it up
- If you have cups, you might instruct kids to use a Sharpie to put their names on their "Cup for the Day" but at the end of each day to throw away all the cups.
- Leave the thermostats alone – Only sponsors can change the temperature.
- And whatever else might apply to your specific situation

**Other Tips**

- This happens mostly on the boy's side--As soon as you say no more talking, someone makes a funny noise. As soon as they do, immediately shine your flashlight on them and tell them (in front of everyone) that they have broken the rules and that tomorrow morning you will tell them their consequence. It is time for bed and there should be no more talking.
- What kind of consequences should there be: This depends on your leader and the camp but doing extra clean up during free-time, cleaning the bathrooms before leaving camp at the end of the week, and other chores are common consequences. Consequences should never put the child in the "spotlight", should not give them attention from the group and should also not be "fun" or embarrassing. There are many things that were done for discipline at camps long ago that would not be appropriate or acceptable by parents for you to do today. Have an approved plan for your camp discipline process before you go to camp.
- After your conversation with the students about how they will go to bed, it's good to answer any questions they might have (i.e., What if we need to go to the bathroom after the lights go out? Get up and go use the bathroom but be quiet and respectful. It shouldn't be right after lights-out either and you won't need your flashlight because we'll have a nightlight that will give enough light.)
- It's also a good idea to have your groups divide between boys and girls for any extra information they might need to know that might not need to be discussed in front of the whole group (i.e., Boys, don't leave your underwear in the showers. Girls, if you have feminine products, here's how you dispose of them, etc.)

- Ask your sponsors to follow the same timeline as the kids. However, there might be another place (such as a group meeting area) that your sponsors can go where they can have some down-time, stay up a little later, etc., that is near to the kids but not in the same room where they are sleeping.
- Take a nightlight that's not too bright but also gives enough light that kids don't need a flashlight to get to the bathroom in the middle of the night.
- Take a box fan – This is more for the gentle noise than the breeze. In a completely quiet place with 30 other kids moving and rolling over on squeaky mattresses and bunks and some that snore, a box fan can help to “mute” some of the noise.

### **Quick Tips**

- Always act in love
- Be fair
- Be consistent
- Tell kids what to expect in advance
- Never make empty threats
- Expect obedience
- Whatever you let kids get away with on the first night, they will expect the same every night
- Give plenty of warning about what is coming next
- Get to know your kids and enjoy your time with them.