



Strengthen the Heart-H: Including Spirituality in Camp While Respecting Differences

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In 4-H, our need to embrace diversity and move away from a tradition which often favored one religion over another, has led to a denial of spirituality. Recently many disciplines have rediscovered the importance of spirituality and the need for reinstating character education. Medicine, higher education, mental health and business have all begun to recognize the importance of spirituality in life. Reflections at camp can be spiritual without being religious.

Steps to Strengthening Spirituality at Camp

- Provide quiet time
- Involve youth in planning reflections
- Encourage thought about serious matters
- Encourage youth to express their feelings verbally
- Encourage youth to write down their thoughts and feelings
- Encourage youth to read and appreciate art and literature
- Encourage youth to stop, take time out, and appreciate nature

Involve Youth in Planning

As with most other aspects of youth development, empowering youth to be involved in planning is essential. Youth should be trained to respect differences in religious beliefs and challenged to create reflection programs that are meaningful to them and their peers. Explore with them why certain songs and practices may

make others uncomfortable. Train your reflections committee well before camp and plan the basics of the reflection programs ahead of time.

1. Decide what the purpose of the program will be. Offer some options, but be open to their suggestions.
2. Help them decide what activity would carry out that purpose.
3. Give them tools and ideas for setting the mood for the activity-music, props, lighting, selection of readings, etc.
4. Don't be limited to what we have always done!
5. Practice any presentations. Reflections can quickly lose their value amidst giggles and presentations that cannot be heard.
6. Follow with an informal evaluation – did we do what we wanted to do?

Suggested Purposes for Reflections

- To appreciate the beauty of nature
- To think about honesty
- To celebrate friendship
- To show appreciation to each other
- To help us be more of a family
- To learn to respect others
- To make the best better
- To appreciate differences
- To celebrate our state
- To explore and appreciate 4-H
- To learn to respect others
- To make the best better
- To think about citizenship
- To think about fairness



Ideas for Methods

- Readings
- Dance performances or group dance
- Songs
- Plays
- Stories and object lessons
- Journaling
- Notes or happy-grams
- Ceremonies
- Tap someone who...
- Candle lighting
- Meditation or guided imagery

It is more important to create a safer, kinder world than to recruit more people to the religion that happens to satisfy us. - Dalai Lama

In some ways all camps have a spiritual component. Either because of the beautiful natural setting, the opportunities for bonding with others, or meaningful religious practices, young people have an opportunity to connect to the earth, to each other, and perhaps to a higher power."
Christopher Thurber, Ph.D., Child Psychologist and Author

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