

“Camp Policies Regarding Camper Sexual Behavior”
FJC “Leaders All Year” Webinar Series ♦ US Health Department Facts

The following chart shows the percentage of males and females in the US at various ages who have had sexual intercourse. These figures are from 2008. More recently (2011) it has been reported by the Department of Health and Human Services that 45% of males and 47% of females in the US have had sexual intercourse by age 15.

	MALES	FEMALES
By age 15	25	26
By age 16	37	40
By age 17	46	49
By age 18	62	70
By age 19	69	77
By age 20	85	81
By age 21	89	92

Talking with Teens about Sex

The following are suggestions for trusted adults who talk to teens about sex (or any other important matter!). Excerpts have been taken from 1) Fogarty, K., & Wyatt, C. H. (2007) Communicating with teens about sex: Facts, findings and suggestions. University of Florida, IFAS Extension, publication FSC 2251. 2) Ponton, L. (2000, September/October) Teenagers and sexuality at camp: Understanding teen sexuality and tips for talking with them. Camping Magazine, 73(5), 20–24.)

- 1) Share your values, not your stories!
- 2) Have two-way conversations, not lectures! Even when I want to make a point with adolescents I will often “wonder out loud” about it and then ask them what they think.
- 3) Use strong conversational skills such as:
 - a) Honoring feelings and the natural interest around sex
 - b) Asking open-ended questions (like, “Tell me more about that . . .”).
 - c) Being non-judgmental.
 - d) Disagreeing respectfully.
 - e) Making suggestions.
- 4) Keep the dialogue going over time rather than having “the big talk” about sex in one sitting.
- 5) Watch for danger signs like other high-risk-taking behavior or hanging with a “fast” group of peers.
- 6) Use simple but clear terms for body parts or activities.
- 7) The more comfortable you are the more comfortable teens will be (mirroring).
- 8) Don’t make the mistake many adults make, which is to think that adolescents know more about sex than they actually do.
- 9) Don’t make the same mistake 84% of parents evidently make, which is to presume young adolescents are not sexually active. Only 54% of parents in the US discuss sex or sexuality with their children.

As people who have dedicated themselves to working with young people, camp professionals should remember that having clear, open conversations with adolescents about sex has been shown to greatly reduce their risk-taking behavior and delay the onset of their first intercourse. As a camp professional each one of us must decide at which point we wish to enter the conversation.

“...have you been Ditterized?”

Robert B. Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW

www.bobditter.com

Camper Sexuality

Bob Ditter

Key Messages

- 1) Camp has a long tradition of being a place that promotes health in children and staff—healthy friendships; healthy eating; healthy participation in sports and activities; healthy contact with Nature and the outdoors. Camps help children develop healthy habits.

For example, camps don't simply take children into Nature; they talk with children about safe ways to hike or rock climb or camp as well as teaching children about the impact our presence has on Nature.

Likewise, a good camp doesn't just teach about winning but about sportsmanship, fair play and other healthy sports habits.
- 2) Camp professionals have a long tradition of creating dialogues with campers about important personal matters—behavior; friendships; respect; self-image; being a responsible member of a community; etc. Talking with campers about healthy sexuality is part of a camp's role in developing the whole self.
- 3) Adults have typically compartmentalized sex as a separate part of life rather than as an integral part of life. Sex is a part of the beauty of Nature, art, performance and virtually every other aspect of human creativity. (Yetzer hara).
- 4) Camps routinely put children into situations where they change or shower together, with ample opportunity to observe one another, be curious or explore while providing no guidelines to their staff or the campers themselves about how to talk about the natural sexual aspects inherent in these situations.
- 5) Sexual attitudes vary by generation, culture and class, even though we know there are great individual differences within these parameters.
- 6) Generally speaking, children today are bombarded with many more explicit sexual images and messages earlier in their lives than the previous two or three generations in the United States.
- 7) Children today receive two major, conflicting, simultaneous messages about sex from the culture: The first is, don't! Just say no! The second is, if you're not having some of the fun, you're missing out! Everybody's doing it!
- 8) Too often the approach adults take with children concerning sex is fear-based and vague. Many adults are afraid to speak clearly, openly, honestly and directly about intimate things with children, while others are envious of pleasure many young people seem to enjoy in their sexuality.
- 9) Young people are going to learn about sex no matter what. What adults have choice over is whether they learn from caring, responsible, trained adults.

FJC “Leaders All Year” Webinar Series

Bob Ditter

Ways Camper Sexual Issues Present at Camp

I. Camper-Counselor Dialogues

- A. Camper asking a counselor for their advice on what to do or not do:
“Do you think I should...?” “He/she wants to...and I don’t know.”
- B. Seeking information from counselors:
“What’s 69 mean?” “Do you know what happens when...?”
- C. Asking a staff member about their personal experience:
“Do you; have you ever...?”
- D. Online contact and information sharing (social networking sites)

II. Supervision of Campers: Walking in on...

- A. Two boys masturbating or two girls exploring one another or engaged in some sexualized play that is mutual. Walking in on a coed situation of sexual activity.
- B. Some sexualized activity that is coercive or not mutual.
- C. A strip poker game.
- D. Viewing pornography (print or video—steaming on a smart phone)

IV. Derogatory Talk

- A. Kids joking around using sexual language.
- B. Name-calling that involves sexual references.
- C. Other derogatory remarks.

V. Camper Conversations about Escapades or Experiences Outside Camp

VI. Rumors

- A. Regarding campers, about alleged events at home or at camp
- B. Regarding Staff

VII. Disclosure of Inappropriate Intimate Experiences

- A. A camper reveals something to a staff member or other camper that happened to him/her at home that she has not previously reported.
- B. A counselor reports something to a camper or other staff member that happened outside camp.

“...have you been Ditterized?”

Robert B. Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW

Sexual Behavior at Camp—*Guidelines for Camp Counselors*

Guideline #1: Do not *initiate* discussions of sexuality. Campers are stimulated enough by elements in our society without adding counselors to it. Sex can be discussed if it is part of an overall, camp program or if it is in response to camper behavior that should be addressed.

Guideline #2: Preempt talk about sex with talk about *relationships*. Teens and pre-teens are as curious about relationships as they are about sex. Counselors could easily have informal group discussions to talk about the qualities of healthy relationships. Doing so would help set expectations about what is appropriate to talk about publicly at camp by modeling it. The following issues are usually compelling ones for teens:

- How you can tell if a girl/boy likes you;
- What it means to *respect* or *disrespect* the person you care about;
- Having your own likes and dislikes *separate* from the one you care about (That caring about someone does not mean “being” them or being joined at the hip);
- That a true loving relationship *enhances* the rest of your life, and does not take you away from other people or your own interests;
- That sex and love are not synonymous;
- Seeing the person you care about for who they are, not who you want them to be;

If some youngsters become provocative during these talks, use guideline #4 below to handle it.

Guideline #3: Determine whether campers are being sincere or provocative. If campers are trying to “shock the counselor” or are getting *over-stimulated* (e.g., silly or provocative), it is important to stop the discussion immediately. •The first line of defense is to say, as calmly as possible, “You know that kind of talk is not okay here at camp.” I stress the word “calmly” because the more irate or defensive a counselor is, the more satisfying it is to the camper provoking him/her and the more the camper will persist. •If a camper says, as some have, that they talk this way all the time with their friends, the response should be, “What you talk about with your friends in private is your business, but here at camp it’s not okay.” •If campers still can not control their own behavior, the second step is to remove them from their audience or their audience from them. •If they are still being provocative, speak with the Unit or Division Leader (you *must get their input first!*) about having them to call their parent (or, worse, their grandparent) and have *them* say over the phone what it was they were doing or saying. This technique has a deeply sobering effect on most campers. The parents must be prepared for this call beforehand!

Guideline #4: Provocative or graphic sex talk is simply unacceptable. Allowing campers to continue being provocative or suggestive is not good for anyone involved. Quieter, less assertive campers become embarrassed, uncomfortable and feel unsafe in the presence of such behavior while more provocative campers become increasingly daring and unmanageable. Persistent provocative sexualized talk on the part of a particular camper may be a call for help. Children who have witnessed inappropriate sexual behavior often signal their distress by being provocative themselves. Likewise, children who are in danger of acting out sexually may signal their need for help for self-control by dropping hints through explicit sexual conversation. In either case, if counselors have any concerns about a camper, they should discuss them with a supervisor.

Guideline #5: Counselors should not share their own *experience* when it comes to sex.

When counselors live in close quarters with campers and a trusting environment is created, there is a risk that the *boundary* between what should be *private* to counselors and *private* to campers may become blurred. This happens when counselors share details of their own private romantic exploits with campers. There have been times at camp when campers have actually waited up for their counselor to come back from a day or night off out of their sheer curiosity. Again, staff need to be alerted and supported throughout the summer regarding this potential. In some ways, camp may be the perfect place for children to get their information about relationships, of which sex is “the icing on the cake.” Unfortunately, as Lynn Ponton points out in her book, *The Sex Lives of Teenagers* (Penguin Books, 2000), we are of two minds about sex in this country—one the one hand, it pervades our society; on the other hand, we sometimes pretend it’s not there. Neither approach is helpful to youngsters. At least at camp they figure they might get to talk about it in a sensitive, respectful way.

"...have you been Ditter-ized?"

Robert B. Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW bobditter@gmail.com