

### Mental Health – Camper Wellness and Cabin Community, *Specialty Track*

<b>AUTHOR(S):</b>	Natalie Rothstein
<b>SUMMARY:</b>	In this session we will: discuss and learn about supporting camper wellness and explore ways to create a cabin community that positively promotes social and emotional health.
<b>ABC GOALS:</b>	<p><b>Affective:</b> Participants will feel...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inspired to create a cabin community that prioritizes mental health and wellness.</li> <li>Connected to the importance of recognizing different needs amongst campers along with their own needs.</li> <li>Empowered with ways they can appropriately support mental health and wellness.</li> </ul> <p><b>Behavior:</b> Participants will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer activities that promote the importance of wellness for their campers.</li> <li>Support campers in appropriate ways.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cognitive:</b> Participants will know...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What appropriate support models and roles look like in the context of mental health.</li> <li>The importance of asking for additional support when necessary.</li> <li>How they can have a meaningful impact in their cabin communities.</li> </ul>
<b>AUDIENCE:</b>	Camp counselors, ideally a group smaller than 30 participants.
<b>TIMING:</b>	Three 90 minute sessions.
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	Wellness Now a Staple for Campers and Counselors, Camp Counselor Self Assessment, Empathy Article, Mental Health and Wellness Quotes

<p><b>MATERIALS NEEDED:</b></p>	<p><u>Session 1</u> Poster board/paper Pens and lined loose leaf paper</p> <p><u>Session 2</u> Poster board/paper Pens and lined loose leaf paper</p> <p><u>Session 3</u> Poster board/paper Pens and lined loose leaf paper Water color paints, paint brushes, cups for water White paper Construction paper Markers</p>
<p><b>SET-UP DETAILS:</b></p>	<p>Space where everyone can be sitting comfortably in a circle with chairs.</p>

### SESSION 1 TIMELINE

Total Session Time: 90 minutes

- **Introduction-** 15 minutes
- **Definitions** – 5 minutes
- **Your Mental Health Matters** – 15 minutes
- **Discussion about Camper Mental Health and Wellness** – 15 minutes
- **Break** – 5 minutes
- **Appropriate Support Models** – 25 minutes
- **Self assessment** – 10 minutes
- **Closing-** 5 minutes

### SESSION 2 TIMELINE

Total Session Time: 90 minutes

- **Introduction-** 5 minutes
- **Community Care** - 15 minutes
- **Empathy in Cabin Community** – 10 minutes
- **Mental Health and Wellness Values** – 15 minutes
- **Break** – 5 minutes
- **Community Building** – 20 minutes
- **Creating Cabin Community Norms** (if not already doing so) – 15 minutes
- **Closing-** 5 minutes

### SESSION 3 TIMELINE

Total Session Time: 90 minutes

- **Introduction-** 5 minutes
- **Nurturing Resilience-** 15 minutes
- **Self Care in Judaism** – 10 Minutes
- **Camper Self Care-** 15 minutes
- **Break** – 5 minutes
- **Mental Health and Wellness Quotes** – 15 minutes
- **Closing-** 25 minutes

### **SESSION 1 OUTLINE:**

#### **Introduction- 10 minutes**

Facilitator introduces the session topic and leads the group in a round of introductions (name, pronouns, camp). Provide a preview of sessions 1, 2 and 3 of specialty track. Intentions of the track and goals.

Facilitator suggests group norms and guidelines and opens an opportunity for input from participants. Guidelines and group agreements for the session, offer an opportunity for anyone to add guidelines or to ask clarifying questions.

- Ask clarifying questions
- Self regulate and self care (ie it's ok to step away)
- Facilitator is available after
- It's ok to be raggedy
- Be mindful and intentional about what you share
- Privacy
- This is a judgement free space
- Use "I" statements

Frame specialty track - Mental Health – Camper Wellness and Cabin Community - today's session will be talking about mental health and wellness for campers. Facilitator to set expectations about the track:

- This is a space to talk about mental health and wellness in the context of campers and cabin community.
- This space is meant to be supportive in thinking about mental health at camp and ways to navigate supporting campers in appropriate ways.
- This track will focus on ways to create cabin communities that honor mental health and wellness.
- These sessions are not group therapy.

**Why did you choose this track? Why did you choose this track? Either have participants write down answer to question to hold for themselves or have participants private message the facilitator with their answer.**

### **Definitions- 5 minutes**

Definitions- provide the following definitions to the participants. These should be written out on large paper hanging so that they can write them down. The purpose of providing these definitions is to offer a framework for conversations through the session and related sessions. Be sure to offer the opportunity for participants to ask any questions.

- o **Mental health:** Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. (source – mentalhealth.gov)
- o **Mental illness:** A mental illness is a condition that affects a person's thinking, feeling or mood. Such conditions may affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day. Each person will have different experiences, even people with the same diagnosis. (Source: National Alliance for Mental Illness)
- o **Wellness:** Wellness is considered a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential. Wellness is multidimensional and holistic, encompassing lifestyle, mental and spiritual well-being, and the environment. Wellness is positive and affirming. (Source: National Institute of Health)

In this session, we will be primarily focusing on mental health and wellness with campers and cabin community... (thinking about from the lens of empowerment and scope)

### **Your Mental Health Matters- (15 minutes)**

This conversation is imperative to help remind staff that in order to show up as a counselor to the camp community, other staff and campers, it's so important to take care of themselves. The framing to put your air mask on first, preventative versus reactive. Share the following thoughts (about 5 minutes):

- Most of you have likely been on an airplane. When you're on a plane and going over the safety protocol, the demonstration always mentions, put your air mask first before assisting others. Do you know what I'm talking about? (wait for response from the group). Why do you think that is (give them a moment to think)? Because if you're not able to breathe, how can you help someone else breathe? Also AIR SOURCE - where is the air coming from?
- That being said, if you're not taking care of yourself, how can you take care of other people? It is so important as a camp staff member to put your air mask on first so that you can take care of your wellness and then show up for your community. Your patience and ability to be present are much better if you're making space to take care of yourself.

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- Barometer of reasoning what the boundaries are and when you need to make the decision to take care of yourself and when you need to focus on showing up for staff and campers. Preventative self-care and making sure you're taking care of yourself during your free time and from the start of the summer are key to preventing burn out and to help reduce putting yourself in a compromising position.

Have the participants answer the questions below. Ideally these questions should be written out for participants to see visually. Ask them 1 question at a time and let them write down their answers. Take some time to reflect independently on these questions and write down (about 5-7 minutes):

- Do you have any concerns about your mental health at camp this summer? If so, what are your concerns?
- What ways do you feel prepared in terms of prioritizing your mental health at camp this summer?
- When was a time that you neglected your mental health and wellness at camp?
  - What did that feel like before, during and after?
  - How did that impact your ability to do your job and show up for your community?
  - What do you think prevented you from taking care of yourself?
  - What are ways you can be proactive about your mental health at camp this summer?
- What's your barometer of when you can and cannot put your needs aside?

Group discussion to discuss the following (about 5-7 minutes):

- What are some of the challenges of navigating your own needs while also attending to others needs at camp?
- What has been helpful for you and your camp community for staff to find balance in taking care of themselves and others?
- How can your camp culture better promote the importance of taking care of your needs?

### **Camper Mental Health and Wellness Discussion-** (15 minutes)

Facilitator to lead participants in group discussion about themes around camper mental health at camp. Think, pair, share. Then have an open discussion around those challenges and emphasize session is going to offer frameworks and tools and this is an evolving learning experience. Mental health is layered and complex – it can show up differently for everyone and that's nuanced. This conversation must be continuous.

- What are some themes around camper mental health that have come up in past summers at camp?
- What are challenges that come up with supporting camper mental health?

Have participants read the following article: [WELLNESS NOW A STAPLE FOR CAMPERS AND COUNSELORS HTTPS://EJEWISHPHILANTHROPY.COM/WELLNESS-NOW-A-STAPLE-FOR-CAMPERS-AND-COUNSELORS%EF%BF%BC/](https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/wellness-now-a-staple-for-campers-and-counselors%EF%BF%BC/)

Lead a group discussion:

- What did you think of this article?
- Was there anything that stuck how to you?
- What feelings did this article evoke for you?
- Clearly the demand for supporting mental health and wellness for campers and counselors continues to grow and is being considered, what ways is your camp evolving with this demand?

**BREAK** - (5 minutes)

**Appropriate Support Models – 25 minutes**

Facilitator will lead a discussion about what appropriate support models look like a camp. What issues are non-mental health professionals equipped to deal with? At what point do you go see a supervisor or utilize a mental health professional? What are you as a staff member an expert at?

- Have participants reflect or discuss question:
  - **Reflect: What does your structure at camp look like with camper care teams?**
- Discussion of Jewish law and getting medical support: According to Jewish law - someone struggling with medical issue (mental health) is required to seek help from a medical expert (therapist, psychologist)
- Think, pair, share the following:
  - What is your role? Your role as a staff member is to provide a safe and caring environment for your campers. That can show up in different ways. When issues come up with your campers that are beyond the boundary of a non-mental health professional, that's the time to utilize your camper care team. If there's a doubt, then it's worth connecting to your camper care team.
  - Clarify with your camper care team about what their expectations are of you and what boundaries look like in terms of appropriate support.
  - Hero mentality- we all want to be helpful and warmly supportive. Sometimes, that means playing the role of hero in a way that you're connecting a camper or staff member to the support that they need. That is an imperative role.
  - Negligence- finding a happy medium between providing appropriate support and not neglecting needs is important. Over supporting needs that someone is not equipped to support is also a form of being neglectful.
  - Working with your camper care team. Look at the camper care team as a partnership for supporting campers.
    - Open up discussion to talk about positives and challenges of working with your camper care team.
  - **Empower yourself in your role as a counselor and all that you can do within your scope.**
  - Social anxiety may be higher this summer coming from the previous years - providing empathy and flexibility around supporting campers and helping them ease into group settings will be very important (if there is time, explore different scenarios of how that could be handled).



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### **Camp Counselor Self Assessment (10 minutes)**

Have participants fill out the camp counselor self assessment. Take about 10 minutes for filling out. This handout helps to reflect on their strengths and challenges of working with kid and is a great tool to assess where they're doing well and where they want to improve and/or need additional support. This is something participants can bring back to camp to use with staff at their camps. This is meant to be a tool to empower participants in their roles and to identify all they do have to offer as camp counselors.

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Close session with a reminder of the next two sessions (cabin community and camper self care). Have participants share with the group 1 word to describe how they're feeling at the end of this session.

### **SESSION 2 OUTLINE:**

#### **Introduction (5 minutes):**

Facilitator introduces the session topic and leads the group in a round of introductions (name, pronouns, camp).

Facilitator offers reminder of the group norms and guidelines and opens an opportunity for input from participants. Guidelines and group agreements for the session, offer an opportunity for anyone to add guidelines or to ask clarifying questions.

- Ask clarifying questions
- Self regulate and self care (ie it's ok to step away)
- Facilitator is available after
- It's ok to be raggedy
- Be mindful and intentional about what you share
- Privacy
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- Use "I" statements

#### **Community Care in Cabins - 15 minutes**

What is community care? Community care is when a community emphasizes the importance of relationships, caring for each other and supporting one another. Community care also involves a culture that makes space for the importance of personal wellness as a part of community care. This is so important to incorporate into the cabin community.

Here are questions to explore ways community care exists and can exist in the cabin community.

- Lead a group discussion on the following questions in the think/pair/share model:
  - How is community a part of your camp culture?
  - What do you think of the concept of community care?
  - What ways do you feel like your camp already models community care in cabins?
  - What are ways you think that your camp could improve with community care in cabins?

#### **Empathy in the Cabin Community- (10 minutes)**

- Define empathy in very simple terms: "The ability to understand the feelings of another person" - (source: American Psychological Association) Share with participants that empathy is always important. It's a helpful tool of relating to other



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people, understanding and supporting them. Empathy is an essential component of creating a safer cabin community. Approaching people in the cabin community with empathy is really important to helping connect community members, meet each other where you're at and create space for different emotional experiences. Boundaries and empathy are not mutually exclusive.

Share this article with participants via email/messaging to read about ways to practice empathy.

How To Develop Empathy in Your Relationships

<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-develop-empathy-in-relationships-1717547>

**Jewish Values around Mental Health and Wellness in the Cabin Community-** (15 minutes)

Jewish Mental Health Values <https://thebluedovefoundation.org/jewish-mental-health-values/>

Show video about Jewish Mental Wellness Values from the Blue Dove Foundation and share the link later with the Jewish Mental Health Values. This video highlights great themes that counselors can be sharing and discussing with campers. Hanging up the Jewish Mental Wellness values with their cabin communities is a great way to talk about values in relation to mental health in the context of Jewish values.

[A Crash Course in Jewish Mental Wellness Values and](#)



Mi Shebeirach for Mental Health from the Blue Dove Foundation (to be shared with participants to explore on their own and a tool to use in their cabins)

<https://thebluedovefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/mi-sheberach-mental-health.pdf>

**Break** - (5 minutes)

### **Cabin Community Building** (20 minutes)

Building cabin community is so important to creating opportunities for safety, connection and empathy. Cabins are naturally going to have people who click and people who may not click or don't get along as well. Considering ways to develop mutual respect, understanding and a culture of compassion and empathy are so meaningful in making a cabin a safer space for campers and counselors. This starts with counselors. It's important for counselors to understand each other and how they can work with each other with different styles and needs. Below are some activities to help build cabin community:

- Cabin community norms (activity below)
- Ice breaker – 5-10 things in common in small groups – reminder that although we're different or may not appear to have a lot in common, there are things everyone shares
- gratitude tree/wall - have a space in cabin where people can write things they are grateful for, people will be able to write them down and see notes from people from the entire camp community
- Wellness quotes
- Cabin check ins – if it's not structured into your camp culture, having opportunities for the whole cabin to check in and reference the cabin community norms is a great way to facilitate dialogue.
- 1 on 1 check ins – if it's possible, counselors checking in with campers 1 on 1 a few times a week can be a helpful way to get a better understanding on how they're doing and also how they're feeling in the cabin community. Hopefully if there are challenges, those can be highlighted to give ways to think about how to work on improving those challenges.

### **Creating Cabin Community Norms** – (15 minutes)

Lead activity with participants where they break into small groups and come up with a list of 8-10 cabin community norms. Acknowledge that many camps already have cabin community norms as part of their camp culture. The intention of this exercise is to capture the essence of mental health and wellness and how that can be incorporated into cabin community norms. Reminder to keep in mind the themes we've been talking about and approach with a general lens as well as considering mental health and wellness as a framework. Give participants 7 minutes to come up with their lists and discuss why they're adding those. Have the who group come back together and each group share their list with the entire group. Encourage participants to lead this activity at the beginning of camp sessions to create a foundation for cabin community building.

### **Closing**- 5 minutes

Have participants write out an intention for cabin community building this summer. If there is time, have participants share with the group. Encourage participants to store this intention some place they will come across it – or to send themselves an email/reminder for the week before camp starts.

### **SESSION 3 OUTLINE:**

#### **Introduction (5 minutes):**

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- Ask clarifying questions
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#### **Nurturing Resilience- 15 minutes**

**Resilience:** Resilience is transforming through an adverse or stressful experience. This can involve addressing the emotional impact of the experience and finding ways to cope. Resilience is nuanced and not linear.

Camp is a place where people build and nurture resilience in a setting that can allow for more space for growth, working through difficult moments and a lot of different opportunities to be challenged and affirmed. Camp offers so many different experiences where people can fail and succeed in an isolated environment where consequences may be more forgiving. The absence of technology and parents/guardians also puts individuals in a place to be more self-reliant to work through difficult moments. These experiences help individuals build resilience in a powerful way that can then be translated back to other parts of their life.

Lead participants through a discussion of the following question:

- How can you nurture resilience in your campers during difficult situations at camp? (allow participants to troubleshoot and offer ideas)
- Offer additional thoughts below:
  - Allow campers to make (safe) mistakes.



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- Help them and guide them, don't do it for them.
- Encourage campers to honor their feelings/emotions and validate their feelings/emotions
- Identify when it's helpful to let something go- "laugh it off"
  
- Encourage them to look at the positives and learn from experiences
- Things that staff can take away for themselves and for how to approach challenging moments with campers:
  - Celebrate overcoming challenges- especially the smaller things!
  - Being open to feedback because it helps you to grow.
  - Discuss lessons and how they can grow.
- Revisiting empathy - children need to feel empathy and validation. discussion, break participants into groups of 3-4 to discuss the following questions-
  - What roles do you think empathy and compassion play when working with campers?
  - Share an example of empathy from a staff member having a positive impact on a camper,
  - Share an example of camper to camper empathy having a positive impact.
  - How might showing empathy look different based on different ages of campers?
- Regular 1 on 1 check-ins with campers (can be split between each counselor for each camper in the cabin) to see how they're doing, asking what their needs are and how they can be supported.
- Quotes about mental health and wellness (give handouts with quotes related to mental health and wellness) – staff can use these by sharing them with campers or posting them in the cabin as reminders. The handout "Mental Health and Wellness quotes" has quotes about resilience and wellness that are great words of encouragement and reminders about wellness.

### **Self-Care in Judaism-** 10 minutes

This segment is about the importance of self-care and also uses a Jewish lens to model Judaism's self-care.

Defining Self-Care: Self-care is taking time to take care of yourself by doing things that make you feel good and promote your mental health and wellness. What actually qualifies as self-care can truly vary and examples include: taking a shower, taking a nap, getting enough sleep, going for a swim, going for a walk with a friend, meditating, watching a movie and more. Self-care looks different for everyone! Self care is a part of community care. which we will talk about more in our next session.

Read the following quote:

"Self-care is not selfish or self-indulgent. We cannot nurture others from a dry well. We need to take care of our own needs first, so that we can give from our surplus, our abundance.

When we nurture others from a place of fullness, we feel renewed instead of taken advantage of.”

—Jennifer Loudon

### Notes on self-care:

- Self-care has a direct correlation to helping promote resilience. When self-care is made a priority, that can help prevent burn out. Self-care is intentional time put aside for yourself to restore.
- Self-care is so important to help promote resilience, prevent burnt out and maintain your wellness. There are so many great ways to practice self-care at camp that take little tools and short amounts of time.



<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/21/self-care-radical-feminist-idea-mass-market>

Present the following ideas that come from a Jewish Lens:

- **Share this quote:** “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” - Hillel from Pirkei Avot
- **Minyan** – being connected to community during hard and difficult times

- **Shabbat**- enforced rest and time for contemplation and to connect to simple pleasures
  - o What does that look like at camp?
  - o What about Shabbat practices at camp feel like self care?
    - **Prayers for self care** – Modeh Ani, Mourner’s Kaddish, Shehecheyanu, mi Shebeirach (healing)

**Hitbodedut**- which translates to solitude and the idea of interior seclusion for prayer and meditation – although Judaism does not generally recommend that one withdraws from the community, this practice can be seen as a time to connect to G-d alone and provide self-care and healing by taking time to: complain, cry, express gratitude – if something going on for you is important to you then it’s important to g-d, this process can help turn pain into an act of love and not holding it to yourself, creates closeness and intimacy with g-d. This is not a replacement to therapy but a form of self-care through

### **Camper Self-Care**- 10 minutes

Teaching campers about self-care is so important. Talk through with the participants about ways staff can teach campers about self-care and also lead self-care activities. Having routine around self-care practices can be a great way to model the value for campers. Below are suggestions:

- Importance of sleep
- Reading
- Writing a letter home
- Importance of hygiene as a self care practice
- Lavender pouch making – relaxing scent for bedtime
- End of day reflection and rituals
- Leading the cabin through breathing exercises (you can lead participants through these):
  - **4 by 4 by 4 breathing**: When a camper is showing signs of anxiety, breathing exercises can help slow down their heart rate and therefore help them better manage anxiety levels. If you do this with them, that helps as well! Breathing in for 4 seconds, pause for 4 seconds, breathe out for 4 seconds. You can count with your hand if you join them in the exercise.
  - **Belly breathing**: This is also a great way to slow down breathing. Have the camper put one hand on their stomach and take slow deep breaths. They’ll know they’re taking deep enough breaths as they look and watch their hand rise and fall with each breath.
- Taking a nature walk with a counselor
- Lanyard making
- Watercolor painting about how you’re feeling

### **Mental Health and Wellness Quotes** - (15 minutes)

Hand out to participants Mental Health and Wellness quotes. Encourage them to read through each one and choose 1 quote that’s a favorite. Then participants will be able to write out the quote and decorate the paper – something they can hang in their area at camp. This is an activity they can lead campers in to decorate their cabins – using this list of quote or finding others. Materials for decorating: white paper, water color paints, construction paper, markers)



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### **Closing** – 25 minutes

Have participants write down - what is one thing they feel confident about supporting campers this summer? What is one thing they want to work on when supporting campers this summer?

Debrief and decompress the specialty track. Highs and lows of specialty track. Offer space for any final questions.

### **BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP:**

The majority of this specialty track is intended to be led by a mental health professional. The following sections could be activities on their own without the rest of the sessions and could be led by anyone:

- Camper Self care
- Creating Cabin Community Norms
- Jewish Mental Health and Wellness Values
- Cabin Community Building