

4. STAFF MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, AND SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

This section focuses on how the camp environment is prepared to respond to and support staff—both seasonal and year-round professionals. It is not just the campers who need MESSH support; counselors and year-round professionals are also in need of support and strategies to handle challenges. Staff support influences the overall tenor and culture of camp, and in turn, how staff is supported and nurtured influences how they care for campers.

Staff MESSH support begins the moment they are hired and is most glaringly obvious during staff training. Time allotted for staff training varies greatly between camps, and especially day and overnight camps. However, as leadership is planning staff training, they can maximize staff engagement and learning by considering mindful scheduling:

- Include opportunities for breaks.
- Present your content in various styles for different types of learners.
- Encourage moments of self-reflection throughout.
- Teach and role-model approachable strategies for wellbeing.
- Ensure that training is ongoing and not only available upfront.

Those transitioning from camper to counselor should receive education to support them on making this transition successfully.

Additionally, the camp environment itself needs to be set up to support the health and wellness of all staff. Staff roles, rules, and expectations need to be clear. Having clear policies and procedures immensely helps reduce staff stress and impacts positive health. It is strongly recommended that camps have a person whose responsibilities include focusing on staff development, wellness, and recreation. Beyond pre-camp training, this staff person should be expected to focus on plans throughout the summer.

How is the camp schedule created and adjusted throughout the summer as needed to accommodate staff health needs? If staff are feeling run-down and sick, how can time be built in for them to rest while still maintaining and running camp? Daily and other regular time off need to offer appropriate space and frameworks for self-care.

Finally, staff should be receiving regular feedback—positive and constructive—on their performance. These evaluations include staff feedback on the balance between work and self.

Key questions to keep in mind:

- *How does camp respond when a staff member needs support or is showing signs of struggling? Is this response system known to everyone or just a few? Is it written down and documented or just something that is spoken about?*
- *How are staff schedules built to ensure time to decompress and care for themselves?*
- *Are staff provided spaces for continuity of care conversations with therapists back home?*
- *What support is given to help international staff understand and feel a part of the camp community? How do we plan time off so that they can still connect with home?*
- *Is space created for staff feedback about unmet needs?*

Year-round staff need different support than seasonal employees. While it can be difficult for small agencies with limited budgets, it is recommended that boards, executives, and/or camp directors look at opportunities to provide additional benefits to year-round professionals like: mental health care, gym membership rate reduction or support, week-long closures to support rest post-camp, etc. These may be able to be achieved through partnerships with local organizations, insurance providers, or other non-traditional avenues.