Ohio 4-H Camp Counselor Core Competencies

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Camp counselors contribute to a quality camping experience and therefore it is important to understand factors that influence their successful performance. Because counselors work directly with campers, they have a great impact on the learning environment. Across the country, 4-H is known for its use of teens as camp counselors. 4-H camp counselors need to know how to perform their multi-faceted role, and the 4-H professionals who train them need to be able to evaluate their competencies. A competency model was developed to support 4-H camp counselor selection, training, and evaluation.

This list of Ohio 4-H Camp Counselor Core Competencies was developed by using a variety of internal and external sources. Ohio 4-H professionals were involved in a mixed-method research design including a review of literature, interviews, modified nominal group technique, focus groups, and a survey. The process included data gathering, analysis, integration, and peer debriefing in four phases: (a) review of literature, document review, and idea generation; (b) new model development; (c) model validation; and (d) final refinement and confirmation.

Core competencies are the demonstrated capacities that form a foundation for high-quality performance in the workplace. For the purpose of this information, this workplace may include campsites or camping programs in Ohio. Definitions are also presented, which is a term and associated description of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and observable behaviors that represent the competency identified. Key actions, or general descriptions of behaviors that illustrate a competency, are given for each competency on subsequent fact sheets in this series.

These competencies are what 4-H camp professionals should focus on when selecting, training, and evaluating camp counselors. For related resources on these and other topics, refer to the Ohio 4-H Camping Curriculum.

The following is the set of 15 competencies and their definitions, presented in alphabetical order. The fifteen competencies and their key actions may be found on subsequent fact sheets in this series.

1) **Child and Adolescent Development Knowledge**: Understands youth and their needs, along with the ages and stages of youth development; has an understanding of behavior management techniques and guidelines; puts knowledge to practice.

2) **Communication**: Communicates effectively with others using a variety of methods including active listening, observation, direct conversation, and public speaking, in both individual and group settings; has conflict mediation skills.

3) **Cultural Awareness**: Understands and accepts differences in others; appreciates different talents; relates and connects with diverse groups of people including but not limited to various cultures, special needs and backgrounds.

4) **Health, Wellness, and Risk Management**: Is watchful and knows what to look for regarding potential health and safety concerns and how to deal with and react to situations; has knowledge of emergency procedures and the protocol to take if they arise; has knowledge of how to manage their own stress, support the physical and emotional well-being of the camp community and basic first aid skills.

5) **Personal Commitment**: Is committed to the philosophy and goals of camp and devotes themselves to the position; has a sense of selflessness; takes ownership and has “buy-in” to the influence and impact they have on the program.
6) **Professional Development:** Has a willingness to be coached and challenged; accepts feedback and guidance from adults and peers; seeks opportunities to continually improve knowledge, skills, and capabilities; develops job-seeking skills (including completion of an application, references, screening, and selection process).

7) **Professionalism:** Demonstrates behaviors that reflect high levels of maturity, responsibility, flexibility and adaptability, honesty and trustworthiness; has an appropriate sense of humor; has a positive attitude; energetically shares knowledge; avoids a sense of entitlement; is engaged and respects people and things; demonstrates customer service and maintains confidentiality.

8) **Program Planning:** Designs, creates, and plans for appropriate programs and workshops to engage all participants; is prepared to implement these programs.

9) **Role Model:** Is someone who others aspire to be like; models, demonstrates, and teaches positive values; has fun in a positive and responsible way.

10) **Self-Direction:** Takes initiative and does things from start to finish with all the details and without being asked; works unsupervised; admits and recognizes mistakes when they are made.

11) **Supportive Relationships:** Is accepting and empathetic toward others, caring and kind, and responsive to needs; creates a welcoming environment and puts campers first.

12) **Teaching and Facilitating:** Teaches and leads activities with ease; interacts with, engages and motivates children; facilitates hands-on or experiential learning.

13) **Teamwork and Leadership:** Effectively participates and works as a member of a team; is supportive of peers and other staff; is approachable and has organizational skills, the ability to lead or follow, and sees the “big picture” or goals of camp; understands and follows directions; serves in a supervisory role.

14) **Thinking and Problem Solving:** Acquires information and uses thinking skills including creativity and critical thinking to prevent and solve problems; exercises fairness and moral integrity and makes sound judgments; anticipates consequences of actions.

15) **Understands Organizational and Camp Environment:** Understands the 4-H organization and philosophy; has a sense of community and citizenship within the camping program; is knowledgeable about whatever content area (nature, technology, horse, etc.) that is the focus of the camp; lives within the camp routine.

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**References**