

Southern Maine String Camp

Notes to Parents

The First Day:

We know dropping a child off at camp can be traumatic for some parents and sometimes difficult for campers. When you arrive, you will be directed to the dining hall where check-in takes place. In addition to turning in any missing documents, there will be a quick head lice check, and a chance to speak to the Director or Nurse if desired. Then you and your child will be allowed to go to the bunk. It is best to leave as soon as your child is settled in their bunk so that they can begin to adjust, but do feel free to take a walk around camp and enjoy the surroundings. Check-in time is somewhat chaotic, but once everyone arrives we have a busy first day with a swim test, a tour of camp, a brief audition, the first orchestra rehearsal, and then bunk activities to help everyone learn names and make friends.

Homesickness:

Some campers may experience short periods of homesickness. This is normal for children who haven't spent time away from home before. For first time campers we know that the hardest thing about music camp is not the music, it's being away from home. If it persists, we will notify parents about our concerns by phone. We have learned that it is important to listen with compassion to a child's feelings but also to help them focus on the positive aspects of camp, fun activities, new friends, great music and teachers, etc. Please help us by not making any "private deals" with your child like "If you're unhappy I will come get you." We know how difficult it is for parents to not give in to a sad child's demands to go home. But the best option is for parents to help their child by being supportive, yet clear, about their desire to have the child adjust to camp life. Homesickness most often lasts a day or two before a child again turns its positive attention toward camp life. We do recognize that in some extreme cases campers may not respond even with the help of their parents and may need to be reunited with their families as soon as possible. This is rare, but we do our best to put the safety of the child first.

Phone Calls

While not encouraged, parents who need to call camp to talk to their child should try to call just before evening meal times when campers can be by a phone, or the cell phone can be returned to them to make or receive the call. They may also use the camp phone with permission from the Director. Please only call your child if it is very important that you speak to them, but in an emergency follow the directions on the Contact Us page. If you are the parent of a first-time camper and want to know how your child is doing, please send the director a quick email. The Director will follow up by gathering information from the counselors and teachers, and then call or email you with a comprehensive report. Camp is a safe environment for emotional growth and campers often do better if they feel like they're "on their own," and this allows for the child to remain independent and you to know they are doing OK.

Mail:

As the week at camp is so short, I advise against sending mail to your child, as they may not receive it in time. While one or two email letters can be sent to the YMCA office to be printed and delivered to your child, please do not send these on a daily basis. Campers can send cards and letters as mail is picked up and delivered on a daily basis.

Meals

Meals are served "Family Style" with the focus on healthy, plentiful food. We serve vegetarian options as well as meat options, and an afternoon snack time. All bunks assist with meal clean-up on a rotating basis. If your child has specific dietary needs, please indicate this on the health form.

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Tipping

Parents often ask me about our tipping policy for counselors. Our staff does not expect to be tipped by parents, yet they always appreciate it when it occurs. Parents seem to tip an average of \$10 when they pick up their child.

Rules & Safety

Parents, please find a time to sit down with your child before leaving for camp and go over these rules together. We try to minimize the rules at camp, because camp is essentially a place for campers to relax and have fun. By agreeing to these few rules, we can be sure that the entire camp community can feel safe and show respect to each other.

Waterfront Safety

Southern Maine String Camp at the YMCA Winthrop is located directly next to a lake and offers many water activities. Water safety is extremely important.

- **The Docks:** Campers are not allowed on the docks unless they have been given special permission by the waterfront staff.
- **The Swim Area:** Campers are never permitted to enter the water without a lifeguard supervising. The main swim area is roped off into 3 areas, based on ability. On the first day of camp, every camper is asked to take a swim test with the rest of their bunk. Our head lifeguard then assigns them to the areas appropriate for their ability. If you are not a strong swimmer, don't worry! You will still be allowed to go in with a lifejacket on.
- **The Buddy System:** While swimming, we use the Buddy System to speed up head counts. Every camper entering the water picks another person to "buddy" with. Every 3-5 minutes the head lifeguard will blow a whistle and yell "Buddies!" Each pair of buddies finds each other and the staff perform a check to make sure everyone is accounted for.

Bunk Rules

Living together in a bunk is tremendous fun, but it requires patience and cooperation. We have a few simple rules to help everyone have a good time.

- **Keep it Tidy!** We come to camp to have fun, not clean out rooms, but we try to stick to a minimum of cleanliness. Every day after breakfast, there is a short clean-up period that is monitored by the cabin counselor.
- **Personal Space:** Campers are responsible for keeping their personal area clean, and for respecting the privacy of others. At camp, your bunk and your storage containers are the only areas that are really "yours". It is very important that members of a bunk always ask permission to sit on someone else's bed, or touch their possessions. Nothing in the bunk is locked at camp, so everyone must respect the space and belongings of everyone else. Any theft or unauthorized taking will result in immediate dismissal from camp.
- **Privacy:** Campers must respect the privacy and modesty of other campers. Everyone (including counselors!) has a different comfort level with modesty, and it is very important that everyone feels safe and comfortable.
- **Personal Hygiene:** Jumping in the lake is no substitute for a hot shower with soap. We strongly suggest campers take a shower at least every other day. We do not send out or do laundry.
- **Candy/Snacks:** It is often comforting to new campers to have a small amount of personal food. We ask parents to send reasonable amounts of snacks, and to be sure it is sealed in airtight containers or zip lock bags. Do not send any products containing tree nuts to camp!

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- **Boys & Girls** Boys & Girls may not enter each other's Bunks. Sometimes we will rehearse in areas near bunks, but campers are not allowed to enter each other's bunk.
- **The Bunk Itself:** Campers are not allowed to climb on the rafters or roofs of the bunks. Campers are not allowed to write on, or damage the walls, ceilings, mattresses, floors or screens of the bunk. Parents will be asked to pay the repair costs of any deliberate vandalism.
- **Bunkmates:** This year campers have been allowed to choose one bunk-mate. Both campers must request each other. Every attempt will be made to accommodate these requests, though there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Requests for two bunk mates may not be accommodated.

Medicine & First Aid

We do our best to keep the Camp as safe an environment as possible. We have a doctor or nurse on-site 24 hours a day. There are several first-aid kits scattered around camp for the odd bump or scrape, and several of our staff are EMT, or First-Aid/CPR trained.

- **Medicine:** When families arrive to check in, the Doctor or Nurse will be there to meet you and your child, and to make sure the Health Form is complete. All medicines are kept in the infirmary with the Nurse. The Nurse will administer medicines that need to be taken with meals or bed time. If there are any special medical or behavioral issues we should be aware of, please ask to speak privately with the Nurse and/or Director. Children with glasses should bring an extra pair.
- **Illness:** In the event your child becomes genuinely ill, the Camp Director and/or Camp Doctor will contact you. If the illness is minor, the camper may be excused from classes to rest and re-hydrate, but we are not set up for campers to spend the night in the Infirmary.
- **Allergies:** Any food allergies must be described to the Nurse and listed on the health form. If your child requires an EPI pen or an inhaler, please fill out the "Self-Medicate Form."
- **Sunburn & Dehydration:** Our staff reminds campers almost constantly to drink water and put on sun block, to the point where the kids think we're obsessive. However, many campers come from urban environments and are unaccustomed to spending all day outside in the sun. Please explain to your child the importance of wearing sun block and staying hydrated.

General Rules

- **No Fighting** Some conflict is unavoidable, but we dedicate ourselves to solve problems peacefully, as a community.
- **No Swearing** We expect campers to control bad language, particularly the older campers, who set an example for the younger ones.
- **No Smoking** Cigarettes are not allowed at camp and will result in being sent home.
- **No Knives** We do not allow knives of any kind at camp, including Swiss army knives or fishing knives.
- **No Burning** No matches, lighters, etc.
- **No Electronics** Cell phones are not allowed to be used at camp without permission. If your child is traveling, he or she may bring a cell phone, which we will store for them during their stay. Personal music players are allowed (such as an ipod) but we do not recommend them as they are easy to damage or lose. SMSC will not replace any lost or broken electronic devices. Cameras are allowed.
- **No Soda or Gum** No soda, chewing or bubble gum is allowed.

With these rules in mind, we expect everyone will have a happy and healthy week!
Anne Wilkinson, Director, Southern Maine String Camp