

Otter Creek Christian Camp Visitor Policy 2009

Purpose

In keeping with our priority to protect all campers and staff from the actions of unauthorized visitors to the OCCC, the camp ministry is committed to providing a safe environment for campers and staff. Additionally, the camp ministry is also committed in providing a focused experience to all campers and staff that is free from outside interruption and distraction. To support this commitment and to remain in compliance with policies mandated by the Otter Creek Child Protection Committee in response to environmental issues to which the OCCC must safeguard itself against, this policy prohibits the presence of any visitors to the OCCC except as defined in the policy below.

Definitions

All of the following persons are **prohibited** from visiting the OCCC:

- Pre-camper children not attending camp – The camp layout is not conducive to the safety of small children.
- Camper-eligible children not attending camp – Camper eligible children visiting camp often interrupt camper cohesiveness and may negatively affect the camp culture. Additionally, travel to and from camp to visit is a travel risk for young drivers that the camp ministry would not like to encourage.
- Non-staff adults – except as outlined below.

Exceptions

- Church elder and spouse
- Staff and their spouse (no children) if the staff person is not already at camp.
- *Family/friends of camper being baptized*
- *Additional Staff (band, DJ, Specific Role)*

Reasons

1) Child Protection Policy - having all adults at camp undergo background checks is undermined when adults that have not been checked visit camp. There is no point in doing background checks on staff if others can come and go as they please. We have had a person that we had to turn away from being on staff due to the background check. This person could just come to camp as a visitor under our old policy. The kids at camp are best protected when all adults at camp have undergone background checks.

2) Visitors impact several camp staff roles negatively. It is hard for the kitchen staff to plan meals when visitors show up unannounced. We have had visitors come to camp that we do not know and that are not connected to Otter Creek. Staff people have to make sure that everyone is where they are supposed to be

at night. We have had visitors come up and attempt to spend the night without us knowing about it. Staff people had to deal with getting visitors back on the road when they should have been dealing with people that were supposed to be at camp. Our policy has always been to defer to staff people that were most affected.

3) Adult visitors impact campers negatively. We have had a father who was going through a nasty divorce show up at camp. When he finally left, we had three children and a staff person (ex-wife) in tears. We also had three cabins worth of kids in an uproar because those three children returned to the cabin in such an emotional state. We have also had parents that showed up to visit and cause more “homesickness” in their campers. Campers do best if their parents are there all week, or if they are not there at all. Visits are difficult on some children.

4) Camper-age visitors impact campers negatively. Teens who have developed new relationships at camp, or have emerged as leaders, are often displaced when someone comes up to visit. Interjecting kids into camp mid-week disrupts the flow of what we are trying to do. The visitors are not up to speed on where camp has been going. They are also not as tired and have caused problems in games, etc. Visitors are a distraction to the other campers. Campers have paid to be there and have made sacrifices to be there. Visitors are getting to pick and choose what they do. They are also less accountable to staff, because they know they aren't really a part of camp. I can site specific examples for each reason.

5) Feelings have been hurt when we did not enforce the policy. We have had this policy for several years. Those who complied with our request not to visit had their feelings hurt when they found out that others visited anyway. The people who were trying to respect the board's request were actually penalized for doing so. Those who considered themselves exceptions came to camp anyway and word got around that the best thing to do was just to show up because “they won't send you home”. We shouldn't be able to pick and choose who comes to visit and who doesn't. In the past, we have done this - especially for family members of the board and it has caused resentment and hurt feelings from others.

6) Liability - we are responsible for everyone at camp. If we have no control over who is at camp, we don't even know who we are responsible for.

7) The policy should be uniformly applied to everyone. Every visitor should be treated the same way to avoid accusations of exclusiveness on the board's part.

8) Medical – Insurance, Tetanus or any additional medical information is non-existent for visitors at camp.