



# Camp Counselor Core Competencies and Their Descriptions

Camp counselors contribute to a high-quality camping experience and it is therefore 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 has been developed to support 4-H camp counselor selection, training and evaluation.

This list of Ohio 4-H Camp Counselor Core Competencies were developed 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.

These competencies provide a foundation for 4-H camp professionals to 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 list on the following pages defines each core competency (in alphabetical order) and provides key actions that demonstrate its proficiency.

## Ohio 4-H Camp Counselor Core Competencies

1. Child and Adolescent Development Knowledge
2. Communication
3. Cultural Awareness
4. Health, Wellness, and Risk Management
5. Personal Commitment
6. Professional Development
7. Professionalism
8. Program Planning
9. Role Model
10. Self-Direction
11. Supportive Relationships
12. Teaching and Facilitating
13. Teamwork and Leadership
14. Thinking and Problem Solving
15. Understands Organizational and Camp Environment





## Descriptions of Competencies

### Competency 1: Child and Adolescent Development Knowledge

**Definition:** 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.

#### Key actions

- Demonstrates awareness of various learning styles and camper needs and abilities related to ages of campers by engaging appropriately in conversation.
- Demonstrates awareness of various physical needs and abilities of campers.
- Plans activities and programs appropriate for camper ages, stages, and abilities and not counselor interests; adjusts the rules and objectives for these activities as needed.
- Demonstrates awareness of different behavior management techniques by redirecting campers or managing situations calmly and confidentially.
- Explains rules to campers to ensure an understanding of expectations and how it relates to camp.

### Competency 2: Communication

**Definition:** 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.

#### Key actions

- Delivers clear messages when speaking using appropriate inflection of tone, volume, and proper pause; captivates the audience when speaking.
- Uses nonverbal communication that is congruent with the intended message.
- Speaks directly to individuals on their particular level.
- Demonstrates effective listening skills; listens to others, shows interest in what they are saying; checks for understanding.
- Uses communication tools, methods, and attention grabbing techniques based on the situation and need of recipients.
- Addresses conflicts that may arise and resolves the issue by effectively communicating with others.

### Competency 3: Cultural Awareness

**Definition:** 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.

#### Key actions

- Conveys respect for individuals who have different perspectives related to culture, religion, socioeconomic status, special needs, sexual orientation, and opinions or ideas; embraces the differences.
- Addresses the situation if a bias is observed.
- Seeks out individuals who have different backgrounds from themselves and expands their own awareness.
- Welcomes others who are different with a positive attitude and makes sure all individuals are involved regardless what their difference is; makes adaptations to activities to include everyone.



# Lessons by Competency

## Competency 4: Health, Wellness, and Risk Management

**Definition:** 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.

### Key actions

- Addresses safety issues or threats that may arise by preparing the environment for safe success; keeps camper safety at the forefront of their mind.
- Has an understanding of safety protocols and what to do in an emergency situation; reacts to the situation according to these protocols.
- Recognizes the seriousness of an event, behavior, or action and calmly and appropriately reacts to the situation.
- Knows when to seek help and report violations.

## Competency 5: Personal Commitment

**Definition:** 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.

### Key actions

- Makes every decision with the best interest of the campers in mind, creates an environment for the campers to enjoy, and puts the campers’ needs first.
- Attends trainings and planning meetings, spends extra time preparing for camp and is engaged in all aspects of camp, not just what one likes; makes camp a priority.
- Has a positive outlook on camp, desires to work as a team to have a positive impact on the program.

## Competency 6: Professional Development

**Definition:** 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).

### Key actions

- Seeks and utilizes critiques and performance feedback from peers and staff members.
- Evaluates self and understands why some things did or did not work.
- Makes a connection between being a counselor and later when applying for college or jobs and develops the skills that will assist in performing well (e.g., completing application, interviewing, reflection).
- Seeks out opportunities and extra training to directly impact and enhance their role in the camping program; sets goals and pushes themselves to learn something new.

## Competency 7: Professionalism

**Definition:** 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.

### Key actions

- Demonstrates maturity by differentiating between being a camper and a counselor; does not get defensive when their ideas are challenged.



- Demonstrates appropriate language, actions, and behaviors while at camp and also outside of camp (school, church, fair, etc.).
- Adjusts roles willingly if plans change.
- Maintains confidentiality regarding medical needs, special conditions, or incidents that may arise.
- Engaged with campers, counselors, and staff members.
- Treats others with respect; is inclusive of all individuals.
- Does what needs to be done with a positive attitude and is prepared for activities and events.

## Competency 8: Program Planning

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

### Key actions

- Contributes meaningfully to committees, brings ideas, and voices opinions when planning events.
- Generates ideas that are new or creative but incorporates an educational component to these activities or programs.
- Thoughtfully plans lessons, generating and understanding a detailed list of steps while keeping in mind the ages of campers, available location and timeframe, and the finances and resources needed while relating activities to the goals of camp.
- Works to plan and create program with a team and includes resource people as needed.

## Competency 9: Role Model

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

### Key actions

- Maintains positive image and acts appropriately in all areas of life (online, school, church, sports, etc.).
- Better others around them by giving credit to peers or staff and enabling campers to succeed.
- Leads by example and has fun while following the camp rules.
- Is engaged and shows respect for all persons, places, and things.

## Competency 10: Self-Direction

**Definition:** 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.

### Key actions

- Identifies what needs to be accomplished and takes action before being asked; looks into the future to prepare the setting.
- Takes initiative to generate ideas or play games during transition or down time; includes teachable moments as they arise.
- Is prepared to lead an activity but changes plans if needed.
- Performs with minimal supervision or direction and follows through on assignments or tasks without being reminded.
- Is willing to take ownership for successes and failures; works toward achieving group (and not individuals') success.



# Lessons by Competency

## Competency 11: Supportive Relationships

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

### Key actions

- Attentive to the needs of others (e.g., illness, preparation for activities, accident) and treats them as they would like to be treated.
- Is empathetic toward others (e.g., homesick, struggling, not included); acts accordingly to engage them.
- Creates a welcoming environment for campers and their parents; makes them feel like they are special.

## Competency 12: Teaching and Facilitating

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

### Key actions

- Involves all youth in activities through motivation or guided direction while creating a fun and engaging environment.
- Is enthusiastic while encouraging youth, regardless of what the task may be.
- Takes time to practice and prepare before leading an activity or session and is willing to research ideas as needed but is able to be spontaneous and alter plans as needed.
- Employs a variety of teaching methods including demonstration, visual, and hands-on learning; relates the activity to life outside of camp.

## Competency 13: Teamwork and Leadership

**Definition:** 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.

### Key actions

- Supportive of others ideas and allows individuals to be in a leadership role and assists them to be successful; shares the workload to provide opportunities for all individuals.
- Identifies the strengths and weaknesses in the group and draws upon the strengths to achieve a common goal.
- Assumes the leadership role when appropriate but does not always need to be in charge and allows others to lead.
- Develops constructive and cooperative working relationships with others.

## Competency 14: Thinking and Problem Solving

**Definition:** 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.

### Key actions

- Identifies potential problems before they occur and takes action to prevent or handle the threat; works with others to solve problems if needed.
- Uses creativity to plan activities or solve problems and is not afraid to plan something (e.g., theme, event, game) that has never been conducted before.
- Reflects upon performance, experience, and activities; alters ideas as needed.



- Employs sound judgment when faced with confrontation or potential breaking of rules; strives to ensure fairness for all participants.

## Competency 15: Understands Organizational and Camp Environment

**Definition:** 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.

### Key actions

- Identifies needs of self and campers and learns what is expected of them.
- Understands that camp is a special place and can make a difference in a child's life.
- Is focused on the job as a counselor.
- Understands the philosophy, purpose, and desired outcomes of the 4-H camp experience.
- Has a basic understanding of the rules and what is acceptable and is willing to explain and follow the rules, even if they do not agree with them (e.g., withdrawing from cell phones or other technologies).

### Source

Epley, H. K. Defining and describing Ohio 4-H camp counselor core competencies. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The Ohio State University, Columbus, 2014. Available at [rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc\\_num=osu1398709972](http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1398709972)

