

Camp Counseling

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Are you a teen who wants to learn about children; enhance your leadership skills, responsibility, and personal development; lead games, crafts, and other activities; and have fun along the way? By taking this project, you can develop these skills to help you serve as a camp counselor. If you are already a camp counselor, take this project and continue to improve.

The teens who serve as camp counselors are the life force of camp. They are responsible for the safety, well-being, and education of the campers. Just as important, they are responsible for making camp fun, too. Counselors guide the campers through camp activities, information sessions, and workshops. They are also involved with the planning and programming of camp. Serving as a camp counselor is a tremendous responsibility, but it also has incredible benefits.

Ohio 4-H camps are **intentionally designed**. That means they are planned specifically as creative, experiential-learning endeavors. Campers engage with each other, older teens, and adult staff to develop decision-making skills, accept personal responsibility, and have a sense of self-determination. The environment of 4-H camp is carefully supervised and supportive, and depending on the camp, it often incorporates aspects of the natural surroundings. Ohio 4-H camps involve teens in camp counselor training and planning. Some teens are also involved in counselor training and camp evaluation.



PLAN YOUR PROJECT

Use this idea starter AND publication 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide* as the starting place for your 4-H self-determined project. The *Self-Determined Project Guide* is available from your county OSU Extension office or on the Web at ohio4h.org/selfdetermined. You may choose to do a little or a lot depending on your level of interest. Be sure to register your project with your county OSU Extension office.



Activities that often take place at camp include:

- campfire
- candle lighting or other reflective activities
- canoeing
- dancing
- flag ceremony
- high ropes and other adventure activities
- nature education
- information sessions and workshops
- shooting sports
- singing songs
- STEM and science activities
- team building

By participating in Ohio 4-H Camps, campers will:

- build self-esteem and self-efficacy;
- connect with meaningful role models in a safe and inclusive environment;
- demonstrate problem-solving ability and establish standards and values that guide decision-making;
- enhance independent living skills;
- develop positive relationships with other young people from different backgrounds;
- cultivate teamwork and leadership capacity;
- explore activities for wise use of leisure time;
- gain a better understanding and appreciation of the world around them through programs focused on outdoor learning; creative expression; science, technology, engineering and math; and leadership and citizenship.

AREAS OF INTEREST AND THINGS TO DO

Every self-determined 4-H project can be broken down into areas of interest. These are the specific things members want to address during their project adventures. Using 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide*, identify at least three areas of interest with at least three activities per area to explore. Take your ideas from the following lists, or make up your own.

Planning Your Adventure

- Develop and write your own 4-H camp philosophy.
- Make arrangements with an Extension educator who serves as a 4-H camp director to observe a day at a camp where you are not already participating.
- Volunteer two hours at the Extension office to help with 4-H camp preparations.
- Make a list of 10 questions you have about the counseling experience. Get the answers by interviewing a counselor with two or more years of experience.
- Create a portfolio or binder for your counseling information and activities.
- Develop at least three personal goals for your role as a camp counselor. Write them down and refer to them later. Did you meet them?



Understand the Ages and Stages of Child Development

- Enroll in and complete a babysitting class.
- Enroll in and complete a basic first-aid class.
- Enroll in and complete a mental health first aid course.
- Observe third graders on a playground for a half hour and summarize your observations of the characteristics of 9- to 10-year-olds.
- Volunteer or observe at a day care center or day camp to gain experience with younger children.

Enhance Counseling Skills and Personal Qualities

- Research new games, icebreakers, songs, programs, crafts, and other activities you can conduct at camp. Compile these in a small notebook or make a set of activity cards. Go one step further by making a cabin kit (bag, box, or similar) with five to 10 of your favorites and the necessary supplies. All set for camp!
- Find and teach five get-acquainted name games or ice-breaker activities to members of your 4-H club or another leadership group, for example, junior leaders, CARTEENS, or junior fair board.
- Choose three group game activities, skills or crafts to teach and make with your club or youth group.
- Find and lead a camp activity to potential campers at a camp open house, 4-H recruitment, or other similar event.
- Complete the counselor self-rating scale at ohio4h.org/selfdetermined to assess your skills before your camp experience.
- Participate in a multi-county, regional, or statewide counselor training opportunity.

Camper Behavior Management

- Write goals for you and your campers to achieve at 4-H camp.
- Make arrangements to visit, shadow, and observe an experienced counselor for one day at another 4-H camp.
- Observe a teacher or other childcare provider for two hours. Make notes of strategies used to deal with challenging behaviors.
- Interview a teacher or other childcare provider about strategies they use to defer challenging behaviors and what they do if situations arise.

- Come up with three to five camper behavior scenarios. Provide a potential prevention strategy and response for each behavior.
- Write about what it means to lead by example through your personal behavior choices.

Leadership/Citizenship Activities

- Assist in setting up for camp, cleaning up after camp, or both.
- Help someone with a childcare, first aid, creative arts, or leadership project.
- Arrange a tour of 4-H camp for members of your club or group.
- Encourage a friend to join 4-H and take a self-determined camp counselor project.
- Teach someone something you learned about 4-H or another topic.
- Invite someone to talk to your club about being a counselor or going to camp.
- Use a county camp flyer to promote 4-H camp to your 4-H club or the local library.
- Interview the county 4-H professional about counselor opportunities and requirements.
- Create a promotional 4-H camp video and share on social media. Be sure to ask permission from everyone who appears in the video.
- Record an interview with a co-counselor about why someone should attend camp. Get their permission and share on social media.
- Create a graphic or image with a caption and use it to promote camp.
- Assist with the counselor selection process by serving as a peer advocate.
- Prepare and exhibit a display promoting 4-H camp.



RELATED RESOURCES

Ohio 4-H Camps, ohio4h.org/camp

American Camping Association, acacamps.org

National Association for the Education of Young Children, naeyc.org

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