**Chaperone Recruiting Tips**

Recruiting chaperones for camp can be a challenge, and we frequently get requests from children’s leaders asking for help in this area.  Following are some recruiting tips collected from kids’ camp coordinators who have had good success.

**Recruit your chaperones *before* you accept camper applications!** We start recruiting chaperones as soon as we get the applications from the district. We then accept camper applications based on how many chaperones we have. For example, if we have three female chaperones recruited, we advertise that we have 15 female camper spots available—first come, first served. (Although the required ratio is 1:7, we know that the rooms only sleep 6, so we recruit 1 per 5 so we can have a chaperone from our church in all our rooms.) If we have more than 15 female campers apply, we put the last arriving camper applications on hold until we can recruit another chaperone. It gives us a greater sense of urgency and extra leverage in recruiting chaperones if parents are aware that their campers cannot attend camp without a chaperone!

**Recruit early so chaperones can schedule a week off:** Ask the interested parents/leaders/volunteers for a camp week when most could be available. I think the key is to promote the need EARLY so that prospective chaperones can plan ahead and request work vacation early.

**Build on the excitement of last year’s camp experience:** Show the camp promo videos and/or pictures from the previous year taken by last year’s chaperones during children’s church (or an adult service) to build excitement among the kids, teachers and interested parents invited to view them. We ask an enthusiastic chaperone from the previous year to speak.

**Promote the “*awesome-ness”* of camp:** We usually show a short video in the main service, have a couple of kids give testimonies, and then one of us in leadership that was also a chaperone says something about how awesome it is to watch 300 kids truly worshipping God. We also mention how fun camp is too!

**Create a sense of high demand:** Chaperone applicants are told that camp sign-ups will be posted on a first come, first serve basis for campers and chaperones. If there are not enough children signed up, then we won't be able to take all the chaperones that want to go, so the first chaperones that sign up get the spots. One year we had to turn down six female chaperones because we had way too many sign up even though all the chaperones had to pay their own way that year! The next year, I had to have the chaperones sign up by emailing me to have a date/time stamp so there would not be any questions about who signed up first. Parents were stopping me in the hall every Sunday to ask when sign ups were open because they wanted to be the first to sign up. Maybe it is just our church, but our parents are eager to be the first ones to sign up as chaperones, so they don’t miss out on an awesome camp experience!

**Give out chaperone applications to parents:** When I send out the kid’s camp packets, addressed to the *parents,* I include the *chaperone* application with the camper information. In the letter that we include in the packet, we state, “*We need one chaperone per every five (5) campers. Please prayerfully consider your role in being a chaperone. If we do not have enough chaperones, some kids may not be able to attend.  Please respond immediately if you are interested or think you might be interested in being a chaperone.”*We start recruiting chaperones in February & March or as soon as we get the camp packet from the district so that parents can plan their vacations in advance and be available when camp time comes around.

**Start first with your children’s ministries workers:** I have had good results looking within the circle of those who already work with kids at our church or with parents.

**Recruit “nervous” parents:** We like to recruit nervous parents who are sending their kids for the first time. Often, they are reluctant to let their children go, and we tell them that they can go as a chaperone for their child's first time so that everyone will not be so nervous. We usually get at least a couple of chaperones this way.

**Recruit older teens:** If given enough notice, our 18/19-year-olds love to go to camp as chaperones. Giving them enough notice helps them get time off from their summer jobs.

**Recruit college students:** We have a strong college group at our church.  We often recruit from this group because they do not have strong family commitments during the summer, and they are happy to have a week of free meals and fun. Also, the campers love these chaperones because they are full of energy and a lot of fun. Of course, we do the background check first, but we know a lot of these kids and they are always happy to help.
 **Recruit husband/wife teams:** We have several husband/wife teams that come to chaperone together and make it a summer vacation. They have fun doing it and love to serve the kids.

**Recruit from the entire church:** Put it before the entire church and not just those who work with kids. You will be surprised at those who would give up a week to take kids to camp. We put announcements in the bulletins in February so that those who may not have children are also aware of the need for chaperones. By promoting to the congregation early, people can look at their schedules for the summer and plan their vacation time for kids’ camp if they want to be a chaperone. The announcement in the bulletin reads, *“Mark your calendar now for Kids Camp to be held (dates we are going) in Gore, VA for boys and girls ages 8-12. Cost is ($cost) per camper. Registration deadline is (our deadline date.) Camp packets will be mailed to parents/kids in March. If you would like more details or would like to go as a chaperone, please contact me at (number) or email (e-dress).”*

**Partner with community agencies:** One year we worked in conjunction with a Christian foster care agency to bring some of their children to camp, and they helped provide a chaperone that was familiar with their kids.

**Recruit one-on-one:**If we don’t get all the chaperones, we need from our first round of recruiting (bulletin notices, parents, older teens, ministry workers), I resort to one-on-one recruitment. It’s not an easy job, but we want all the boys and girls who want to go, to be able to. So, I make getting the chaperones a priority!

**Ask the church to pay for chaperone expenses:** Our church pays the chaperone’s costs to go to camp as an investment in the kids' lives!

**Involve the chaperones in their camper assignments:** As soon as all the campers’ applications are in, we have a “Divide & Conquer” meeting with the interested chaperones. The campers are placed in their groups per discussion of age levels, personality traits, friendships, any special needs, etc. to minimize conflicts/difficulties for the chaperones. Then we ask that they start connecting with those campers by greeting them whenever they see them at church functions.

**Keep your chaperones informed:** When everything is finalized and the applications are sent off, we have another meeting where each chaperone receives a tote bag containing: notebook & pen, camp map, tentative schedule & rules, camper list with specific info on their group such as parents’ phone numbers, tee shirt sizes, amount on money cards and any special notes (such as non-swimmer or dietary needs, meds, etc.).

**Prepare your chaperones:** In the tote, we also place a mini first aid kit, mosquito spray and sunscreen lip balm. This is when we have Q & A time about anything on their minds—from what to pack to how to minister at prayer time. Did I mention that we provide a “supper” of pizza during the meetings?

**Pray for your chaperones:** The Sunday prior to leaving for camp, all the chaperones are called forward in the main sanctuary to be prayed for by the pastoral staff. Then all the campers are asked to join their chaperone for prayer together. Chaperones know that certain “prayer warriors” will be praying for them the whole week.

**Show appreciation to your chaperones:** A pastoral staff member sends them off on Monday morning and greets their return on Friday evening. There is a time of debriefing later in the month, and all chaperones get a small thank-you gift card for their labor of love. By showing appreciation, listening to their praise reports and concerns, and fostering an atmosphere of “*We are in this together for God’s kingdom”*, many of our volunteers “*re-up!”*

**Take good care of your chaperones:** I try to take care of the chaperones and prepare them as much as I can—especially the first-time ones. I email them lists of things to bring and tell them what camp will be like. I also give them suggestions for taking care of the unruly campers, and I try to make sure that a chaperone has no more than one “challenging” child so that it isn't overwhelming. That way they feel empowered when they leave for camp, instead of feeling lost and out of place. When they come home, they are talking up camp, too!

**Start recruiting at the *end* of camp:** At the end of camp, we usually have parents trying to sign up as chaperones for next year. The kids just talk it up so much and most of the parents can see a difference in their kids spiritually.

**Returning chaperones get “hooked”:** Once you get chaperones to go the first time, they're usually hooked.