

# A Camp Director's Guide to "Safety from Sexual Harassment at Camp in the Age of #MeToo"

Bob Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW



Produced in conjunction with The American Camp Association,  
*Camping Magazine* and Markel Insurance

Original webinar live broadcast date: May 10, 2018

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Markel is proud to partner with Bob Ditter and the American Camp Association in sponsoring this valuable educational lesson on preventing sexual harassment at camp. For over 40 years, Markel has made a commitment to protect and help make camps better and safer for all. We are equally proud to be an ACA Mission Partner aligning our values with those of ACA to help ensure a greater public understanding and support for the value of the camp experience.

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**Welcome**

The American Camp Association is grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with nationally recognized trainer and friend of camp, Bob Ditter, and our long-time, generous ACA Mission Partner Market Specialty Insurance, on the development of a Camp Director's Guide for Keeping Camps Safe in the Age of #MeToo.

Day and resident camp programs provide positive communities within which to model and practice respect, kindness, equity, diversity, inclusiveness, collaboration, and appropriate communication. It is our hope that these tools will not only aid camp professionals in providing effective training on the prevention of sexual harassment and other forms of abuse, but promote appropriate behavior for campers and staff members alike.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Rosenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tom Rosenberg, President/CEO  
American Camp Association



## A Camp Director's Guide to "Safety from Sexual Harassment at Camp in the Age of #MeToo"

### How to Use the Camp Director's Guide and the Safety from Sexual Harassment Program

The webinar which this Guide accompanies has been created with your staff in mind. It has been designed to speak directly to your staff about the issue of sexual harassment with specific points about how to create a camp community where the likelihood of such behavior showing up is greatly diminished. My approach is based on the research of highly credible people who have devised trainings that have been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of inappropriate or unwanted sexual advances—jokes, comments, touching, propositions and forced or unwanted kissing, fondling, groping or worse—in a variety of workplace settings. The application of these techniques is laid down in my article in the May-June 2018 issue of *Camping Magazine*, a link to which is provided in the resources section of this Guide.

**Step One:** Understand that only you, the Camp Director, can make the decision about whether to include this program in your staff orientation and, if so, how you want to use it. As you will see in the section titled, "Major Points re: Sexual Harassment Training," *addressing sexual harassment with your staff is not an obligation. It is, however, a powerful opportunity.* That said, only you the Director, who has firsthand knowledge of your camp, its culture, staff and unique features, can decide if and how to use aspects of this program. You may decide only to share certain aspects of the training materials with your Leadership Team. Or you may decide to share it with your Counseling Staff, Program Staff, Support Staff, and even your Board of Directors, if you have one. Familiarizing yourself with the materials first will help you make the decision that is best for your camp community.

**Step Two:** Look over all parts of this Camp Director's Guide. This will give you a solid idea of my approach and what's involved.

**Step Three:** Register to watch the original webinar broadcast of the Markel "Safety First" webinar series on Thursday, May 10 at 1 PM EDT. If you miss it, Markel and ACA are making the recording available via a YouTube link to every ACA accredited camp for free. The recording link will be emailed to every person who registers, so you may watch it again at any time. Better yet, have trusted members of your Leadership Team and/or Year-Round Staff watch it so you can have a full discussion of just how you want to design your approach.

**Step Four:** Read the article, "#NotHereAtCamp," in *Camping Magazine's* May-June 2018 staff training issue (included in this Guide). You might even consider making the article available to your staff before camp or making it available after they arrive at camp for orientation.

**Step Five:** Gather your Leadership Team, especially those responsible for designing and delivering your staff training during your staff week, and make some decisions about whether you want to do any or all of the following:

- Show the recorded webinar, “Safety from Sexual Harassment at Camp in the Age of #MeToo.”
- Make the May-June 2018 *Camping Magazine* article, ““#NotHereAtCamp,” available to staff.
- Do the exercise on “Building a Respectful Camp Community.”
- Distribute and discuss the “Bystander Empowerment” handout to staff.
- Show the video, *Tea Consent* (Blue Seat Studios, 2015),” the URL to which is found in the “Resources” section of this Guide.
- Show the video is *The Coworker*, produced by David Schwimmer, of TV sitcom *Friends* fame, which shows just how an offender “grooms” their victim in subtle but progressive ways that eventually put the “target” in an extremely uncomfortable position. The URL to this video is also found in the “Resources” section of this Guide.

**Step Six:** Practice your delivery and execute!

My whole approach to addressing this timely and critical topic is to do it in a way that reinforces the basic camp values of mutual respect, emotional and physical safety for everyone, and honoring the contributions of each and every member of the camp community as it supports the mission of the camp: a safe, quality, life-changing experience for campers!



# Safety from Sexual Harassment at Camp in the Age of #MeToo

Bob Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW

Produced in conjunction with *Camping Magazine* and Markel Insurance

Original Webinar Live Broadcast Date: May 10, 2018

## Key Points to Consider for Training and Discussion

- A. The #MeToo Movement has reached into many facets of life in the United States, including Hollywood, Television Broadcasting, Newspapers, the Culinary Arts, the Music Industry, and Corporate America, to name a few.
- B. It is a topic that is likely to be on the minds of most, if not all, of your staff, regardless of their personal gender identity or sexual orientation.
- C. **Speaking with your staff about sexual harassment is not an obligation.** You don't need to address the issue to do any of the following:
  - Maintain your ACA accreditation
  - Keep your insurance coverage
  - Operate legally in your state or county
  - Be politically correct
- D. There are, however, **advantages to seizing this powerful opportunity**, such as the following:
  - 1) To take steps to diminish the forces that might give rise to abusive or harassing behavior at camp. Such abusive behavior lowers morale and erodes trust in the community.
  - 2) To build on the core values of your particular camp community, such as:
    - treating one another with respect
    - valuing the contributions of everyone, regardless of gender, role at camp, etc.
    - standing up for one another
    - working together to build and maintain an environment that is physically and emotionally safe
  - 3) To signal to your staff that you care about the issues that resonate with them and, specifically, that you care about their well-being whether at camp or in other arenas of their lives.
- E. If you decide to raise the issue at camp, here are some tips:
  - 1) Conduct the discussion about sexual harassment in the **overall context of camp safety**. When camp community members feel emotionally and physically safe, everyone thrives and benefits.
  - 2) Make it clear that a discussion about sexual harassment is not meant to denigrate or devalue the **normal, healthy interest** that people in the community have for one another. You don't want to inadvertently criminalize healthy sexual interest.

- 3) **No one likes to think of themselves as either a perpetrator or victim.** If you approach the topic with a list of “do’s and don’ts,” people will tune out and your “training” will have no traction or positive impact.
  
- 4) The **two main approaches** to training that have been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of unwanted sexual advances and behavior have been increasing the overall level of **shared respect** in an organization or community; and **bystander training**. Each of these approaches fits well with the typical **values of every camp community: mutual respect and support.**



# #NOTHEREATCAMP

## Creating a Camp Community Safe from Sexual Harassment

**BOB DITTER**

Bill Cosby.

Harvey Weinstein.

Lawrence Nassar.

Kevin Spacey.

Matt Lauer.

#MeToo.

It's been a rolling, roiling story that's been unfolding for over a year: the riveting and, at times, explosive exposure of ongoing and often long-standing sexual abuse and harassment of both male and female victims by mostly men in various positions of power. So, don't be surprised if the idea of sexual harassment crosses your mind at camp this summer. To think that camp exists in some kind of bubble, where sexual interest is somehow left at the front gate, is, after all, naïve. Yes, I know most directors say, "Sex doesn't belong at camp!" And, of course, that's true when it comes to any sexual behavior, including gossip or talk, in front of or with campers, even if you as a staff member are the same age or near the age of some of the older campers. But what about nights out and time off? Even if you are at a single-sex camp, we all know you find ways to "meet up" with staff members from other camps. What then?

### A Nuanced Approach

Let's face it: sex can be confusing. First of all, it encompasses everything from fantasies, flirting, language, and jokes to "hooking up" — a vague term encompassing everything from touching and kissing to sexual intercourse. Secondly, healthy sexual interest is inherently a part of who we all

### ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL WAYS FOR ALL OF YOU AS STAFF TO ENSURE GREATER EMOTIONAL SAFETY AT CAMP FOR EVERYONE IS TO ENCOURAGE RESPECT FOR EVERYONE ELSE AT CAMP.

are. So how do you suddenly turn off what you have been hardwired to think about so urgently and frequently — something that pop culture constantly immerses us in through songs, advertisements, and media? By addressing unwanted or nonconsensual sexual overtures, advances, language, or gestures of any kind, let's take care not to disparage healthy sexual interest in general. As Daphne Merkin, a writer for the *New York Times*, points out, "Expressing sexual

interest is inherently messy and, frankly, nonconsensual: one person . . . bites the bullet by expressing interest in the other — whether it happens to be at work (camp) or at a bar" (Merkin, 2018). Indeed, while we all need clear guidelines for what constitutes harassment or unwanted sexual behavior, it serves no one to make every behavior that expresses a natural interest in others "pathological" or offensive. What is needed is a nuanced approach — one that can help distinguish between healthy interest and unwanted overtures or worse.

### It's Not Just Behavior, It's the Camp Culture

We now have good evidence that tells us that, when it comes to reducing unwanted sexual behaviors, it is the entire *camp culture* that needs to be looked at (Kearney, Rochlen, & King, 2004). To actually prevent or interrupt unwanted sexual behavior at camp at any level of offense, you as a member of staff will need to create a culture in which everyone is treated with respect and, in the case of coed camps, where women are treated as equals.

The good news is that camp is — or should be — all about creating a culture of civility and respect. After all, all camps share the awesome responsibility for the care and well-being of other people's children. If a camp does not have a *culture of care and respect*, the campers aren't going to feel safe, make friends, or engage wholeheartedly in the camp program and thrive as a result. What is great for the kids should be just as great for you, and the key is to take proactive steps to establish and maintain a culture where *all staff*, regardless of their position or status, treat one another with care and respect.

### Cultivate a Camp Community with Respect and Civility

One of the most powerful ways for all of you as staff to ensure greater emotional safety at camp for everyone is to encourage respect for everyone else at camp. This is something you can discuss together during orientation once everyone is settled in at camp and there has been some time for new people to get more comfortable with their surroundings.

Brainstorm a list of respectful behaviors

you all might exhibit toward one another. Pass around large (5 x 7) Post-It pads and a bunch of fine-point Sharpies. It is important to identify what respect and civility look like in practice, such as:

- Noticing the contributions others make
- Praising one another's efforts with campers
- Sharing and acknowledging breakthroughs with campers
- Refraining from interrupting one another
- Sharing information and power at camp
- Including new people in staff-only activities
- Agreeing to disagree with respect
- Listening to one another's ideas
- Trying the new ideas that new staff members offer
- Teaching new staff members the camp's songs, prayers, or other rituals
- Avoiding multitasking during conversations

Place your examples of respectful behavior on a wall or bulletin board for everyone to see.

Discuss the connection between creating a community that respects all of its members and sexual harassment. As a researcher named Fran Sepler tells us, "Workplace incivility often acts as a 'gateway drug' to workplace harassment. These exercises can remind you of the specific skills needed to act respectfully and to intervene when you observe disrespectful or abusive behavior. In short, this approach is designed to stop improper behavior before it ever rises to the level of harassment" (Sepler, 2017).

### Empower Bystanders

As a member of a camp community, you are also a potential bystander. We know that *the most effective way to reduce or eliminate unwanted sexual behavior of any kind is by empowering bystanders*. If everyone who overheard or witnessed an off-color or unwanted advance, comment, or suggestion spoke up, everyone else would be safer (Sepler, 2017). By empowering one another to speak up you are simultaneously establishing an understanding as a community

as to what constitutes respectful behavior, and you are helping to overcome the power difference that usually exists between someone displaying unwanted advances and the person on the receiving end. You know, it is the more vulnerable person at camp who may be new, have less status, or who is shy that is more easily intimidated by the staff member who is more popular, has been at camp longer, or who may be favored by the director.

We also know that members of the community are more likely to speak up and stop harassment if they have simple, practical tips to practice (Miller, 2017). Furthermore, what careful research tells us about bystander training is that it is much more effective to empower *everyone* at camp with the tools

of speaking up than it is to talk about people as perpetrators or victims — two roles with which *no one at camp will want to identify* (Rawski, 2017).

What empowering bystanders looks like:

- Avoid a direct challenge to the harasser in the moment because it can escalate the situation and/or put you, the bystander, or even the target, in jeopardy.
- Say something like, “That joke wasn’t funny,” or, “I don’t think she is interested,” or, “I wouldn’t want to think that you were being disrespectful right now,” or, “I wouldn’t want anyone to get the wrong idea about you. They might think you were bothering him with that gesture/comment/joke.”
- Another option is to disrupt or interrupt the situation, such as by clearly asking

the targeted individual if they would like a drink, or would they want to come join the group over here, etc.

- Talk to the harasser later by asking questions but not lobbing accusations: “Were you aware of how you came off in that conversation?” It might be even better if you had another person who also witnessed the offensive behavior join you. Having someone with you lessens the probability that the offender will threaten you or deny his or her behavior.
- If you are witnessing inappropriate behavior in the moment, talk openly with others about it by asking colleagues: “Did you notice that? Am I the only one who is seeing this?”
- Circle around later to anyone who has been the target of unwanted behaviors. That person might feel isolated or shamed by the perpetrator’s conduct. You can always say, “Hey, I noticed what happened a few minutes ago. Was that okay with you? Are you okay?” Simply checking in with someone who may look uncomfortable may help empower them to speak up if the unwanted behavior happens again. If they say they were not okay with what happened, you can offer to help them approach the proper person on camp leadership for assistance later.
- Discuss any behavior or concern with a trusted member of staff leadership. Your camp director may identify at least one person on leadership as a “camp safety” person. And, of course, if that is not someone you trust, go to the person on leadership you do trust.

Because of the power difference that can exist at camp, a person who is being targeted by unwanted advances or comments can question their own judgment. Simply affirming to the targeted person that they did nothing wrong or that what happened was not okay can validate them and help set the tone of what is “acceptable” behavior at your camp.

While it is true that bystanders are unlikely to be present when the most egregious sexual offenses happen — for example, when two people are alone on a day or night off — one researcher explains that harassers often test how far they can go by starting with inappropriate comments or touches and then escalating their advances over time (Miller, 2017).

### Discussion Questions

1. How will you personally encourage respect for others at camp?
2. If you feel comfortable sharing, can you think of a time when you were younger that you witnessed someone else being harassed but weren’t sure what to do about it? How might you encourage your younger self to act today?
3. Has there ever been a time when you weren’t sure if a behavior directed at you was harassment? Has your opinion changed now? If so, how?

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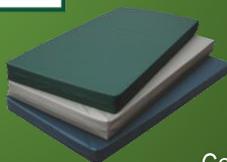
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This is much like the “grooming behavior” that has been reported in many child abuse prevention awareness programs. A strong, positive camp culture and bystander response can stop the grooming or testing behavior before the offenses escalate into something worse, like forced sex.

### Consent

When you are alone with someone else, the fact that you might like to kiss or touch does not automatically mean you might want to go further. Consent is an ongoing proposition. At every step of a sexual encounter you have the right to say no, and your partner has the obligation to take no for an answer! The best, short depiction of ongoing consent that I have seen to date is *Tea Consent* (Blue Seat Studios, 2015), a YouTube video that I would strongly encourage you to watch ([youtube.com/watch?v=fGoWLWS4-kU](https://youtube.com/watch?v=fGoWLWS4-kU)).

Another great video is *The Coworker*, produced by David Schwimmer, of TV sitcom *Friends* fame. It shows just how an offender “grooms” their victim in subtle but progressive ways that eventually put the “target” in an extremely uncomfortable position (#ThatsHarrassment, 2018). Watch it and encourage your fellow staff at camp to do the same ([youtube.com/watch?v=MV7a-oetsB0](https://youtube.com/watch?v=MV7a-oetsB0)).

### Be Smart, Be Safe

One last word. We know that there are certain risk factors that increase the chances of an unwanted sexual advance or encounter. One of the biggest is alcohol. If you are drinking and you are with people who are drinking, know that alcohol not only lowers inhibitions, including that of a potential offender, but also lowers their sense of the impact of their behavior on others. I say this not to blame a potential victim, but to encourage you to be safe.

Sex is a natural part of life. Keeping it a safe, fun, healthy experience for everyone requires a community-wide effort. Most camps have done an admirable job of creating environments for campers that are increasingly emotionally and physically safe. Now it is time to make sure we are all doing the same for you, the staff. The recent #MeToo movement and all of the tragic and upsetting revelations that have led to it only underscore this need. It is too bad that it took this movement to get us to talk more seriously and in more effective ways about emotional and environmental safety for everyone. Now is a great time to start.

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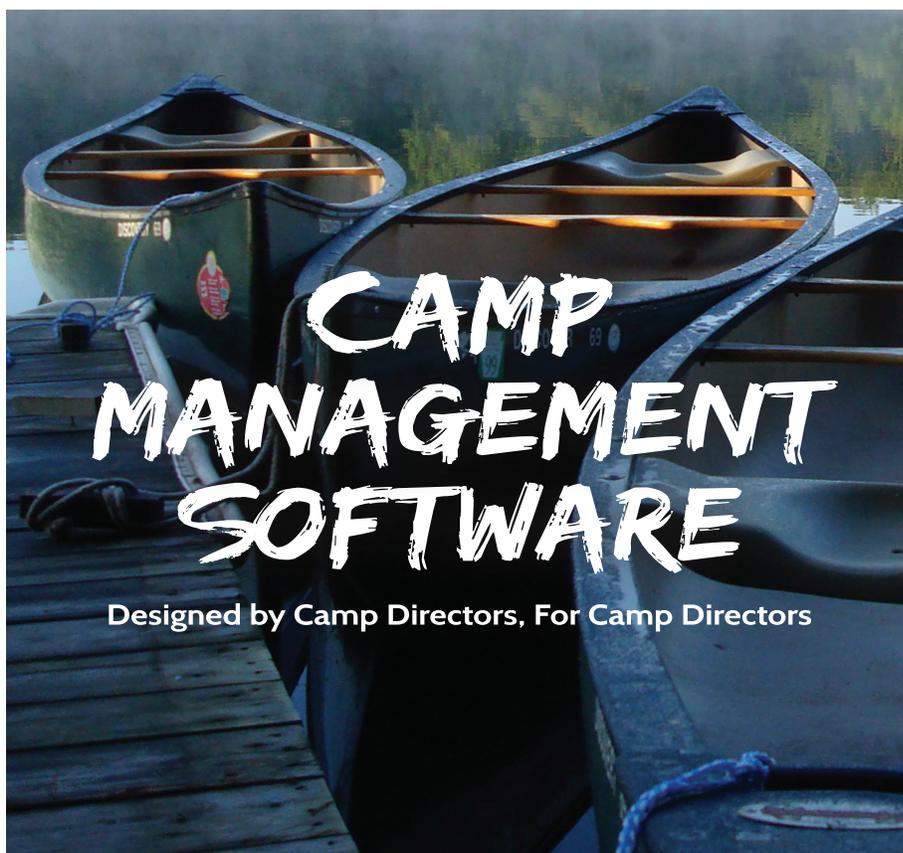
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Bob Ditter is a licensed clinical social worker specializing in child, adolescent, and family therapy. For more information about the author, visit [BobDitter.com](http://BobDitter.com).



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## Respect at Camp: A Staff Orientation Exercise

Good evidence that tells us that, when it comes to reducing unwanted sexual behaviors, it is the entire *camp culture* that matters. To actually prevent or interrupt unwanted sexual behavior at camp at any level of offense, every staff member needs to help create a culture in which everyone is treated with respect and, in the case of coed camps, where women are treated as equals.

The good news is that *camp is all about creating a culture of civility and respect*. Taking on the awesome responsibility for the care and well-being of other people's children requires it! Campers aren't going to feel safe, make friends, or engage wholeheartedly in the camp program and thrive without a culture of respect and emotional safety! What is great for the kids should be just as great for you, and the key is to take proactive steps to establish and maintain a culture where *everyone*, regardless of position or status, treats one another with care and respect.

### Brainstorming Exercise: A Culture of Respect at Camp

Brainstorm a list of respectful behaviors you all might exhibit toward one another. Pass around large (5 x 7) Post It pads and a bunch of fine-point Sharpies. It is important to identify what respect and civility look like in practice. The following are some examples:

- Noticing the contributions others make
- Praising one another's efforts with campers
- Sharing and acknowledging breakthroughs with campers
- Refraining from interrupting one another
- Sharing information and power at camp, especially about resources or where to get help
- Including new people in staff-only activities
- Agreeing to disagree with respect
- Listening to one another's ideas
- Trying some of the new ideas that new staff members offer
- Teaching new staff members the camp's songs, prayers, or other rituals
- Avoiding multitasking during conversations (give people your attention)

Place your examples of respectful behavior on a wall or bulletin board for everyone to see.

A researcher named Fran Sepler says, "Workplace incivility often acts as a 'gateway drug' to workplace harassment. This exercise can remind us of the specific skills we need to act respectfully and to intervene when we observe disrespectful or abusive behavior. This approach is designed to stop improper behavior before it ever rises to the level of harassment" (Fran Sepler, "Harassment prevention and creating respectful workplaces for all." *US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, 2017).

*"...have you been Ditterized?"*  
**Robert B. Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW**

## Empowering Bystanders

While it is true that bystanders are unlikely to be present when the most egregious sexual offenses happen — for example, when two people are alone on a day or night off —harassers often test how far they can go by starting with inappropriate comments or touches and then escalating their advances over time. This is much like the “grooming behavior” that has been reported in many child abuse prevention awareness programs. A strong, positive, respectful camp culture and bystander responses can stop the grooming or testing behavior before the offenses escalate into something worse, like persistent unwanted advances or forced sex.

- **Avoid a direct challenge** to the harasser in the moment because it can escalate the situation and/or put you, the bystander, or even the target, in jeopardy.
- **Language:** Say something like, “That joke wasn’t funny,” or, “I don’t think she is interested,” or, “I wouldn’t want to think that you were being disrespectful right now,” or, “I wouldn’t want anyone to get the wrong idea about you. They might think you were bothering him with that gesture/comment/joke . . . ”
- Another option is to **disrupt or interrupt the situation**, such as clearly asking the targeted individual if they would like a drink, or if they want to come join the group over here, etc.
- **Talk to the harasser later by asking questions** but not lobbing accusations: “Were you aware of how you came off in that conversation?” It might be even better if you had another person who also witnessed the offensive behavior join you. Having someone with you lessens the probability that the offender will threaten you or deny his or her behavior.
- If you are witnessing inappropriate behavior in the moment, **talk openly with others** about it by asking colleagues: “Did you notice that? Am I the only one seeing this?”
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- **Discuss** any behavior or concern **with a trusted member of staff leadership**. Your camp director may identify at least one person on Leadership as a “camp safety” person. If that person is not someone you trust, go to the person on Leadership that you do trust.
- Because of the power difference that can exist at camp, a person who is being targeted by unwanted advances or comments can question their own judgment. Simply **affirming to the targeted person that they did nothing wrong**, or that what happened was not okay, can validate them and help set the tone of what is “acceptable” behavior at your camp.

*“...have you been Ditterized?”*

**Robert B. Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW**

[www.bobditter.com](http://www.bobditter.com)

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### Additional Resources

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#### **The Coworker**

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