

Family Camps: Strengthening Family Relationships At Camp And At Home

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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how family camps help families strengthen their relationships with other family members. This study also examined if family camps are based on theoretical foundations, and if so, how those theories affect the program that the families participate in.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the family systems framework, which holds that families are a dynamic and complex unit in which individual family members influence and are influenced by each other and their surroundings. Family camps are an ideal environment in which to strengthen family relationships and help families improve their family functioning. Both parents and youth are involved at the camp, and upon returning home both have an influence on the ensuing family interactional patterns that occur. This study examines how family camps attempt to strengthen family relationships, and how they help families apply principles they have learned at the camp once they return home.

Sample

The sample of this study was composed of directors and founders of five family camps across the United States. Study participants were selected through a convenience and snowball sample.

Methods/Instrument

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the study participants and asked them a series of questions regarding different aspects of their family camp. Examples of questions were: What are the goals and objectives of your family camp? What are the ideas and foundations your camp is based on? How does your camp help families strengthen their relationships with each other? How does your camp help families leaving the program continue to apply what they have learned when they go home? The interviews were then transcribed and coded for emerging themes.

Results

The researchers are currently analyzing the data and organizing the results. This process should be completed within the next month. Main themes include certain ideas that camps are based on, how family camps help families strengthen their relationships with other family members, and how family camps help families continue to strengthen their relationships after leaving the camp.

Findings

Researchers are currently in the process of analyzing the data, so the findings are still being discovered. Main themes included different ideas upon which these family camps are built, as well as specific activities camps have families participate in that help them strengthen their relationships with each other.

Implications

The results of this study promise many valuable applications. Families are an integral part of society, and strengthening them is one of the most vital undertakings people can be involved in. Professionals in a variety of fields, including recreation and leisure professionals, are recognizing the need to strengthen the family unit.

Family camps are an avenue through which to strengthen families. When at a camp, the family is in one place for a certain amount of time with limited distractions. In such settings, the family is able to focus on their relationships with each other and participate in activities that can strengthen those relationships. Finding out how these family camps strengthen relationships within the family can be useful to not only other family camps, but to all practitioners and people who work to strengthen families.

This study also explores how family camps help the families apply what they have learned at home. Once the camp is over and the families return to their normal situation, it is important that they be equipped with tools for success in continuing to strengthen their family relationships. Again, this information will be useful to both practitioners and professionals in a variety of settings who work with families.

As families are strengthened, many other groups and sectors in society are consequently effected in positive ways. The ripple of influence that family camps can have is a powerful one, and one which merits the study and attention of both researchers and professionals who work with people in a variety of settings.

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Study Objectives

What principles are common between family camps?

How are those principles being taught to families?

Review of Literature

- The success of families is being challenged
- Families are a complex system composed of individuals interacting with one another (Whitchurch and Constantine, 1993)
- Principles are deep fundamental truths with universal application that guide behavior (Covey, 1989)
- Families can participate in core and balance activities to increase family **SUCCESS** (Zabriskie, 2001)

Review of Literature cont.

- Family members can form a powerful collective efficacy (Bandura, 1986)
- Changing family behavior is insufficient. Families must desire to change who they are.
- Family Camps can provide a greater understanding and a highly motivating and empowering experience for families (Lewicki et al, 1995)

Methods

- Family camp directors were contacted by telephone to set up interviews
- 13 peer reviewed interview questions
- Data was coded to find main themes
- Different categories were created to explain family camps

Results

- Purpose of camps is to strengthen families
- Philosophies camps based on included promoting values, building community, environmental stewardship, choice
- Principles of camps included honesty, respect, responsibility, caring, sense of community, healthy living, personal growth, appreciation of wildlife, family
- Camps felt principles were implied
- One out of eight camps taught principles through specific activities

Discussion

- Family camps exist to strengthen families
- Families must be free to choose participation
- Intentionally teaching principles can help improve family functioning
- Family camp providers have an opportunity to specifically teach families

Implications

- The ultimate responsibility for family success lies with the family
- Family camps have an opportunity to teach families
- Define the principles the camp is based on
- Family camp providers can intentionally teach principles with activities that already exist
- Specifically plan and intentionally teach with additional activities based on principles
- Help families to apply principles after returning home

Recommendations

- Extend research to include participants of family camps
- Examine hiring process of family camp staff
- Increase sample size