

# Summer Camp Safety

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Many adults reflect on childhood summer camp experiences as some of their happiest and most meaningful memories from youth. Camp administrators can help create more of these adult advocates by ensuring the wellbeing of current young campers, who—thanks to a safe and productive environment—will leave their camp retreats to enter adolescence or adulthood armed with life lessons and memories of joy.

## Conduct a Safety Risk Assessment

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Begin reviewing and enhancing the safety protocols at your camp facilities by conducting a thorough safety audit or risk assessment to identify and minimize potential safety risks to your campers. While each camp faces safety challenges unique to that camp's environment, programs, and camper demographics, all camps must manage safety risks that fall into two primary categories:

1. **External Risks:** Camps are vulnerable to safety risks that arise from sources outside a camp's own control, such as natural disasters, disease outbreaks, active shooters, interactions with wild animals, and more. While camp leaders can anticipate and prepare to respond to these risks, camps usually cannot completely control or prevent these risks because external forces dictate them.
2. **Preventable Risks:** These safety risks arise from a camp's internal sources: the practices and programs of the camp itself, and the choices and actions taken by camp leaders and staff. "Preventable risks" are named so because they exist within the control of the camp organization. Effort must be made to identify and manage these safety risks, but the camp can usually prevent or minimize these risks, for example:

Conducting a safety risk assessment might sound daunting, but it is feasible with the help of an experienced consultant, or with the help of your own staff. Don't hesitate to leverage your internal team's expertise on your camp's natural and manmade facilities, your programs, your campers, and the potential safety risks that arise from your operations and environment.

### To conduct a safety risk assessment, consider taking these steps:

**Gauge the need for a consultant** or external provider with an objective perspective. Depending on the nature and complexity of your camp's programs and facilities, it might be wise to engage one or more experts on the specific safety and security challenges you're facing. By conducting an audit, an outsider might identify issues and creative solutions that your own team missed while sharing rich insights from the safety practices of other camp organization clients.

**Gather safety risk information from internal stakeholders.** Take the time to understand and leverage your own team's knowledge of camp-wide safety issues—whether or not you engage a consultant to help with the assessment process. Identify a diverse group of internal camp leaders and staff to interview in order to understand their

perspectives on your camp's greatest safety risks. Ask your team questions like:

- Which safety risks are our campers most vulnerable to in each of our specific programs and facilities? (or in the programs/facilities that each interviewee is most knowledgeable about)
- For which of these safety risks do we have adequate preventative protocols in place? Do you think those safety policies/protocols are applied consistently in practice, or do they only exist “on paper?”
- Which safety risks require greater prevention effort on our part and why? Do you have any ideas or recommendations for improving safety protocols based on these specific risks?
- What type of safety incidents could have the most disruptive impact on the wellbeing of our campers—or the wellbeing of our organization? How can we better prepare to respond if a major disruption does occur?
- From your perspective, what are the top risks concerns of other stakeholders you interact with—including staff from your own team, from other teams/departments, campers' parents/guardians, and campers themselves? Is your personal perspective on safety risks significantly different than the views of some of these other stakeholders? If so, explain why.

**Determine how to use your safety risk assessment results.** Commit to improving your safety program using the results of your assessment, rather than completing the assessment to satisfy specific stakeholders or tick a box. Use your assessment results to manage and prepare for the unique safety risks related to your various camp activities, as well as to refine your comprehensive safety plan and/or emergency response plan. During the assessment process, if some of your staff seem particularly passionate about safety challenges and solutions, then follow up to ask them to lead specific safety initiatives informed by the assessment process. If your assessment results are overwhelming and you don't know where to start, then devise a simple method for prioritizing new safety initiatives. For example, decide with your team to tackle low-hanging fruit first, or spend significant time and energy focusing on the top two potentially devastating safety risks you have identified. While you design your new safety initiatives and improvements, also make plans to evaluate the effectiveness of these changes over time. Treat safety risk assessment and risk management as an ongoing journey rather than a one-time activity.

**Broaden your risk assessment scope.** Some of the safety issues facing your camp might be influenced by other organizational challenges and risks. Consider conducting a broad, organization-wide risk assessment that addresses risk themes related to safety and beyond, such as governance, employment practices, financial reporting and controls, contracts, and more. Get started by exploring [My Risk Assessment](#), a self-led risk assessment web app from the Nonprofit Risk Management Center (NRMCC). Also review NRMCC's other risk assessment resources:

- [How to Conduct a Risk Assessment](#)
- [Risk Assessment Perspectives: Re-Lens with Three Approaches](#)
- [Five Hallmarks of Risk Assessment](#) (webinar available to NRMCC [Affiliate Members](#))
- [Risk Management Activity Planning: How to Get Unstuck After a Risk Assessment](#) (webinar available to NRMCC [Affiliate Members](#))

## Engage in Ongoing Safety Efforts

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The nature and variation of camp programs sometimes require expert knowledge and specific safety protocols to manage many different types of risk. From investing in fleet safety to aquatic safety to managing natural hazards to preventing activity-related injuries, the realm of camp safety is vast. Despite the many possibilities of harm coming to campers, your team has the power to manage preventable risks and respond effectively to external

risks. Rely on these resources from the American Camp Association (ACA) and other experts on camp and child safety to ensure that your protocols represent best practices recognized by your peers in the camp community.

## Camp safety, security, and emergency preparedness

- [Campground Management Safety Checklist](#) (Great American Insurance Group)
- [First Aid and Safety Resources](#) (ACA)
- [What If It Does Happen? Camp Security: Plans to Make and Actions to Take](#) (ACA)
- [Camp Safety Resources](#) (Safe-Wise Consulting), including:
  - [Hot Topics in Safety for Camp Programs](#)
  - [Simple safety tips for camp staff in various scenarios](#)
- [Summer Camp Safety Preparation Guide](#) (National Recreation and Park Association)
- [How to Get Parents to Buy into Safety](#) (National Recreation and Park Association)
- [Protecting Children in Disasters: A Guide for Parks and Recreation Professionals](#) (Save The Children)
- [The Future is Now: Preparing for the Unknown Crisis](#) (NRMC)
- [Right Back At It: Fostering Organizational Resilience](#) (NRMC)
- [Facility Agility: Planning for Facility Emergencies](#) (NRMC)
- [A Blueprint for Facility Risk Management](#) (NRMC)
- [Hitting the Nail on the Head: Prioritizing Safety at Your Nonprofit](#) (NRMC)
- [Safety videos](#) on topics like workplace safety culture, incident investigation, hazard awareness, and safe lifting (NRMC)

## Child abuse prevention

- [14 Questions to Identify Potential Hiring Risks at Camp](#) (ACA)
- [ACA Standards that relate to Staff Screening, Supervision and Training](#) (ACA)
- [Key Principles in Youth Protection: Considerations and Action Steps](#) (NRMC)
- [Vital Partners in Youth Protection: Engaging Parents and Caregivers](#) (NRMC)

Striving for safe camper experiences is a never-ending journey filled with victories, incidents, near misses, and plenty of lessons learned. Consider investing in additional safety training for your team using ACA's [Learning Center and training certificates](#). Also, explore accreditation if your camp is not yet accredited. [ACA accreditation](#) can position your team to perform at the highest [industry standards](#) while bolstering your credibility and reputation in the eyes of campers, their guardians, your staff, and other stakeholders. With safety as your priority, your campers will learn more from camp and perhaps leave camp as lifelong supporters of your community.

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