

A Staff Member's Guide: Offseason Camper Communication and Social Media



Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and other social media sites are great ways to keep in touch with your friends. You likely know, however, that what you put up for public display may follow you for years and be scrutinized by colleges, universities, potential employers, future partners and our camp parents. We're sure that you have read stories about teachers, coaches and other youth workers who have been accused of inappropriate activities, often from an electronic method of communication. Once an accusation is made, true or false, it's difficult to recover your reputation.

The fact of the matter is that as a camp staff member, you are in a youth development and mentoring position. We would hate to see you put in a position to defend your reputation because of something that you posted on your Facebook profile or a text message sent to a camper that was interpreted in the wrong way. We want to make sure that your online presence is one that would fit with the values of our organization. At North Star we believe that the relationship between staff and campers is a fundamental part of the camp experience. We are proud of the job that our counselors do as role models and we value the year round relationships that are created at camp. With the trust that we have in our staff comes responsibility, even after the summer is over. We need everyone to do their part to ensure that outside of camp they remain a positive influence on the individuals who look up to them.

With that in mind we would like to make some recommendations regarding communication with campers outside of camp. Our intentions are to make boundaries clear to keep you safe from allegations of misconduct and to keep our campers away from content that is inappropriate for them. The best plan is prevention of any suspicion and to put boundaries in place. We realize that we cannot control of your actions and our recommendations are very difficult to enforce. We hope that follow them for your own safety, our campers well being and the reputation of North Star.

Basically what we're asking is this; if you're going to allow campers access to your online content, you need to monitor it. If you don't want to censor your online content, don't allow campers access. Here are some specifics that all staff should abide by:

- If you allow campers access to any of your personal online content (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) make sure that there are no representations of illegal or questionable behavior. This includes underage drinking, excessive alcohol consumption, drugs or sexual acts, whether this involves you, your friends or anyone else.
- **We strongly recommend that you do not allow campers access to your wall or photos and videos that you post or are tagged in.** Since your friends tag you in pictures, video or status updates, you're not the only one adding things to your profile. It is easy in Facebook to create a camper "list" and then go into your account privacy/profile settings exclude this list of from having access to specific parts of your profile. Facebook also has a "profile review" option that, if enabled, requires that you approve a post or picture that you're tagged in before it appears in your profile. We'd be happy to help you with any of these settings.
- When communicating with campers keep the language and content appropriate. Whether this involves email, Facebook wall posts, facebook chat, text messages (or any other communication form) make sure that it is of an appropriate subject matter, always using appropriate language.
- If you use Twitter and Instagram, realize tweets and posts are public for anyone to see unless you protect them. We ask that you protect your posts and tweets unless you are willing to keep them 100% child appropriate. We recommend that you protect your tweets and posts and do not allow campers access to them.
- Keep a healthy boundary on things that you're willing to talk to campers about. At camp we outline subjects that you should be off limits such as intimate details of your personal relationships, discussion

of alcohol or drug use, promoting your religious views or anything of a sexual nature. This applies outside of camp, too. Change the direction of a conversation that you feel is going towards subjects that you should not be talking about with a camper. If campers tell you personal information that concerns you, let us know so that we can take the appropriate action.

- If you see online activity that you feel is inappropriate, please let us know so we can deal with it. Cyber bullying or any instances where campers are disrespecting other campers isn't the North Star way. If there is anything on someone's profile or happening involving campers or camp, please let us know so we can help determine if there is a necessary response. We promise anonymity in all instances. Further, if you're uncomfortable with excessive or inappropriate communication from a camper or another staff member, let us know so we can help deal with the situation.

While we are focusing the bulk of our attention to a handful of social media websites, we ask that you use similar precautions in regards to all social networking sites and tools.

If you are going to get together with campers, make sure that their parents are aware of your plans and approve them. Whether you are having lunch with a camper or having a get together with several campers, their parents should be involved in the planning.

If you do not believe that you will be able to completely follow these guidelines and cannot ensure that your profile reflects the values of someone who is serving as a role model to children, do not friend campers and don't accept friend requests of campers. Further, we'd ask you remove campers who are currently friends. Do not allow them access to your tweets or any other social media.

We know that we are asking you to do something significant. For some of you, you may consider some campers more friends than campers. They may just be one or two years younger than you or they may go to school with you. Being on staff, however, means that you are a role model for all campers, even ones that you are friends with. You have great influence as a current or former camp staff member with our campers and our hope is that your influence is always positive. Your actions and judgment related to inappropriate contact with our campers could affect your future employment at North Star. Please give this some serious consideration.