

## What to do with 'problem' campers

by Morton Tener

I entered the cabin with the grandest of expectations. I had gone through a thorough staff orientation with direct bearing on the contemporary scene, and was, therefore, anxious to experience the reactions of young teens celebrated for their awareness of maturity.

### A counselor's soliloquy

After a few days on the job, idealism was rudely shattered and the realities of the defiant camper intruded on my rosy world. I started to feel deep regret and bitterness, but resolved to fight it off and resigned myself to do the best job under the circumstances.

It became clear to me, however, in the course of a few days, that my efforts were meeting little success and, in some cases, meeting with outright opposition. There was, I found, a curious species of camper known as "homosopho," Latin for "wise guy." It became apparent that this peculiar sort of camper would be my biggest headache.

The character traits of this species are easily recognizable: (1) a penchant for speaking in undertones, (2) an aversion to direction, (3) a recurring glance at people all around to see if anyone is paying attention, (4) cutting and critical remarks, barely audible, (5) facial contortions pregnant with contempt, (6) a

mocking smile, (7) a compulsion to distract campers who may be genuinely interested in being involved, (8) an unveiled (or in more advanced species, veiled) disrespect for counselors and their position in the cabin, and (9) a generally hostile attitude toward camp policy.

The initial reactions I felt were those of profound contempt, disappointment, remorse, despair. The action these sentiments prompted was vengeance. Ridicule and slander, spitefully delivered harangues, flaming oratory could be my weapons. I thought long and hard about my function and position in the cabin. I could become, if I were to remain on that path, another homosopho, and a glorified one at that.

I gradually began to control myself. I began to reconsider that peculiar species as one deserving help, rather than contempt. Mockery is degenerative both to the one who delivers it and the one who receives it. I learned to exercise restraint, good sense, even compassion. Nothing was gained by attacking the disease with another form of the disease.

Counseling is a marvelous arena of human relations, and I began to operate with this in mind. Campers who displayed those characteristics of the homo-

sopho, which previously had incensed me to retaliation, were asked to see me in private.

We approached the problem honestly, candidly, in good faith. I explained myself fully, emphasizing the role of the counselor and the responsibility that that entailed. I asked for cooperation. I expressed concern that all campers have quality experiences, unobstructed by the attitudes of others. I expressed concern that such behavior tended to deny the benefits of camp not only to the rest of the group, but also ultimately to one's self.

No ridicule, no threats of retaliation, no petty vengeance, no outbursts of anger, no mockery — just an understanding that cooperative effort is needed.

In most cases, this method has proven successful for me and, it is hoped, will be just as workable next year.

### Children's rights advocated

The U.S. faces a "national catastrophe" unless it invests more in its children, says Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the Washington-based Children's Defense Fund.

"An escalating arms race and perverted world and national priorities" have adversely affected the plight of children, she said.

*Dr. Tener is director of Camp Log-N-Twig for Boys and Girls, Dingman's Ferry, PA.*



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