

Gender Integrated Lodging at Camp Quest Smoky Mountains (CQSM)

The Camp Quest community endeavors to challenge stereotypes, foster self-expression, and provide ample opportunities for camper growth. We strive to instill in our campers the belief that they can all become bolder, stronger, and more self-assured.

As a camping community, we strive to be increasingly welcoming to campers of all gender identities. Our activities are divided into either dorm groups or gender-neutral teams. We aim to create an inclusive camping environment through language and practice, and we plan to continually expand our inclusive practices. To these ends, we intend to provide a facility where all campers feel welcome. Since 2021, we have offered only gender-neutral sleeping arrangements. Please find answers to the most common questions below, and don't hesitate to contact cqsmokymountains@gmail.com if you have questions or concerns that are not addressed.

How will campers be supervised?

CQSM has a strict "rule-of-three" policy, meaning that no camper is ever left alone with just one other camper or staff member. Throughout the day, staff always supervise the campers. At night, staff are strategically positioned throughout the dorm, particularly near the exits. Additionally, there is a "night watch" for the first hour after lights-out. During this time, staff monitor the exits and bathrooms while also ensuring that campers are settled in for the night.

How will campers' privacy be maintained in the cabins?

Our staff supports camper privacy by clearly communicating expectations regarding the need to change clothes in private areas (e.g., using a curtained off area or a private bathroom stall for any changes that uncover "bathing suit areas"). On the first afternoon of camp, campers will be encouraged to participate in group boundary-setting, which will give them the opportunity to voice their needs and communicate their physical, emotional, and spatial limitations. Staff will then add important ancillary information as needed and will tirelessly endeavor to ensure that the campers' boundaries are respected by everyone throughout the week.

What about showers and bathrooms?

Campers have access to private toilets and shower stalls in the dorms. During non-down times, campers are allowed to use any bathroom stall that they prefer. We have not experienced any issues with campers using the same bathrooms.

Who will be assigned as my child's cabin counselor?

Cabin staff are assigned to camper groups with whom they accompany and closely supervise during camping activities. Dorm groups are boarded together in neighboring bunks in the dorm, and sex and gender are not part of the boarding or grouping criteria. Staff selection and group assignment are based on the best pairing between staff members and campers to help ensure successful camper experiences. The Camp Director and Assistant Director carefully consider and interview staff before making their selections, and all accepted staff undergo annual background checks prior to camping sessions.

How is my camper assigned to a dorm group?

CQSM dorm groups are primarily arranged by age, maturity, friendships with other campers, and other relevant factors. Many camping activities involve more than one dorm group at a time; hence, campers have plenty of chances to spend time with their friends and members of other groups.

What is Camp Quest's approach to camper relationships and romance?

Camp Quest strives to create a secure and supervised atmosphere that is in line with humanist values and those of the campers' families. As youth development professionals, we are responsible for providing proper supervision, communication, and sound judgment to guarantee that camper experiences are beneficial and appropriate. In accordance with the "rule of three," campers are never left alone with another camper or staff member. Moreover, campers will only engage in activities with which they feel comfortable, and they will be supervised.

Camp Quest views age-appropriate behaviors, such as spending time together, flirting, hand-holding, dancing, hugging, and (if they are brave) brief kissing, as normal and healthy milestones in camper growth and development.

On rare occasions, when campers' romantic behavior rises to a level that clearly violates their stated boundaries, causes discomfort to others, is deemed inappropriate, or breaks the "rule of three," staff will intervene. This intervention is performed in ways that do not create shame or moral guilt; it instead emphasizes the importance of respecting boundaries and rules in addition to recognizing the

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contexts in which certain modes of behavior are inappropriate. In more serious or repeated cases, interventions may include behavior contracts, group reassignment, increased monitoring, or (as a last resort) sending a camper home.

My camper has never stayed in a gender inclusive setting. How can I prepare them for camp?

In most cases, we have found that campers quickly and easily adjust to gender-inclusive settings, especially if they have not been taught to fear them. When we first implemented our gender-inclusive policy, we found in hindsight that we (the staff) were far more worried than the campers. Much like issues of homesickness, please try and not convince your camper that they will have problems with inclusivity. Instead, inform them of the policies and see to it that they understand how to behave. If they share concerns with you, try focusing on solutions rather than worries. To increase their sense of privacy and propriety, campers are welcome to bring extra sheets to drape around their bunk or even their bathroom stall (permanent/dedicated bathroom stalls **will not be provided**).

What if I still have concerns about gender-inclusive dorm arrangements?

Please contact us at cqsmokymountains@gmail.com. Our Director and/or Assistant Director will get in touch with you and/or your camper to discuss how we can create a welcoming environment for all campers.