

DEC Summer Camps Volunteer Guidebook

CAMP COLBY, CAMP DEBRUCE, CAMP PACK FOREST, CAMP RUSHFORD

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This Guidebook is intended to be reviewed by volunteers before arrival at camp as well as with the Assistant Director/ Camp Aide 1 shortly after arriving.

You do not need to bring a copy with you to camp.

Volunteer Position

Role

DEC Camp Volunteers assist in many aspects of the Camp Program. Volunteers are provided room and board and participation in Camp activities for free for the week that they are chosen.

A volunteer's primary duty is helping out in the kitchen (i.e. washing dishes, setting up and cleaning up before and after meals, assisting with the serving line). Additional duties include assisting staff members with the general upkeep of the camp facility (i.e. cleaning windows, sweeping floors, storing supplies and taking inventory) and cleaning/washing camp vehicles.

The volunteer is also a camper and is expected to become an active part of the camp program. Included within this programmatic role is assisting staff members with recreational activities, observing and assisting staff on courses, participating in the opening and closing campfires, developing and completing projects requested by the Camp Director, as well as sharing any special skills and/or outdoor interests with both staff and campers. The volunteers are supervised by the paid camp staff on a 24-hour basis during the camp week.

At the end of the camp week, volunteers will receive a letter detailing their completion of 40 hours of community service.

Volunteers may be called back to volunteer additional weeks during the summer by the Camp Assistant Director depending on camp needs. These calls generally happen on Sunday after check-in.

Expectations

Volunteers are expected to understand and follow the expectations for campers in the Parent/Camper Handbook. Volunteers are campers; however, they are actively helping staff as needed.

Assistant Directors and Camp Aide 1s are responsible for ensuring volunteers know their unique role in the NYSDEC summer camp and for being a volunteer's point of contact should any issues occur relating to their volunteer duties during their time at camp. Soon after arrival, the Assistant Director and/or Camp Aide 1 should review the following subjects with a volunteer:

- Review Parent/Camper handbook sections to familiarize volunteers with DEC rules and standards
 - Electronics
 - Volunteers
 - Homesickness
 - DEC Camper Code of Conduct
 - Five-Step Discipline System
- Rules and responsibilities in the kitchen
- A more in-depth review of how to deal with camper homesickness

- Camper/ staff interactions
- Review of volunteer evaluation form
- Other camp-specific topics, as needed

Requirements

Volunteers will be required to:

- review expectations with the Camp Assistant Director and/or Camp Aide 1 shortly after arrival,
- be screened through the National and NYS Sex Offender Registry,
- be between 14 and 17 years old,
- complete and submit DEC volunteer application materials,
- have had a parent/guardian complete all registration forms online prior to arrival
- follow all rules while at DEC Camp

Application

All volunteer application materials and registration forms are housed on the registration site. Volunteers are campers and should remain on the family's account. **Do not make a new account to apply as a volunteer.** Volunteers should be completing the volunteer application materials. Parents/Guardians should be completing the registration materials.

To apply you must submit the following by **MARCH 1st, 2024**:

- **DEC Volunteer Application**, see attached example
 - A copy of a **photo ID**, if you have questions about what type of ID is acceptable, please email volunteer program coordinator, Shannon Post-Wilson, at Shannon.Post@dec.ny.gov
- **Volunteer Information Sheet**
- **Cover letter** explaining why you would like to volunteer at camp (about 1 page)

Late submissions may negatively impact your chances of being chosen as a volunteer this summer. If you choose NOT to apply to volunteer, it will NOT impact future placements.

Selection

Camp placement decisions and registration information will be emailed to families after March 22, 2024. Volunteers may be initially selected for multiple weeks depending on camp needs and volunteer availability. Volunteer parents/guardians will need to confirm the placement via email and then fill out the registration forms and waivers, if not already complete.

Registration Forms and Waivers

Volunteer registration is initially completed by administrative staff and then finished by the family of the volunteer. It is a separate process from public registration and does not cost any money.

If the volunteer is selected to attend camp, parents/guardians will need to log on to the registration site, on the same account that the application was submitted to, and complete all forms and waivers to accept the placement.

If the volunteer is also registered as a camper for another week, the forms and waivers will not need to be filled out again. The forms and waivers for campers and volunteers are the same and only need to be completed once a summer.

[Health Care Provider Form](#)

Volunteers may attend different DEC camps either as a volunteer and/or as a camper. Each DEC camp that the volunteer attends will require a camp-specific Health Care Provider Form to be completed. This form **must** be completed by a health care professional, signed by both the professional, and a parent/guardian. Immunizations can be either added on the form or attached separately. The Health Care Provider form must be complete to attend camp. Another form, like a school physical form, cannot be substituted.

[Selected Sections from Parent/Camper Handbook](#)

Volunteers should read and be familiar with the Parent/Camper Handbook before arriving to camp. Since volunteers are campers, they are held to the same standards in the handbook that campers are. Below, we have highlighted some sections from the handbook for emphasis.

Please do not substitute reading the entire Parent/Camper Handbook for this section.

Electronics

Electronics are not allowed at camp. Electronics, such as cell phones, MP3 players, tablets, portable video games, etc. are expensive. They can be broken, lost or stolen. At camp, they are a major distraction to the program. If brought to camp, they will be securely stored in the camp office until checkout.

Volunteers

Every week, each camp hosts up to four camp volunteers. Potential volunteers are selected by camp staff at the end of each camp session and are invited to apply to be volunteers the following summer. Campers who are selected to be volunteers are mature, enthusiastic, and very engaged in all camp activities. As volunteers, these campers participate in the camp program but are assigned other tasks as well to help camp run smoothly. Volunteer's main assignments are assisting the kitchen staff in setting up and cleaning the dining hall before and after meals. First-time volunteers get placement preference before returning volunteers. Also, during their camp stay, volunteers are evaluated based on performance, attitude and overall helpfulness. They may be asked to not return, depending on how well they do during the week.

DEC Camper Code of Conduct

We will provide your child with a safe and secure environment and create a warm, comfortable, and fun atmosphere that will make their look forward to participating at camp each day. However, we are not equipped to handle continual behavioral problems. Certain behaviors are

severe enough to merit immediate expulsion from camp (i.e. physical aggression, stealing, sexual harassment, defiance of discipline code, bullying, and/or repeated incidents of inappropriate language). These behaviors will not be tolerated and, if severe enough, may warrant visitation by a law enforcement officer. If a camper is sent home for disciplinary reasons, they will not be allowed to return to camp, nor will camp fees be refunded. If a camper's attitude and behavior is serious but does not warrant immediate dismissal from camp, it is the camp administration's decision whether to allow the camper to return to camp in subsequent sessions or years. If your child is not permitted to return to camp, you will be notified by DEC camp administration.

To promote good behavior, campers must agree to abide by the following guidelines (discipline code):

- I will be honest and respectful of peers, camp staff and myself.
- I will follow directions and rules at camp.
- I will respect other campers and staff members.
- I will respect property belonging to the DEC camp, other campers and staff members.
- I will behave appropriately and use appropriate language.
- I will stay within camp boundaries unless accompanied by a camp staff member.
- I will treat all campers fairly and equally.
- I will respect wildlife and natural spaces.
- I will do my best to HAVE FUN!

Five-Step Discipline System

Each of our campers has a reasonable expectation to enjoy a positive camp experience. The misbehavior of one camper or of a group of campers should not be permitted to negatively affect the camp experience of others. We strive to ensure all campers practice social skills that will allow them to resolve conflicts and meet their needs without resorting to harmful or destructive behaviors. When problems occur, we act promptly. We follow a five-step system for discipline, described below. A camper's actions may warrant skipping a step or steps and going directly to step 4 or 5 outlined below. For example, hitting someone, bullying, sexual harassment or possession of illegal substances are automatic grounds for being sent home.

1. *Verbal Warning* - The counselor speaks with the camper and identifies and describes the unacceptable behavior. The counselor offers methods to correct the behavior and describes the consequences if there is no change in behavior. The counselor notifies the camp director.
2. *Time Out* - The counselor removes the camper from the activity. At the end of the time out, the counselor reminds the camper what is expected of them (appropriate behavior) and what the consequences will be if inappropriate behavior continues. The counselor notifies the camp director.

3. *Meeting with Camp Director* - The camp director meets with the camper. Together they complete and sign a written “behavior agreement” outlining acceptable behavior and acknowledging understanding of the consequences of continued poor behavior. Depending on circumstances the camp director may contact the parent prior to this meeting.
4. *Meeting with Camp Director and calling parents* - The camp director contacts the parents, typically via telephone. Together, the camp director, camper and parents discuss the camper’s behavior/actions and develop a plan that allows the camper to stay at camp. It also impresses upon the camper the seriousness of the situation and the potential that s/he may be sent home if there is no improvement or if the poor behavior is repeated.
5. *Camper Sent Home* - The camp director contacts the parents to notify them that they must pick up their camper. The camper may not return to camp.

Camper Homesickness

There are many ways to handle camper homesickness. There are also many ways **not** to handle camper homesickness. Outlined in this section are a few examples of each with some background information on what homesickness is and what it can look like. Talk with counselors or director staff if you are unsure of what to do or have any concerns.

Common possible causes of homesickness:

- Lack of experience if a camper has never been away from home before
- Living with others when a camper is not used to washing and dressing with others
- The change of environment if a camper is not used to being outdoors, outside of a city or areas they are familiar with
- If other campers are homesick, it can cause the feeling to spread to people who were not previously homesick
- Missing family, friends or pets
- Being unable to communicate with them immediately, especially if the camper normally has a cell phone
- Parents who tell a camper they should be or may be homesick because the parent themselves is “child-sick”
- And many, many, more...

The 5 W’s (and H) of Homesickness

Who gets homesick? Anyone coming to camp can become homesick. From first-time campers to vols, even staff may have feelings of homesickness during camp. The feelings generally pass as the week goes on, but campers sometimes need some extra help from volunteers or staff.

What does homesickness look like? Each person is different. With that understanding, each person will handle homesickness differently. Some campers might get sad and remove themselves from fun activities, cry, lash out or become angry, become defiant, or, in extreme cases, take actions intentionally in an attempt to be sent home from camp. As a volunteer, you can help campers dealing with homesickness. DEC staff are provided guidelines on dealing with

camper homesickness. However, as a volunteer, you can help campers work through their homesickness.

Where do I go if I feel overwhelmed helping a camper? You can always step back from situations you are uncomfortable with. If you are uncomfortable with dealing with camper homesickness for any reason, please inform camp staff and they will find another activity for you to help with.

When do I step in to help? When do I stop? If you feel comfortable speaking with a camper who seems to be sad or expresses that they are homesick you may comfort them and try to help. If the camper starts feeling worse or you become uncertain or uncomfortable, inform staff so they may intervene and find you another task.

Why do I need to help campers? As a volunteer, campers will look up to you for the same reasons you were nominated. Your maturity, camp spirit, and leadership skills will all come into play at varying times and during different activities. Helping campers is an active way of being a positive role model and have a direct impact on camp morale.

How do I help homesick campers? Homesickness can have many different causes. Understanding the reasons is important for staff and volunteers to help campers overcome homesickness.

How to handle homesickness:

- Speak with the camper about their feelings and reassure them that it is normal to feel this way.
- Listen to their concerns and feelings and decide if you are comfortable helping in this scenario. If you are...
 - Suggest achievable goals i.e.:
 - “How about you try to chat with one new person at breakfast?”
 - “Why don’t you try playing the game for five minutes, then you can take a break if you still want to?”
 - “We can write a letter home later during bunk time. Try to think of some things you’ll want to write about”
- Goals and suggestions should always try to focus on getting the camper involved in camp activities.
- Introduce the camper to other campers you think they may get along and encourage friendships.
- Always let their counselor know if you know a camper is feeling homesick so the counselor can keep an eye on the situation.

How NOT to handle homesickness:

- DEC Camps does not allow campers to call home during the week. Unfortunately, if a camper calls home it often makes the homesickness worse. Additionally, if one camper

calls home others may demand to also call home. The camp office phone must be kept open for emergency calls since cell phone service is unreliable at camp.

- Talking with the camper about home too much. The camper should be trying to focus on all the fun they will have at camp, even in the short term. Avoid talking about home too much because campers can become even more focused on home and feel worse.
- Joking about the camper's feelings at their expense. Some people use jokes to feel better. Since you do not know the camper's preference or experience outside of camp, refrain from making ironic or other jokes at the camper's expense. This has the potential to make the camper feel worse.

Camper/ Staff Interactions

Distinctions

As a volunteer you have been a camper, often more than once or at multiple camps. All these experiences sometimes add up to more time at camp than new counselors! With that in mind, volunteers are minors and considered campers by the NYS Dept. of Health and NYSDEC. Camp staff have extensive training before each season and must meet minimum qualifications for the position as set by NYSDEC. Understanding and respecting this distinction can help everyone have a smooth week at camp.

Relationships

Romantic relationships are not appropriate at camp. Relationships between volunteers, volunteers and staff, or volunteers and campers are all prohibited.

As a camp volunteer, you should strive to behave in a professional manner when interacting with camp staff and a role model for campers.

Ratio

Camper and staff safety is the first priority of staff. There are various ratios that camp staff need to maintain during different activities. During all activities volunteers count as campers, **not** staff, and will **not** be asked to supervise other campers.

Safety drills

Each week there are mandatory safety drills that take place at camp. Volunteers should follow staff directions and help when asked.

During emergencies

In the event of an emergency volunteers should follow directions from Camp Director Staff that follow the emergency safety plan.

Social media

Online social networking sites and apps can be fun and positive ways for people to interact with friends. While DEC has an official Facebook page for the camps program, we cannot monitor unofficial camp pages on social networking sites. DEC is not responsible for interactions among

campers, volunteers and staff after the camp season has ended or on other than our own Facebook page. We recommend our camp staff not "friend" campers on other sites, but we cannot monitor their actions during the off season or on sites where we have no control.

Contact Information

	Mailing Address	Physical Address & GPS coordinates	Phone, Fax, Email
Volunteer Program Coordinator Shannon Post-Wilson	NYSDEC Shannon Post-Wilson Camps Program 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-5256	625 Broadway Albany, NY GPS: N42 39.087, W 073 44.554	Year-round (Mon.-Fri., 8:30AM – 4:00PM) Phone: 518-402-8014 Fax: 518-402-9033 Email: Shannon.post@dec.ny.gov
Camp Colby	90 Camp Colby Road Saranac Lake, NY 12983	90 Camp Colby Road Saranac Lake, NY GPS: N 44 21.121, W 074 08.738	Only during Camp Season Phone: 518-891-3373 Fax: 518-891-0077 Email: colby@dec.ny.gov
Camp DeBruce	307 Mongaup Road Livingston Manor, NY 12758	307 Mongaup Road Livingston Manor, NY GPS: N 41 55.959, W 074 42.746	Only during Camp Season Phone: 845-439-4627 Fax: 845-439-4433 Email: debruce@dec.ny.gov
Camp Pack Forest	PO Box 777 Warrensburg, NY 12885	276 Pack Forest Road Chestertown, NY GPS: N 43 33.238, W 073 48.809	Only during Camp Season Phone: 518-623-2037 Fax: 518-623-4433 Email: packfore@dec.ny.gov
Camp Rushford	8717 Rush Creek Road Caneadea, NY 14717	8717 Rush Creek Road Caneadea, NY 14717 GPS: N 42 20.667, W 078 13.788	Only during Camp Season Phone: 585-437-5351 Fax: 585-437-5400 Email: rushford@dec.ny.gov

DEC Summer Camps Volunteer Evaluation

Evaluating a volunteer's performance will help to ensure that they grow with the opportunity given to them. To help a volunteer understand the areas where they exceeded expectations and the areas that may need improvement, the camp staff will complete this form based on the volunteer's week at camp. This evaluation will weigh heavily if volunteers decide to return as a volunteer or apply for an internship or a camp staff position with the NYSDEC Summer Camps program.

Here is an example of a blank evaluation. Shortly after arrival, the Camp Assistant Director and/or Camp Aide 1 will go over this and outline the expectations for the week. Volunteers will also be asked to complete a self-evaluation at the end of the week to help reflect on their performance.

You do not need to bring a copy of this evaluation to camp.

Please write as neatly as possible!

Volunteer Name: _____ **Camp:** _____ **Week:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1 = Fails to meet expectations | 2 = Needs improvement | 3 = Meets expectations |

4 = Sometimes exceeds expectations | 5 = Always exceeds expectations

Description	Score out of 5	Description	Score out of 5
Volunteer conducts themselves safely and follows camp rules		Volunteer is helpful and assists the counselors when needed without over-stepping	
Volunteer is on time, prepared and efficient when completing tasks		Volunteer takes the role of a leader and is a role model for campers	
Volunteer is engaged and enthusiastic while working		Volunteer works to create an inclusive environment	
Volunteer works well with campers and counselors		Volunteer is engaged and enthusiastic for camp programming, is willing to help and has a positive attitude	
Volunteer is responsive to feedback and is willing to work through challenges		Volunteer anticipates program needs and actively takes initiative, thinking ahead and problem solving	
Score Total 1:		Score Total 2:	

Score calculation:

$$\underline{\hspace{2cm}} \text{ Score Total 1} + \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \text{ Score Total 2} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} / 10$$

$$= \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \text{ Overall Score (i.e. 4.8, Please do not round)}$$

Volunteer Name: _____ Camp: _____ Week: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**** All sections on this page are required ****

Overall comments:

Areas with room for improvement:

Areas of strength:

Is this volunteer recommended to return?	YES	NO	
Will the volunteer be 16 or 17 next year?	YES	NO	
If yes to both, would you recommend them to be an Education Program Volunteer next summer?	YES	NO	N/A

Assistant Director Name: _____

Signature and Date: _____

Volunteer Name: _____

Signature and Date: _____