

Camp Rio Vista and Sierra Vista Internet and Technology Policies

Dear Parents,

We have always taken the safety and well-being of our campers--your children--very seriously. After all, giving your children over to the care of other people is perhaps the greatest act of trust you as a parent can engage in. We aim to do everything we humanly can to earn and keep that trust. We also know that we cannot do this without your help. With more and more children using the Internet, cell phones and other technologies at younger ages, we appeal to you as a parent to partner with us to ensure that your children continue to have the safest, most wholesome experience with us at camp as possible.

Please read our letter carefully. It will help you to understand the challenges some technologies pose to the continued health and safety of our camp community. Please also discuss these policies with your child and as always, we invite you to call or email us if you have any questions or concerns about any of these issues.

Cell Phones

As you know, we have a "no-cell phone" policy at camp. Aside from the fact that cell phones are expensive and can get lost or stolen and that the physical camp environment is not kind to such items, there is a fundamental problem with having cell phones at camp, and that is trust. When children come to camp they - and you - are taking a leap of faith, temporarily transferring their primary care from you as their parents to us and their counselors. This is one of the growth-producing, yet challenging aspects of camp. As children learn to trust other caring adults, they grow and learn, little by little, to solve some of their own challenges. We believe this emerging independence is one of the greatest benefits of camp. It is one important way your child develops greater resilience. Contacting you by phone essentially means that they have not made this transition. It prevents us from getting to problems that may arise and addressing them quickly. Sending a cell phone to camp is like saying that you as the parent haven't truly come to peace with the notion of them being away from you and in our care.

We agree to tell you if your child is experiencing a challenge in their adjustment to camp. The lines of communication are always open. *You can help* by talking with your child *before they leave for camp* and telling them that there is always someone they can reach out to, whether it is their counselor, a trusted activity leader, the Head Counselor, the Director or camp nurse or health care provider. We are all here to help, but if *you* don't trust us, your children certainly won't!

Digital Photography/ Video

Another drawback of having cell phones at camp is many of them have built in cameras. It has happened to some other camps around the country that children have secretly taken photographs of other campers or staff during changing or showering times and later uploaded those images onto the Internet. (If you belong to a health club, chances are it has a "no-cell phone" policy). Another concern is the use of devices that are capable of playing video. (Video iPod or Sony PSP are examples). There have been cases of campers bringing inappropriate downloaded images and video clips or movies on these devices to camps and sharing them with other campers. To lessen the possibility of this happening we have decided to *ban all devices that are capable of showing video, movies or downloaded images*.

We believe that photographs help to preserve those wonderful camp memories and encourage campers to bring cameras to camp, but would prefer them to be of the disposable or film variety. Like cell phones, digital cameras are expensive and could be lost or stolen and have the capability to upload digital images online. Unlike cell phone cameras, they must be connected to a computer to upload these images. Since campers do not have access to computers at camp, we are comfortable with campers using digital cameras at camp. We reserve the right to view the images on any camera if we feel that there has been inappropriate behavior, and encourage you to participate in viewing the images on your camper's camera when they return home.

Please help us maintain a safe environment and explain this to your children. You should know that *any camper that takes a compromising photograph of another camper or staff member and uploads it to the Internet or makes it public in any way may be subject to dismissal from camp or may not be allowed to return. If a law is broken, the appropriate authorities will be notified.*

Cyber-Bullying and Harassment

It has happened at camps around the country that a few campers have sent rude, demeaning, intimidating or vulgar e-mails or IMs (Instant Messages) to other campers or have created false screen names to harass members of the camp community or spread false and damaging information about them. (Please go to www.vistacamps.com for our full Camper Internet Policy statement). We understand that Internet communication is fun, positive and an important way campers stay in touch with their friends. Because we understand this, we are providing you with tools for safe and monitored environment in which campers can communicate over the internet. We are working with Bunk1.com, who hosts our camp picture pages, to bring you CampAlumni.com. It will offer campers a supervised alternative to social sites like Facebook and MySpace in which they can keep in touch with friends and counselors throughout the year. *We will review and approve everything submitted by campers and staff before it is posted online.* CampAlumni.com will also provide alumni with a way to keep in touch, find old friends, and find out what is happening at camp. Best of all, it is free to all campers, staff and alumni! Go to our website to sign up.

Your Kids, Our Staff after Camp

Our pledge is to put your children in the company of the most trustworthy and capable staff we can hire--counselors who are well suited to the task of caring for campers. The effort we put into screening and selecting our staff is part of that pledge. Our staff members work with your children in the context of a visible, well scrutinized environment that has many built-in checks and balances. Counselors are supervised by senior staff guided by clear, firm policies regarding behavior. Their actions are also visible to co-workers and campers. By hiring them we do not recommend them as babysitters, nannies, or child companions outside of camp. *In general we discourage our staff from having contact with your children after camp since we cannot supervise it. We hire our staff for the camp season. We do not take responsibility for their behavior off-season.* As a parent you are, of course, free to make your own choice in this matter. While we cannot keep you from allowing your child to visit with one of our staff members, in so doing you take full responsibility. We also know that many children exchange contact information (e.g., e-mail address, profile names, cell phone numbers) without our or your specific awareness or permission. *We recommend that you as the parent supervise your child's online activities just as you do other aspects of their life in your home, and oversee any off-season contact between our staff and your child. You take full responsibility to oversee any contact that results.*

Working Together to Keep Your Children Safe

We see many positive, exciting ways for youngsters to enjoy the healthy benefits of the Internet and other technologies. As advocates for children we want to work with you to keep those experiences safe, healthy and positive. That is why we have taken the time to write these policies. We urge you to talk to your children--both about camp and their online activity in general.