



WISCONSIN CHILD LABOR LAWS - YOUTH AS VOLUNTEERS: CAMP COUNSELORS

Reference Guide

Revised May 2006

1. What are the legal ages for camp counselors?

Youth need to be at least 14 years of age at the time of camp. The focus of the camp counselor role is to be working with young people.

2. How many hours per day are camp counselors allowed to work?

Counselors who are 14-15 years old can work a maximum of 8 hours on non-school days between the hours of 7 am and 11pm and a maximum of 40 hours on non-school weeks. Youth ages 16 and older can work unlimited hours/day on non-school days for a total of 50 hours on non-school weeks. Sleep does not count as work time if an adult is responsible for any situations that develop during sleep hours.

3. What are some ways to comply with the law if we have 14 and 15-year-old counselors?

- Start by analyzing your camp schedule to see how many hours per day your camp counselors actually are on duty each day. You may find that your arrival and departure days have less than 8 hours of duty. Hours of sleep aren't considered "on duty." There needs to be adults in camp who would handle any emergencies during that time.
- Consider having a pair of counselors with group of campers with one "in charge" at a time and the other one participating in the activity as a learner.
- Consider having counselor break time while campers are resting. This could be immediately after meals. Have adults assume camper responsibility during that time.
- Look for other places in the schedule to give the 14 and 15 year old "off time" with either adults or youth age 16 and older in charge of campers.
- You may need more adults and older counselors to make these adjustments, which has budget implications. Explain the added cost as resulting from the need for more supervision which enhances the educational value of the camp and the safety for all involved. Most people will appreciate more responsible people being at the camp.
- "Off duty" doesn't mean that the counselor should be off site or free to roam. They could assume roles of being supportive participants to the person "in charge".

4. How can youth age 12-13 be involved in a camp counseling experience?

Youth ages 12 and 13 can participant as a counselor in training (CIT) in which they are considered a learner and participant. Part of their learning could be performing leadership roles under the supervision of a counselor at least 2 years older than they are.

5. What is ratio of adults to youth campers and counselors required?

Under state law HFS175.13 ruling, the ratio of adults to youth participants/counselors is 1adult to 10 youth. Counselors under 18 years of age are part of the youth count. The ratio of adults to youth is 1 adult to 4 youth if the children are under age 6. Wisconsin 4-H guidelines state that chaperones should be at least 21 years of age. Counselors or youth leaders that are under the age of 21 should not be included in the ratio counts.

6. What equipment restrictions affect camp counselors?

Minor counselors should not be operating dangerous equipment. Youth age 14-15 should not be using power driven equipment (electric pottery wheels, motor boats, kilns, etc.). Youth age 16 and over can operate power equipment. The Department of Natural Resources does have certification courses required by youth for operation of ATV vehicles and motor boats.

In regard to shooting sports camps or specific shooting sports activities taught at camps, according to 4-H Youth Development policy, these can only be taught with an adult certified within the specific shooting discipline (i.e. muzzle loading, archery, etc.). The adult must be present and in direct supervision of youth. Youth that assist in the training or event must be 14 years of age or older. Youth assistants must in the presence of and under the supervision of a certified adult leader. Please note, youth must be at least 12 years old to participate in any powder-burning event (.22 rifle, shotgun, and muzzle loading).

7. What are the requirements for youth volunteers serving in lifeguard roles?

Lifeguards need to be a minimum of 16 years old and need to have successfully completed a bona fide life saving course. Individual facilities may have specific guidelines that help increase the safety for youth.

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