

## Bereavement Camp Standards of Practice

Eluna is pleased to lead the development of Bereavement Camp Standards of Practice through the generous support of the New York Life Foundation.

Please contact Eluna at [info@elunanetwork.org](mailto:info@elunanetwork.org) with questions and feedback.



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### The Standards Committee

The Standards Committee includes professionals with expertise in camp standards of practice and overnight and day camps for bereaved youth, adults, and families. Eluna is grateful to the following for their contributions to the Bereavement Camp Standards of Practice.

- **Tina Barrett, EdD, LCPC** – Tamarak Grief Resource Center, Executive Director and Co-Founder
- **Noreen Carrington, LMFT, FT** – OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center Orange County board member, Camp Erin Orange County
- **Janette du Monceaux, LMSW** – Providence Hospice and Home Care of Snohomish County, Pediatric Bereavement Specialist
- **Bethany Gardner, MA** – Eluna, Director of Bereavement Programs
- **Rhonda Mickelson, MEd** – Past Director of Accreditation, American Camp Association
- **Jenny Simmonds, MEd-Youth Development Leadership** – Fairview's Youth Grief Services, Program Director
- **Jason Stout** – Outward Bound USA, National Outreach Director

### About the Standards

The Bereavement Camp Standards of Practice ("Standards") provides MINIMUM standards of practice that primarily consider providing a beneficial, safe experience in a variety of bereavement camp settings. The Standards are suggested guidelines compiled by peers in the field; they are not a certification or license. In addition, the Standards are not a "how to" guide. To be applicable to many types of clinicians and settings, the Standards are generalized, minimum practices.

A revised version will be released biennially following an invitation for feedback from the children's bereavement field.

### Definitions:

- **Camp:** multi-day and/or overnight bereavement support experiences
- **Host organization:** the organization responsible for providing the bereavement camp
- **Camp facility:** the venue where the bereavement camp is held
- **Participants:** campers, volunteers, and staff

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## **FUNDAMENTALS**

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### ***Organization and Service Description***

The host organization will establish and provide the public and participants with information regarding the purpose, mission and scope of services of the organization; type of camp services and their goals and outcomes; and any associated fees.

### ***Equality/Non-Discrimination***

The cultural, ethnic, country of origin, gender identity and expression, race, age, physical and mental ability, veteran status, sexual orientation, economic, spiritual and religious diversity of all campers, volunteers, and staff will be respected. The host organization will work to identify and address any barriers to inclusion.

### ***Community Outreach***

The greater community will be engaged to increase awareness regarding the benefits of bereavement camp participation. Camper and volunteer recruitment practices will reach a diverse population with identified underserved populations at the forefront of these practices.

### ***Community Resources***

The host organization will maintain an up-to-date list of community resources that address the needs of bereaved individuals and families, such as social, emotional, mental health, and spiritual needs. Resources will be provided when needs are outside the scope of services of the host organization.

### ***Program Evaluation***

The host organization will seek feedback from campers, volunteers, and staff analyze the results; and modify camp programming as appropriate in order to meet program goals and improve services.

### ***Confidentiality and Data Protection***

The host organization will develop and clearly communicate policies to all participants regarding confidentiality, social media, photography, and media involvement. All information pertaining to campers, volunteers, and staff will remain confidential within all formats and contexts, including stories shared verbally. The host organization will thoughtfully determine what information will be shared with volunteers.

Policies and procedures will be established and implemented regarding the respectful use of camper images, stories, etc., for marketing and other purposes. Releases will be obtained from campers, parent/guardians of minors, volunteers, and staff prior to the sharing of any confidential information, including data, photographs, videos, and camper stories.

Volunteers and staff will be trained to honor the integrity of confidentiality as it applies to their roles and responsibilities. All federal and state laws will be adhered to regarding the protection of confidential information and retention, as will any professional confidentiality requirements, including mandatory reporting laws.

### ***Dual Relationships and Conflicts of Interest***

Policies and procedures will be established regarding dual relationships (two or more distinct relationships with the same person) and conflicts of interest (tension between self-interest, professional interest and/or public interest) to protect participants from harm or exploitation and to ensure that participants have the best experience possible.

Specific thought will be given to dual relationships and camp attendance when a prior relationship exists between staff and volunteer, volunteer and volunteer, and staff/volunteer and camper.

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## **VOLUNTEER & STAFF INVOLVEMENT**

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### ***Competency***

The host organization will be knowledgeable and receive ongoing education regarding current literature, research and best practices related to bereavement, bereavement interventions and camp management. All staff and volunteers will demonstrate competencies that are applicable to their roles.

### ***Volunteer Selection and Screening***

Volunteers will be selected following a formal application, screening and reference verification process. The screening should at minimum include an annual criminal background check conducted on all qualified applicants and returning volunteers. The host organization will identify and operate under all federal, state, and local laws, codes, and regulations related to background checks for working with minors and vulnerable populations in the program context.

NOTE: The American Camp Association provides helpful resources, including

- <http://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/public-policy/criminal-background-checks-issues-resources-camps>

### ***Volunteer Training***

Camps that utilize volunteers will maintain the highest standards by providing volunteers with a code of conduct, policies and procedures, training, and an opportunity to evaluate their experience.

Training will be provided to all those involved in camp programming and camper supervision. Training will include at least the following topics:

- Camp leadership and reporting structure
- Staff/Volunteer expectations, roles and responsibilities
- Camp facility expectations
- Camp structure and programming
- Grief and grief support interventions
- Trauma and grief
- Working with campers
- Boundaries
- Building connection and community
- Awareness and support of staff and volunteer grief and other potentially triggered responses
- Cultural, diversity, and inclusion awareness, including areas listed in the Equality/Non-Discrimination Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Policies and procedures
- Safety, medical, social-emotional incidents, and emergency procedures
- Signs of self-harm or intentions to harm self or others
- Teamwork and conflict resolution
- Specific Confidentiality

The following additional topics will be addressed when supporting children and adolescents:

- Developmental characteristics of children and teens
- Child abuse recognition and reporting
- Behavior management

## ***Policies and Procedures***

The host organization will have written policies and procedures that are congruent with their mission and values and support a safe and appropriate camp experience. Policies and procedures will address, but are not limited to:

- Recruitment, screening and retention of campers and volunteers
- Camper, volunteer, and staff requirements and expectations
- Camper, volunteer, and staff behavior management
- Safety, health, medical, social-emotional incidents, and emergency procedures
- Sexual harassment, abuse, interpersonal boundaries, and appropriate touch
- Confidentiality, data protection, social media, and media involvement
- Code of Conduct
- Personnel Policies
- Tobacco, drug, and alcohol possession and/or use
- Transportation
- Communication at camp
- Electronics at camp
- Referrals
- Cost of camp
- Ratios of campers to volunteers/staff at camp
- Guests at camp
- Arrival and departure procedures
- Program evaluation
- Pre- and post-camp continued care and contact

NOTE: The American Camp Association provides helpful resources, including:

- Releases and related issues: <http://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/articles/releases-related-issues-revisited>
- Camp staff Use of Electronic Devices and Social Media: <http://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/articles/camp-staff-use-electronic-devices-social-media-some-issues-solutions>

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## **HEALTH & SAFETY**

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### ***Camper, Volunteer & Staff Ratios***

The host organization will develop and implement policies regarding ratios of leadership, volunteers, and campers at camp. General considerations will include age of campers, types of loss, social and emotional needs of campers, type and location of facilities; types and locations of program offerings; and the length of the camp experience. Ratios will be based on the number of clinical staff, the experience level of volunteers, and the needs of the campers being served.

- **Ratios when supporting minors:** The American Camp Association recommends the following ratios for general programming: Ages 6-8, 1 adult to 6 campers, ages 9-14, 1:8; and ages 15-18, 1:10. The host organization will determine when a greater number of adults are necessary.
- **Individual engagement:** Staff and volunteers will be trained to avoid 1:1 camper/staff or camper/camper engagement that is out of observable sight of others. A minimum of three participants, including appropriate supervision, should be together at all times. This policy is often referred to as the “rule of three”. Individual connection is valued and can be engaged safely in a public area.
- **Clinical staff and volunteers:** Camp leadership will include at least one individual clinically trained at the master’s level in a relevant field and who also has expertise and

experience working with the bereaved populations served. The host organization will assess the need for additional clinical staff.

- **Leadership to volunteer ratio:** The host organization will provide appropriate leadership support and supervision to volunteers for a safe, high-quality experience.
- **Staff/Volunteer to camper ratio:** The host organization will identify the number of staff and volunteers needed in the program areas established.
- **High risk situations and settings:** Most incidents at camp occur during unstructured program time. The host organization will identify high risk settings or situations and develop plans for supervision and safety accordingly.
- **Considerations for sleeping arrangements:**
  - For overnight camps serving minors: sleeping arrangements must be evaluated for the number and location of staff within the sleeping quarters.
  - For overnight camps serving adults and families: sleeping assignments will be made with personal and family privacy in mind.

### ***Safety and Emergency Procedures***

Policy and procedures will be developed and implemented to ensure campers, volunteers, and staff are safe at camp. The host organization will consult with the camp facility in the development and implementation of safety plans.

Camp leadership is encouraged to inform the local authorities (police, sheriff, fire department and EMS), or ensure the camp facility as done so, of the dates, location, and number of campers, volunteers and staff on-site to increase safety, minimize impact of emergencies on campers, and ease evacuation if necessary.

Areas to consider include:

- Presence of animals at camp facility, use of therapeutic animals in programming, and service and/or emotional support animals accompanying participants.
- Skilled facilitators for specialized program activities (i.e., a certified lifeguard, challenge course facilitator).
- Procedures will be established in the event that a participant is missing, an unauthorized person is discovered on property, or in the case of an active threat. An active threat is defined as any incident, which by its deliberate nature creates an immediate threat or present an imminent danger to the camp community.
- **Environmental emergencies:** Necessary actions will be identified in the event of anticipated natural disasters (tornadoes, fires, floods) and/or other environmental emergencies (loss of power, compromised water system, etc.). Staff and volunteers will be trained to know and fulfill their role in the response plan.
- **Social-Emotional Incidents:** Policies and procedures will be defined and implemented regarding acute mental health concerns that arise during the intake process, while at camp, or during post-camp follow-up. This may include, but is not limited to, neglect, abuse, harm of self or others, or other crisis situations. Programs will have at least one designated clinical staff person responsible for acute social-emotional needs of campers, volunteers and staff, and will engage appropriate follow up.
- **Accidents/Incidents:** Policies and procedures should be defined and implemented regarding non-social-emotional incidents, accidents, and near misses that occur while at camp. Examples of “incidents” and “accidents” include fires; natural disasters; danger from intruders or trespassers; crises arising out of camper, staff, or rental group behavior (e.g., fighting, serious emotional outbursts, threatening others); or other situations posing

serious safety threats. Examples of “near misses” and “emergencies not resulting in injury” may include lost campers, near drownings, or the use of drugs or alcohol by staff or participants.

- **Guests and Service Providers at Camp:** Policies and procedures related to appropriate participation of guests and service providers will be developed and communicated. Items to consider based on the individual’s participation at camp include: sign-in upon arrival; type of identifier guest must wear; escort policy; required background check clearance; and necessary paperwork (i.e., confidentiality agreement, liability release, media release, etc.). When inviting guests, camp leadership will be mindful of the vulnerable nature of the camper group and be thoughtful of the impact of guests on the campers’ experience and safety.
- **Communication Plan:** The camp will have a communication plan that includes:
  - A single spokesperson for the camp is clearly identified.
  - Communicating with guardians should a natural disaster or emergency occur.
  - Identification of an individual to contact a guardian in the event of a camper-related accident or incident.
  - Identification of individuals(s) who will contact emergency personnel in various health or emergency events and collaborate with personnel to minimize the impact of the event on campers (i.e., lights and sirens off).

### ***Medical Procedures***

A healthcare plan will be developed and implemented that includes:

- The collection of a medical form as part of the camper and volunteer intake process, including a record of allergies, dietary restrictions, current prescription and over-the-counter medications, and a description of any current physical, mental and psychological conditions requiring medication, treatment, or special considerations while at camp.
- The host organization will determine the level of healthcare provider needed during the camp experience based on the camper population, camp setting, access to additional medical support, etc. At minimum, at least one Registered Nurse, Physician Assistant, or Physician with current licensure in the state that camp is held will be on site during the duration of the camp experience. If a camp or activity is located more than 30 minutes from access to the emergency medical system (EMS), someone with wilderness first aid certification from a recognized training provider is required. All camp medical professionals will have current, age-appropriate CPR and First Aid certification.

Please note, campers should not fulfill a medical team role.

- If appropriate, an initial health screening upon arrival at camp that can include temperature, signs of illness, recent exposure to any contagious diseases, etc. The review and collection of all prescription and over-the-counter medications, in original containers, will be required at this time, with the exception of items such as inhalers, epi-pens and insulin pumps. Any medication taken by a camper that day will be documented along with the next needed dosage.
- All staff, volunteer and camper prescriptions and over-the-counter medications will be stored in a locked location, with the exception of items such as inhalers, epi-pens and insulin pumps. Medications will be dispersed by designated healthcare providers only.
- The camp program will have a recordkeeping system documenting incidents and care provided, including:
  - Date, time, location, and name of person ill or injured
  - General description of injury or illness
  - Description of any treatment administered

- Administration of all prescription and over-the-counter medication
- Name and signature of persons evaluating and treating
- The camp program will establish and clearly communicate with all staff and volunteers when, how, and by whom an additional level of medical or emergency care should be contacted.
- The camp program will consider the need for standing orders from a physician for medical care provided to participants.

### ***Transportation***

When transportation is provided by the host organization or camp facility, policies will be developed that address and ensure:

- Training of drivers and driver requirements
- Verification of DMV records of drivers for past violations
- Verification of appropriate vehicle insurance
- Supervision of participants while being transported
- Safety orientation for passengers to include what to do in the event of an accident
- Mechanical evaluations and safety checks of vehicles in use
- Release form from campers or the guardians of minor campers

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## **CAMP FACILITY & BUSINESS**

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### ***Insurance***

The host organization will, in consultation with their insurance provider, the camp facility, and other vendors, evaluate the need for the types of insurance listed below.

- Liability insurance
- Professional liability insurance for those with professional licenses
- Accident insurance
- Workman's compensation for those who qualify
- Property insurance for host organization property (electronics, etc.)
- Motor vehicle insurance if any transportation is provided by the camp, volunteers, staff, or chartered
- The need to have the facility be named as a co-insurer on the camp's liability policy

### ***Camp Facility***

The host organization will have in place a signed agreement with the camp facility that includes:

- Terms of use, including dates, times, and costs
- Cancellation, minimum fees, and refund policies
- Services that will be provided by the host facility, such as food service, recreation options, program staff, transportation
- Cost and conditions for use of any recreational equipment or program services
- Party responsible for any special program activities (ex: swimming, challenge course, horseback riding, etc.), what is included in those activities, and the qualification level of camp facility staff related to program services provided
- Party responsible to provide first aid, emergency care, and emergency transportation
- Party responsible to supervise the camp and participants' behavior
- Required orientation to the host site regarding the site's safety procedures and regulations
- Any insurance required for the host organization and camp facility

- The availability of non-gendered bathrooms and bathrooms that ensure privacy for participants

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## **PRE-CAMP ASSESSMENT**

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The host organization will develop a thorough registration and assessment process to ensure the appropriateness and readiness of each camper for a safe experience in the identified camp setting. This might include, but is not limited to, an application and additional paperwork, phone assessment, in-person interview, open house or other pre-camp event, and ongoing phone and email contact. Paperwork components will address the needs of both the host organization and the camp facility. Consultation with other providers may be necessary. Consent and release will be obtained prior to consultation with other providers. The host organization should establish policy and procedure for determining and communicating non-acceptance to the camp program.

Categories covered in the pre-camp assessment process might include: contact and demographic information, bereavement history; social, emotional, and behavior issues; family structure and communication; coping styles; belief systems; and medical information. Forms may include: general application, consent to provide care; liability release; media consent and release; transportation release; and in the case of minors, custody release. Forms should be crafted taking into consideration the Equality/Non-Discrimination Policy to avoid potential bias and discrimination. For example, applications can request preferred pronouns and offer a gender identity category that is “non-binary”.

During the pre-camp assessment process, campers will receive an overview of the camp experience, be informed of expectations, and have concerns and questions addressed, and be informed of their acceptance status.

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## **CAMP EXPERIENCE**

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A sense of cohesion and community will be intentionally developed in the camp program, helping campers gain a sense of belonging, respect, and trust, and to learn they are not alone. The host organization will determine any identifying items to aid in the development of cohesion, such as camp T-shirt, name badges, etc.

Camp will be structured to allow campers the opportunity to share their story, express their feelings, and receive support in a physically and emotionally safe, non-judgmental, and empowering setting. Campers will be allowed to determine their participation level in sharing, bereavement, and recreational activities. Integrating approaches such as Trauma-Informed Care and other clinical models may help promote resiliency, hope, courage and self-esteem as campers engage their grief experience.

Volunteers will have clear methods and opportunities for breaks at camp to encourage self-care and respite from responsibilities.

### ***Camp Schedule***

Participants will be informed of the camp schedule. Attention will be given to a balance of activities and modalities that consider the developmental needs and learning and expression styles of campers. Types of activities might include:

- A variety of approaches (i.e., art, movement, music, animal assisted therapies, etc.)
- Grief education and support
- Validation and normalization
- Coping skills
- Identifying support systems
- Memorializing



- Ceremonies and rituals (i.e., opening and closing)
- Challenge, character and trust building activities
- Community and connection building activities
- Recreational activities
- Times for reflection and rest

### ***Arrival and Departure***

Policy and procedure will be developed for the arrival and departure of campers. Facilitating a welcoming and smooth process can relieve anxiety and establishes camp as a safe and reliable environment.

At minimum, check-in/out procedures will address healthcare policies, including a health screening at the start of camp and returning of medications at the conclusion. Considerations at check-in and -out when supporting minors include:

- Clear communication of drop-off and pick-up time and location
- Only designated individuals identified on the camp paperwork will be allowed to drop off and pick up campers.
- Identification verification of the guardian or approved adult
- Sign-in and sign-out sheet
- If transportation is provided, ensure that all check-in needs are met prior to transitioning camper under host organization responsibility.
- Provide emergency contact information for the parent to reach camp leadership
- Confirm emergency contact information for camp leadership to reach the guardian
- Help campers and their guardians say goodbye to one another
- Provide information sessions for guardians at the start and conclusion of camp
- Return of medications at check-out

### ***Meal Times***

Meal times are an important part of overall programming and a key opportunity for building community. Host organization should attend to these times as more than just having a meal. Special meal requests, dietary restrictions, meal times, process and menus should be coordinated with the camp facility or food service provider. Ensure that balanced meals, snacks, hydrating beverages are provided to participants.

### ***Camp Rules***

Facility, camp and cabin rules will be established. All rules, enforcement policies and consequences will be clearly communicated. Campers can be given opportunities to shape rules as appropriate.

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## **POST-CAMP EXPERIENCE**

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### ***Post-Camp Continued Care***

The host organization is encouraged to consider the following aspects of participant continued care:

- Timely contact regarding immediate needs with the camper or guardian of a minor camper
- General follow-up related to the camp experience and bereavement needs
- A camp reunion event
- Information about ongoing bereavement programming within the host organization or other community resources

- Encouragement of campers to develop connections with other campers for ongoing support following the camp weekend, as is comfortable with the camper or guardian of a minor camper
- Volunteer and staff support, debrief, and recognition events

### ***Post-Camp Communication***

The camp program will develop and communicate policies regarding ongoing relationships, communication, and social media connection following camp between volunteer/staff to campers and camper to camper.