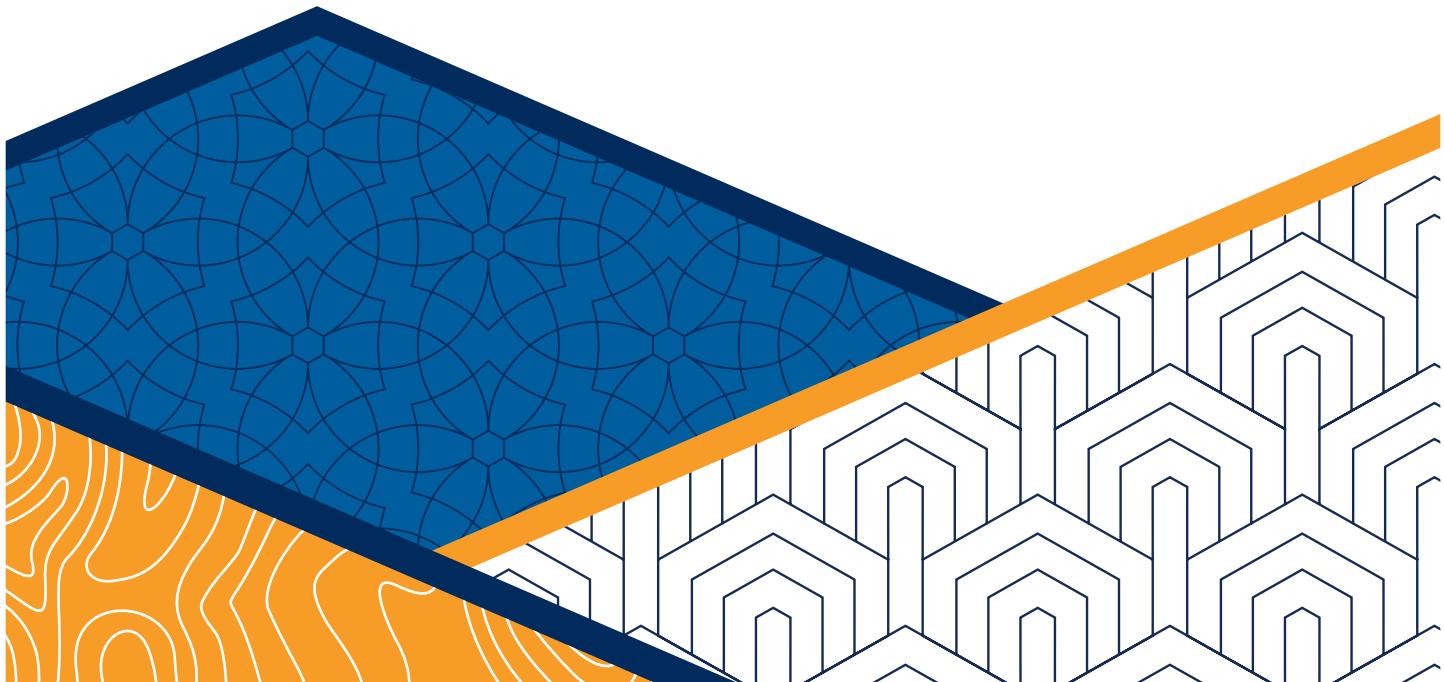


RESOURCE



# MAXIMIZING THE IMPACT OF CAMP BY ENGAGING THE FIVE PHASES OF TEMPORARY COMMUNITIES





Part of what makes camp special is that it is a temporary experience. It is not meant to last forever, even though sometimes we want it to. In order to get the most out of camp, it can be helpful to understand how temporary community works.

Experiences in temporary community have five key phases. There are actions that parents and camp can take during each phase that will enhance the learning and growth of camp.



## PHASE 1: PREPARATION



Do you have a camper that starts packing 6 weeks before camp starts? It might seem crazy at the time, but it's actually very normal, and healthy, to start preparing for camp long before camp starts. Preparing emotionally is just as important as preparing physically. In this phase, it's important to:

- **Set Goals:** Provide a discussion starter or form that parents can use with their child and bring to camp for the counselor.
- **Expectations:** Provide a discussion starter for parents to work through with their camper about the daily schedule, the activities, making friends.
- **Begin to Prepare:** Encourage parents to work with their child to pack their bags (not do it for them). Provide a bible study on the summer theme that parents and campers can do together.

## PHASE 2: ENTRY TRANSITION



Drop off day comes with lots of emotions for parents and campers alike, which is an important part of the camp experience. Though emotions run high, developing intentional rhythms and rituals during this phase can help to minimize stress and ease the transition. In this phase, consider:

- Providing parents with a transitional object to take home with them that reminds them to pray for their camper.
- Inviting parents to opening ceremonies that share the theme or gathering the parents to pray for the week and provide a few encouraging words.
- Facilitating intentional conversation and prayer in families before parents leave





## PHASE 3: IMMERSION

This is camp at its finest. Fully emerged in the daily life and rhythms of camp, campers are detached from their life at home. It's normal for campers to get home sick, and for parents to get "kid-sick", but it is important to protect the immersive space to maximize impact. In this phase, consider:

- Sending parents daily updates focused on the curriculum so that they can follow along with their campers.
- Provide a parallel curriculum at drop off that parents can do while their children are at camp. This might deepen the parent's faith as well as help them discuss camp with their children after.
- Avoiding unnecessary communication between campers and parents

Equip campers in faith practices (prayer, bible reading, reflection etc.) by integrating them into the daily events of camp. It is best if these are repeated "rituals" that campers can take responsibility for within a few days of being at camp. This makes it easier for them to continue the practices at home. Example: Teach the campers how to pray for meals at their own tables instead of having a leader pray for the whole dining hall. Teach the camper how to have a quiet time. Facilitate evening cabin reflection using How (How did you see God at work?), Pow (What was hard today?), Wow (What was something exciting today?) or a similar model.



## PHASE 4: EXIT TRANSITION

As the camp session comes to an end, campers start thinking about home. Some campers may be excited about going home, and others may begin feeling sad about camp coming to an end. Regardless of how campers are feeling about home, intentionally preparing campers for the transition can help extend the influence of camp. The goal of this time is to PREPARE campers for re-entry into their permanent spaces. Key strategies include:

- Have campers name their learning and growth
- Set 1-3 goals for how they want to do life differently when they get home
- Help them to practice describing camp to their family and friends (1 minute elevator pitch)
- Acknowledge what might be challenging at home and brainstorm some ways to approach the challenge as well as people in their permanent community who can support them
- Encourage campers to share this learning with their parent/guardian or friends





## PHASE 5: REINTEGRATION

As the week comes to a close, campers can be just as emotional as they were when they arrived, albeit for different reasons. This is a key phase of the experience that we often miss. Rather than thinking of the last day as pick up day, think of it as an essential hand off between camp counselors and parents, and structure the day to give space for reflection. The reintegration phase begins on the last day, and last for many weeks after. In this phase, consider:

- Extending pick up day so that parents have time to hear from the camp leadership about camp, meet the counselor and other campers, experience some of the activities and life of camp. (See the Parent Day Resource for more).
- Providing space for counselors to talk with camper parents and/or church leaders
- Providing a post camp devotional guide that builds on the week's curriculum
- Sending both print and digital resources to → See our resource "How to Help Your Camper Reflect on Their Camp Experience"!

The temporary nature of the camp experience, far from being a limitation, is actually its greatest strength. **By understanding and intentionally navigating the five phases—Preparation, Entry Transition, Immersion, Exit Transition, and Reintegration**—both camps and parents can transform a fleeting week into a catalyst for lasting personal and spiritual growth.

The goal is not merely to send a child to camp, but to maximize the impact of the temporary community so that the lessons, practices, and growth experienced in Phase 3 are successfully translated and **reintegrated** into the child's permanent life back home. By treating the **Reintegration** phase as an essential 'hand-off' and providing sustained support in the weeks following camp, we ensure that the seeds of faith and independence planted at camp are nurtured, allowing the unique, temporary community of camp to have an extraordinary and permanent impact.



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