

Mental Health First Aid Scenario Resource

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Scenario 1: Jane is a camper in your cabin. She also sits at your table during meals. You notice that Jane does not appear to be eating during mealtimes. You've also noticed that she does not change her clothes in the cabin, but takes them all the way to the bathroom to change instead. When you ask her if she is getting enough to eat, Jane is defensive and claims to have eaten a large snack in the cabin, but you're sure she didn't. You suspect Jane may have an eating disorder.

Debrief points

- **ASSESS** risk of harm – not eating and drinking during camp will make a camper exhausted and sick. Fatigue and dizziness may put the camper in a more dangerous situation as well. Long term, eating disorders can cause severe damage to a person's organs and overall health.
- **LISTEN** nonjudgmentally – try starting the conversation again. Tell Jane that you are worried she isn't getting the nutrition she needs to have a safe and healthy camp and you'd like to talk to her about how you can help.
- **GIVE** reassurance- Because I want you to have the best time at camp as possible, I think this is something we might want to talk to an adult about. They can help us figure out something that will make you more comfortable in the dining hall.
- Other factors to consider:
 - Jane may have an eating disorder OR she may just not like the food being served at camp. Either way, you will need to help her understand that eating and drinking is important for a successful camp.
 - Jane may or may not want to talk about this subject with you, but it is important that you notify an adult staff member if you suspect someone is not eating during camp.
 - Do not comment on the camper's weight or appearance during your conversation, even if you are trying to compliment them.



Scenario 2: John is a first time camper in your cabin. He just doesn't seem to be having a good time at camp. He lacks any energy and just wants to stay in the cabin and sleep all the time. You know that back home John loves to play sports, but you can't seem to get him interested in any athletic activities here at camp. He is withdrawn from the other boys in the cabin, and tends to lay quietly in his bunk facing the wall. You can tell that he isn't having a good camp experience.

Debrief points

- **ASSESS** the risk of harm – Is John thinking about suicide or hurting himself? You cannot know for sure without asking him. When having a conversation about John's depressed state, do not be afraid to ask "Are you thinking about suicide or hurting yourself?" You should not start the conversation this way, but you need to be prepared to ask this question when the time comes.
- **LISTEN** nonjudgmentally- ask John what's up. Tell him you are worried about him and point out behaviors you have noticed. Ask him to tell you how he is feeling and what you can do to help him.
- **GIVE** reassurance. Be sure to tell John that you care about his well-being and his camp experience and that you are here to listen whenever he needs you.
- Other factors to consider:
 - John may have depression or there could be something else wrong
 - Homesickness, bullying victim, afraid or shy, physically ill
 - You do not have to follow the steps ALG in order, and in this case starting with listening is important
 - Be sure to report these behaviors to an adult so they can also attempt a conversation with John about his well-being

Scenario 3: Tonight is the dance at camp. All of the boys in your cabin have been spending the day talking about who they plan to ask to dance. Most of them are excited, but you know a couple of the younger boys are nervous. You are getting ready to go to the dance when John suddenly falls down. He is having trouble breathing and is complaining that he is dizzy and his chest hurts.

Debrief Points:

- ASSESS the risk of harm – clearly John is in a dangerous situation. Send for the nurse immediately, and ask another counselor to take the campers from your cabin outside. John may be having an anxiety attack or a heart attack/problem. You cannot know for sure, so begin to administer first aid until the nurse arrives.
- LISTEN nonjudgmentally- try to calm John down and ask him to describe exactly what hurts and how he is feeling. This may help you decide if the problem is anxiety or not.
- GIVE reassurance- Tell John that help is on the way and you are not leaving his side.
- Other factors to consider:
 - If you know that John is having an anxiety attack or prone to anxiety attacks, talk to him about what kind of coping mechanisms you can help him with, such as breathing exercises, meditation, taking a walk, etc.
 - Anxiety attacks and heart attacks often look the same, so treat the situation as a heart attack if you are not sure. Medical assistance is needed immediately.
 - If you notice John is extremely uncomfortable or fearful about the evening (or any event at camp) try to talk about it with him before he has an anxiety attack. You can even suggest you try an activity together ahead of time so that John better knows what to expect.

Scenario 4: Your cabin co-counselor has not been himself at camp this week. He is usually an energetic, social butterfly, but this week he has been withdrawn and acts irritated or angry around the campers. He is not following through with his responsibilities, and when confronted about it he says things like “I wouldn’t do it right anyway” and “No one even noticed I wasn’t there.” When he makes a sarcastic comment to you that “he’d rather kill himself than do that,” you start to worry more.

Debrief points:

- **ASSESS** the risk – This counselor is making remarks that worry you about self-harm and suicide. Even if these remarks are said in a sarcastic or joking manner, there could be truth to them. The counselor is also not able to fulfill his/her responsibility of making camp fun for the campers if this is his mood.
- **LISTEN** – something may be going on in the counselor’s life that has him/her in a “funk.” Try talking to your friend about what has them feeling down. If these feelings have been around for over 2 weeks, your friend may need professional help for depression. No matter how large or small the reasons they give, remember that these reasons are having a profound impact on them.
- **GIVE** reassurance- remind your friend that you care for them and want to help them. Suggest that they may want to go see the camp nurse until they feel up to being “fun for the campers” again. Maybe a rest in the sick bay or talking to the nurse will help them feel a bit better.
- **Other factors to consider:**
 - **ALWAYS** take threats of suicide seriously. If a camper or counselor is “just joking,” tell them that suicide is a very serious topic and it is never okay to joke about.
 - If someone is threatening to attempt suicide or severe self-harm, call 9-1-1 immediately, many hospitals have special units for psychiatric care that can give immediate help.
 - Something that seems minor or unimportant to you may be life altering to someone else. Never assume that a person isn’t serious about suicide or depression just because the reasons they give seem trivial.
 - A young person can become suicidal very rapidly, especially if they have other uncontrolled mental disorders. Because youth are very likely to act impulsively, suicidal thoughts are very important to address immediately.

Scenario 5: Jane is one of the older campers in your cabin. You've noticed that she always has on her sweatshirt, even in the afternoon when it is over 85 degrees. You've casually asked her if she is hot, but she just shrugs or says "not really." While playing gua gua ball, you notice that there is blood on the cuff of her sleeve. You offer to give her a band aid and while doing first aid notice several cuts on her forearms.

Debrief points:

- **ASSESS** the risk of harm – Jane does have injuries and needs to see the nurse. Although you can probably administer first aid for small cuts and minor bleeding, if you notice lots of cuts, bruises, or bite marks in an area, especially one that is usually concealed, that could be a sign of self-harm.
- **LISTEN** nonjudgmentally – when you ask Jane what happened, she could tell you the truth or a well-rehearsed lie. You need to listen to whatever she has to say and make sure that she is seen by the nurse. Even if you think she is lying, it is important that you handle the conversation carefully.
- **GIVE** reassurance- remind Jane that you are here to be her friend and helper. Tell her that you are worried about her injuries and that it would be best to see the nurse. Even if she does not want to see the nurse, be sure to alert an adult of the situation.
- Other factors to consider:
 - Jane really might be most comfortable in long sleeves for another reason (self-consciousness, medical condition that keeps her cold, etc.)
 - Not all people who self-harm are suicidal. This may be a coping mechanism that the person uses to deal with another mental health disorder, such as anxiety or depression. Regardless of why they are self-harming, they need help to find a healthy way to cope.
 - If Jane refuses to go to the nurse, it will be important that you do not leave her alone. You may have to enlist another counselor to make sure that she does not have the opportunity to harm herself again while you tell an adult what you've witnessed.