



The Camp Newsletter

March 2022



“Psychological” Long Covid At Camp

Gwenn Kudler Gelfand, L.C.S.W.

It's been seven months since my last article and two years since Covid has wreaked havoc on our world. In these two years our world has changed forever. Things we took for granted - a hug, a social gathering and the unequivocal idea that campers would be returning to camp again and again each summer - have changed. In many ways there is a new appreciation for these things that we took for granted. But... things are looking up! The world is beginning to open up and with that camp enrollment is rising. There is a sense of excitement and appreciation about the full return to camp. On the outside, things are really looking promising.

On the inside, however, we have reason to be somewhat concerned. For many of our campers and counselors for that matter, there is anxiety about how the world, their world, will look this summer. People are at different comfort levels about how to deal with these challenges: to mask or not to mask; to test or not to test; to socialize or not to socialize, and in what size groups. So many questions and so much uncertainty. These uncertainties threaten the security and comfort of our youth. We are living in a country that is in political turmoil and a world in which conflict like the one in the Ukraine poses an ever-increasing sense of threat.

Health experts and researchers believe that a pandemic like this one unfolds in a series of four waves, the last of which involves mental health problems and challenges. Psychic trauma, mental illness and burnout are specifically reported. In my own private practice, I have seen a tremendous increase in children and young adults struggling with anxiety and depression. In addition, there is an increase in the prevalence of eating disorders as they often stem from a desire to control an environment that feels out of control. I do not think anyone can argue that we are living in uncontrollable times and, therefore, it is especially important for camps to assess for these concerns.

It is important for camps to remind themselves that socialization has most probably been in smaller groups over the course of the year. Many campers may have suffered exclusion from social groups and gatherings they were previously a part of. New alliances among campers may have developed resulting in a change of friend groups; the development of new cliques and more intense one to one relationships. This will most certainly get played out in social dynamics at camp.

For many, social isolation has been paramount over the past few years. We know that social isolation leads to depression and this is indicated in the increase since the pandemic began in rates of depression seen in today's youth. For some, especially teens, camp is usually an appropriate time for a break from families. Age-appropriate development for them dictates a need for separation. For many who have been home with family for more extended periods of time, separation may have become a much more difficult challenge. Camps can provide a much-needed break from family. However, anticipation of an increase in homesickness and separation anxiety among campers can be expected. On the other hand, for many home is no longer the usual, safe space for kids. There is often more conflict and tension at home since everyone is at home living and working. For these campers, a summer at camp is even more important than in previous summers to offer our youth a secure, safe place to interact with peers.

We need to accept the idea that Covid is something we are going to have to deal with over the long run a psychological form of "long Covid." This revelation has evoked many strong feelings, especially among our youth today. We are moving past a crisis phase and into a phase where we need to co-exist and learn to live with this virus. This idea evokes new feelings and levels of anxiety and depression. It is unclear what this summer will look like and what the comfort level of campers, counselors and parents will be when we get there.

In preparation for the summer of 2022, it will be important for camps to have available mental health services secured in advance for the summer. It is key to have several local therapists secured for in person mental health services or therapists pre-arranged for as needed Telehealth appointments. If families are open and share that their child is in therapy, a recommendation for continued virtual therapy with the camper's own therapist may be an important consideration. If a camp is in need of a mental health provider or assistance in referrals please feel free to reach out to me. Fingers crossed for a safe, healthy and happy summer!

Crisis Intervention Numbers

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
1-800-273-8255
- **Teen Suicide hotline**
(Thursday's Child National Youth Advocacy Hotline)
1-800-USA-KIDS (872-5437)
- **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Suicide Hotline (the Trevor Lifeline)**
1-866-488-7386

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About the author: Gwenn is a licensed certified social worker with more than 30 years' experience working with children and adolescents, with a specialty in kids in crisis. She received a Bachelor of Social Work from Cornell University and a Master of Social Work from Columbia University. Gwenn has been an integral part of the Brown & Brown Camp Crisis Response Team and has received rave reviews from the many camps she has helped at their time of need.