

From Youth Leader to Staff: Taking Initiative, Preparing, and Sharing Responsibility

This reflection is meant to support former Youth Leaders as they step fully into staff roles. Being staff involves balancing teamwork, shared leadership, and preparation—while staying flexible in a dynamic camp environment. This is about growth and skill-building, not criticism.

1. From Support Role to Shared Responsibility

As staff, even when a Site Director is present, each staff member shares responsibility for the safety, engagement, and emotional tone of the group. Research on child development shows that children benefit from consistent, responsive adults who take initiative rather than waiting to be directed.

- *When you are with a group of kids, what feels easiest for you to step into?*
- *Where do you tend to hold back?*
- *What helps you feel confident taking initiative?*

2. Adult Presence Matters (Especially with a 1:9 Ratio)

With a staff-to-camper ratio of 1:9, children rely on staff to notice, anticipate, and respond quickly. Developmental research shows that children feel safer and behave more positively when adults are proactive rather than reactive. Waiting too long to step in can make situations harder for both kids and staff.

- *What are signs that a situation needs adult leadership sooner rather than later?*
- *How can stepping in early support both the kids and your teammates?*

3. Preparation Supports Flexibility

Some people process information more slowly or need extra time to think things through. That is a valid learning style. In group care settings, research emphasizes that preparation helps all staff respond effectively—even when plans change. Being prepared does not mean rigid; it means having a mental map so you can adapt.

- *What kinds of preparation help you feel ready for the day?*
- *How can you prep ahead while staying flexible when things change?*

4. Initiative Is a Skill You Can Practice

Taking leadership does not mean taking over. It can look like:

- starting an activity
- redirecting a child
- checking in with a teammate
- naming what you see and offering support

Research on teamwork shows that shared leadership builds stronger groups and reduces stress for everyone.

- *What is one small way you could take more initiative with a group?*
- *What kind of support from teammates helps you do this?*

5. Looking Ahead

Growing into a staff role is a process. Preparation, communication, and reflection help build confidence and trust within the team.

- *One strength you bring to a staff team*
- *One area where you are practicing taking more initiative*
- *One question you have about balancing preparation and flexibility*