



# Talisman Summer Camp

*Exceptional Programs... Exceptional Children...*

# Parent Handbook 2022



64 Gap Creek Road, Zirconia, NC 28790  
828-697-6313 (Camp Office) Fax: (828) 697-6249  
[www.talismancamps.com](http://www.talismancamps.com) [info@talismancamps.com](mailto:info@talismancamps.com)

# Welcome Parents and Campers!

Dear Parents,

Welcome to Talisman! As parents you are an essential part of Talisman Programs, and we are looking forward to getting to know you and your camper! This handbook is your guide, full of all you need to know to prepare for camp, and answers to many questions you may have.

In these pages you will find information on how to contact us, program details and policies, camp activities, opening and closing days, medication management, food, and much more.

Look here first for answers to your questions and use this handbook to guide you through the summer and support your camper. Through cooperation and coordination, we can work together to provide your camper with a successful summer. Please call us if you have further questions.

Thank you for becoming a part of the Talisman Family!

Sincerely,

Cory Greene  
Camp Director

Robiyn Mims  
Admissions Director

Linda Tatsapaugh  
Operations Director

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## Talisman Summer Camp

### **Mission**

Talisman Programs provide young people with learning differences exceptional opportunities to increase self-confidence, independence, motivation, and social competence in a safe and nurturing environment.

### **Philosophy**

We are an experiential learning camp that helps children develop physical and social competence in an atmosphere that encourages and supports self-regulation and self-direction. We believe that every child wants to do well, and that every child has unique strengths, struggles, and outlooks on life. In order to help all of our campers reach their potential, we must meet them as individuals, and not attempt to fit them into one mold. Therefore, we use a variety of tools to guide our campers as they strive to meet their objectives in socially appropriate and fulfilling ways. We believe that structure and accountability are critical in this process – as are positive relationships and the recognition of accomplishments – and that as a child's self-concept improves, they will make better decisions, relate better to others, and experience a more satisfying life.

### **Statement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Talisman believes in the dignity and worth of every person. We commit to welcoming, including, and valuing people of diverse cultures, ethnicities, identities, faiths, and socio-economic backgrounds. We strive to create a safe and supportive environment which fosters respect, honesty, empathy, equity and belonging.



## **ACA Camps Set the Standard**

### **ACA Accreditation Means...**

ACA is the only independent accrediting organization reviewing camp operations in the country. Its nationally-recognized standards program focuses primarily on the program quality, health and safety aspects of a camp's operation. ACA collaborates with experts from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Red Cross, and other youth-serving agencies to assure that current practices at the camp reflect the most up-to-date, research-based standards in camp operation. For more parent-focused information about accreditation, visit ACA's site:

<https://www.acacamps.org/campers-families>

# About Talisman Summer Camp

Talisman Summer Camp provides opportunities for youth and young adults who struggle with the challenges of ADHD, learning differences, or Autism Spectrum Disorders to develop physical and emotional competence and a more positive and confident self-image. Our summer adventure programs teach life skills and emotional management, and their application in real life situations. This is done through a variety of Challenge by Choice activities and use of the group process. Challenge by Choice allows a camper to set reachable goals and determine their own level of success through activities such as rock climbing, backpacking, and technical tree climbing. The group process involves using peers, staff, and self as tools for assessing decisions and accepting responsibility for themselves and their choices. This is explained in detail in the Group Process section of the handbook.

During their stay at Talisman, campers have the chance to practice good decision-making as well as what to do when a poor decision has been made. This knowledge can be taken away from the program and applied at home and school to improve relationships with friends, parents, and teachers. Most importantly, this knowledge allows our youth to feel good about themselves and be okay with their own differences. Talisman strives, above all, to provide a positive and fun environment in which our campers feel accepted and successful.

## Our Programs

**Discovery:** Discovery is designed for children ages 6-7 who may have ASD, ADHD, learning disabilities, or social anxiety who have never been to camp. In just seven days, campers' sample many of our popular on-campus activities. The Discovery program model emphasizes both consistency and compassion, as campers build foundational skills in social communication and conflict resolution within a developmentally appropriate peer group. This growth takes place in a safe and fun small group environment where campers can become excited about the activities they try, the friends they make, and the potential they begin to recognize in themselves. This is a great introduction to camp for our youngest campers. (*Very limited enrollment*)

**Foundations:** Foundations is a high-impact program for campers 8-13 with LD, ADHD, and mild behavior issues. Campers participate in a wide variety of activities designed to promote communication and cooperation skills within their group. Our small camper-to-staff ratio ensures that each camper receives the attention he or she needs to be successful. Each day has a focus on individual goals as well as group cooperation to teach the importance of both teamwork and personal development.

**Sight:** Sight focuses on the special needs of youth ages 8 -13 with Autism Spectrum Disorders, who may also have ADHD. The program is designed to increase self-confidence, improve peer and social interactions, and encourage campers to discover and pursue their own unique interests and goals. A structured and comfortable atmosphere encourages participants to feel secure and accepted in their environment, which in turn allows them to learn and have fun. Our goal is to help each child have a fun and successful summer camp experience through making new friends, exploring new interests, and gaining independence.

**Insight:** The Insight program is specifically designed for teens 14-17 with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The program combines on- and off-campus activities to introduce teens to new adventures and experiences. Much like the Sight program, Insight offers a structured and comfortable environment for teens to feel accepted and to help them practice both social and life skills. We focus on independence and self confidence while providing a fun summer camp experience.

**Young Adults:** Our young adults, 18-22 years of age, spend time learning to become healthy and responsible adults in a rustic camp setting. The session is spent developing both outdoor skills such as backpacking, paddling, and rock climbing, as well as problem solving and communication skills. In addition to the adventure activities, our young adults work on independent living skills, job readiness, and exploring educational options after high school. For real world practice and exploration, the group may go off-campus to tour a local community college, see a play, or attend a community event.

**Mountain Odyssey:** Campers ages 13-17 explore the history, folklore, trails, and tales of Western North Carolina.

They travel across the lands of the Cherokee, Pioneers, and Rangers that made this area the first Wild West. Campers take day and overnight trips to discover the courageous, fearless, adventurous, lawless, and fiercely independent people and culture of the mountains.

**QUEST:** This program is a treasure hunt canoe adventure for teens ages 13-17 with LD, ADHD, or Autism spectrum Disorders. The first few days are spent gaining skills in paddling, map & compass, and camping to prepare for water-based adventures on a nearby lake. Searching for treasure on various islands, camping, and working to connect with others will enhance skills sets for friendship, collaboration, and problem solving for each camper.

**Caves & Mining:** Caves and Mining is a great opportunity for teens ages 13-17 to explore new depths and geology this summer. Exploration of several caves across the Southeast focuses on caving technique, environmental education, and the geology and biology of caves. The second part of the trip finds the campers exploring rock and gem mines to learn about and pan for gemstones. Visits may include both commercial mines and panning in nearby mountain streams.

**Tri-Adventures:** Tri-Adventures is a multi-skill course for teens ages 14-17 with LD, ADHD, or Autism Spectrum Disorders. This program provides an in-depth introduction to three popular outdoor sports, while incorporating social interaction lessons into each day. Campers delve into multi-day expeditions in the wilderness focused on canoeing, backpacking and rock climbing. Participants learn to hone their leadership and decision-making skills while building self-esteem in an exciting wilderness adventure.

**Leadership:** Leadership is an invitation-only program for those returning teen campers who have shown great growth and potential in their years at Talisman, who have participated in a Teen Adventure, and are recommended by their staff. Successful completion of Leadership is a requirement for those campers who would like to apply for our Krewe Program. The program includes a paddling or backpacking trip, which the participants are responsible for planning, organizing, and leading. Other activities range from community service to production of a full-campus event. Participants run many elements of this group with guidance from staff on important leadership skills and roles. The Leadership program is a place to fine-tune and build on the social skills, communication skills, and peer group skills that our adolescents have learned throughout their years at Talisman.

**Krewe:** The Krewe program is designed for returning campers who have successfully completed the Leadership program and is an invitation-only program. Krewe focuses on real-life job skills such as time management and accountability as well as learning what it takes to be a Talisman staff! Campers in Krewe are an integral part of making sure camp runs smoothly. They assist with tasks such as helping in the kitchen after meals, transporting laundry, and acting as positive role models for younger campers. Krewe members also learn to manage greater freedom and responsibility. Because of their work contributions, Krewe tuition is about half the price of regular sessions.

# Talisman Contact Information

**Address:** Talisman Programs  
64 Gap Creek Road  
Zirconia, NC 28790-8791

**Phone:** 828-697-6313 (main) **Program managers in the summer:** 828-692-6346

**Email:** [info@talismancamps.com](mailto:info@talismancamps.com) **Program manager:** [firstname@talismancamps.com](mailto:firstname@talismancamps.com)

**Website:** [www.talismancamps.com](http://www.talismancamps.com)

**Contact Policies:** The program managers of each program will call parents once a week to update you on your camper, but feel free to call or email us anytime throughout your child's stay at camp.

Campers do not use the phone unless they or an immediate family member have a birthday while they are with us. We find that phone calls exacerbate homesickness, while letters and emails are a welcome connection with home that campers can reread and carry with them. We encourage letter-writing in both directions.

## Writing to Your Child

We encourage you and your family members to write letters to your camper; they look forward each day to mail call. Consider sending a letter before camp begins, to arrive on the first day (or give it to their program manager). Remember to put the camper's name, program and cabin on the top of the address.

Example: **Suzy Smith, Sight A**  
**Cabin Hoth 2**  
**Talisman Programs**  
**64 Gap Creek Rd.**  
**Zirconia, NC 28790**

## Emails and Photos

We know how important it is to you to feel connected to your child while apart. We are happy to be able to offer you CampMinder's One-Way Email program and Photo Gallery. Using the same secure username and password that you used to enroll your child, you will have free access to our Photo Gallery, which will be updated regularly throughout each session. You may also subscribe to the Email program, which allows you to send a certain number of one-way emails to your child. (We will not print emails sent directly to our email address.) Access CampMinder through our website: find "[Camp In Touch](#)" under **Enrolled Parents** at the top of our website: [www.talismancamps.com](http://www.talismancamps.com)

\*\*Please note that all Teen Adventure programs have infrequent access to our one-way e-mail system, due to being on extended expeditions.

## Care Packages

Care packages shift focus from people to things, add more "stuff" for campers to manage in a small shared space and may contain allergens. Thus, Talisman is care-package-free. **Campers may not receive any type of packages** while they are at camp. All large envelopes, padded envelopes, and regular envelopes containing anything other than your letter are considered packages and will be returned to the sender. If there is a **necessary** item left at home (e.g., glasses), you may mail the package addressed to:

Robiyn Mims  
Attn: *(your camper's full name)*  
64 Gap Creek Rd.  
Zirconia, NC 28790

*[\*Campers remaining for 2 sessions may receive one small package during their in-between session. NO FOOD!]*

# Administrative Staff



## **Cory Greene, Camp Director**

*BS Political Science, Wheaton College*

Cory has over 20 years of guiding and educating children in a variety of settings, beginning with Boy Scout camp. He has worked in wilderness therapy as a counselor and director for the Eckerd Foundation, in the NC mental health system, and in special education for the Buncombe County school system. Cory enjoys helping kids find their way through challenging situations and build on their strengths, and training counselors, parents and professionals how to best support them. Cory leads all aspects of the summer program. The rest of the year, Cory can also be found coaching volleyball and track and spending time with his two wonderful daughters who are growing up way too quickly!



## **Linda Tatsapaugh, Operations Director & Owner**

*MS in Child and Youth Care Administration, Nova SE University; BA in Religion, Davidson College*

While working as a summer camp counselor in college, Linda proclaimed to a director that “I want to be just like you when I grow up!” Little did she know.... Linda worked at Stone Mountain School from its inception in 1991 to 2000, serving as a counselor, program director, human resources manager, and admissions director. While this was very rewarding, she found the high energy and fun of camp to be her passion. She transitioned to be director of Talisman Programs from 2001 – 2012. Linda is a Red Cross instructor trainer in First Aid, CPR and Lifeguarding. She thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail in 1990, and still can’t get enough of hiking – usually with her crazy dog Pepper. In her free time, she gardens, paddles, cycles, and enjoys traveling with her grown son whenever possible.



## **Robiyn Mims, Admissions Director & Owner**

*BS Psychology, UNC Wilmington, MS Clinical & School Psychology, Western Carolina University*

Robiyn’s love for everything summer camp started in the summer of 1998 when she found an amazing way to combine learning, fun and adventure that first fateful summer at Talisman. After working several years with Talisman, Robiyn attended graduate school to study Clinical and School Psychology, where she discovered her passion for understanding and helping those diagnosed with neuro-developmental delays, specifically high-functioning Autism. Since then she has used that experience and understanding to work with families in a variety of settings. Robiyn shares her own adventures with her amazing husband Eddie (also a former Talisman camp staff), their 2 Boston Terriers (Muddy & Grits), and their demanding cat (Bacon). She can typically be found snowboarding, “Jeeping”, traveling to other countries, or generally avoiding housework. Robiyn looks forward to helping you find the perfect camp program for your child!

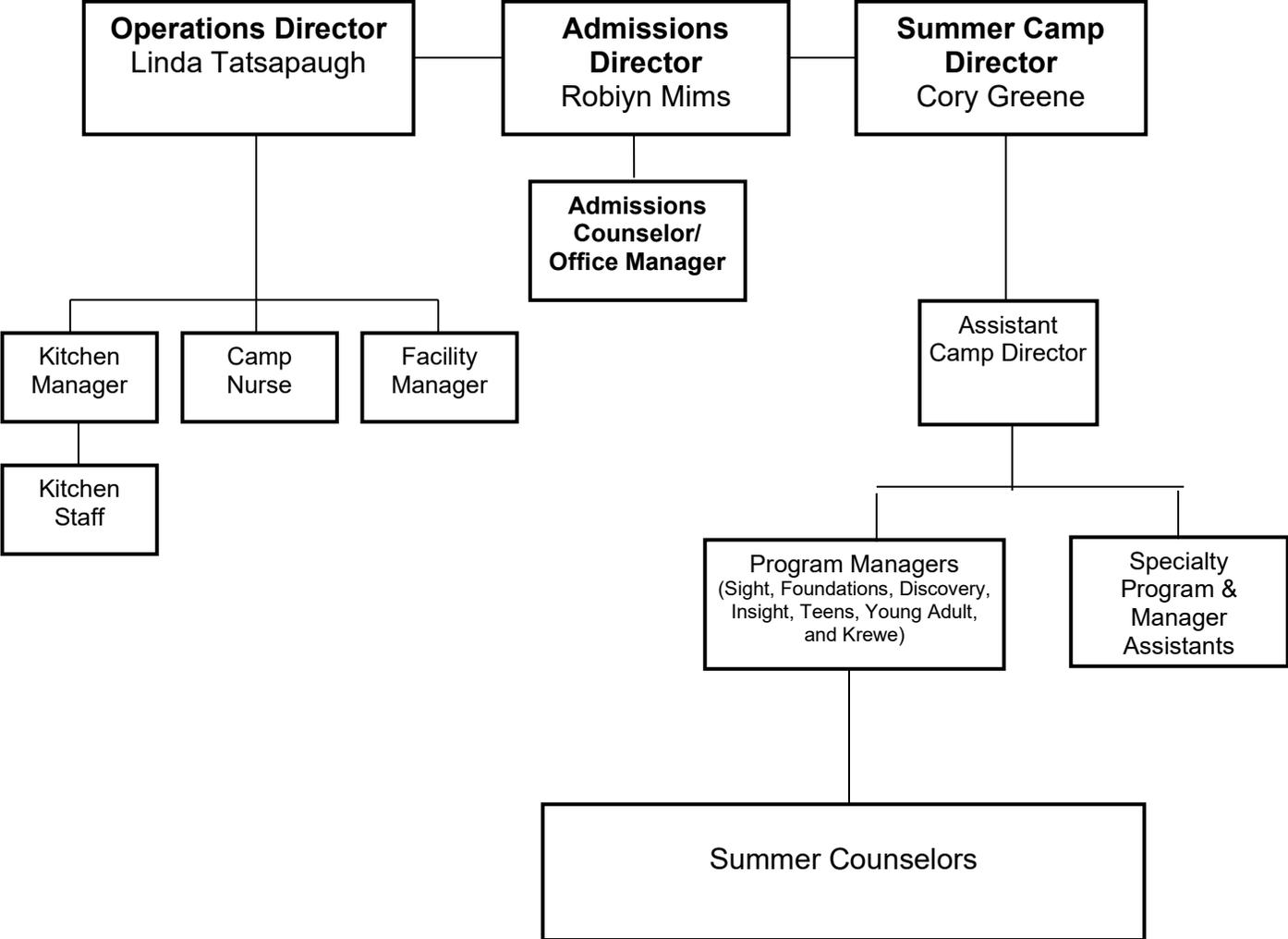
## Our Counselors

Positive and appropriate relationships are crucial to leading children effectively and safely. Our counselors are carefully screened for competence, responsibility, compassion, and understanding of our population. They are typically college students or graduates planning a career in education, psychology, outdoor leadership/education, or social work, who have great enthusiasm for working with our campers. Our counselors come from across the United States and around the world!

Our comprehensive staff training is 2 ½ weeks of high-quality training that includes certifications in CPR for the Professional Rescuer, Wilderness First Aid, Lifeguarding and CPI crisis prevention. Counselors also receive professional-level training on ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, learning disabilities, and other issues affecting our campers. Then, using our interactive training model, staff learn to apply specific strategies utilizing the camp environment to build social skills, independence, and confidence in our campers. All staff go through a national background check and pre-hire drug screening. Many of our staff go on to careers in teaching, counseling and social work – with some returning to work at Talisman each summer!



# Talisman Summer Camp Organizational Chart



# Medication

Many Talisman campers take some form of prescription medication; therefore, it is very important that the administration of medication be a safe and smooth process. For this reason, we have chosen to use **CampMeds** as the packaging company for all campers. You will need to send prescriptions to them, where they fill and package the medications and deliver them directly to us. Each packet of medication has the day, date, time, child's name, doctor's name, and prescription to ensure no errors. Please refer to the [CampMeds.com](http://CampMeds.com) for registration and more information.

**CampMeds'** licensed pharmacy partner accepts most insurance plans and carries a full pharmacy of over-the-counter medications. **Please work with CampMeds to package ALL medications including prescriptions, supplements, and vitamins before your camper arrives.** If CampMeds cannot work with you, call us for another option.

**Summer camp is NOT a good time for a med vacation!** If your child is usually on meds, please continue them for their time at camp, and if possible, do not make changes less than 30 days before camp. There are so many changes and stresses of coming into a new social environment, that chemical changes can really complicate things.

Campers are not allowed to keep any medications, even over-the-counter, on themselves. We provide all regular over-the-counter meds, such as ibuprofen, Benadryl, sunscreen, and bug spray.

Trained counselors in each cabin group carry a week's supply of their campers' packaged meds in their locked med pack, which they wear at all times. They administer meds to their campers and keep a precise record; our nurse oversees the process. This system helps us ensure that all campers receive their meds on time no matter where the group is. It helps the process if meds can be scheduled at mealtimes and bedtime, but we can make accommodations when needed.

Talisman Programs have a strict system in place to ensure that each camper gets his/her medications timely and accurately. When your camper takes medication, it is our policy to watch while they swallow it. No camper is ever forced to take medication. If a camper refuses the medication, we document that refusal and inform the parents and the doctor. This is rarely an issue, as taking meds is a normal part of the day at camp.

## Camp Nurse

We have a nurse on campus seven days a week and additionally we have a nurse and pharmacist on-call through CampMeds, and a local physician serving as medical director. The camp nurse provides all initial care for campers who become sick during camp. Your program manager or nurse will call you to update you if your camper is sick or injured. The camp nurse will also make any decisions necessary for doctor visits or further treatment, in consultation with you as the parent. In an emergency, we will immediately transport your child to the nearest hospital (or call 911 if needed) and contact you with a report as soon as we are able. Our nurse also oversees medication administration, as described above.

# Opening and Closing Day Procedures

Opening and closing days can be hectic and confusing. Follow these guidelines to help us ensure the smoothest possible transition to and from camp.

## **CHECK-IN: 8:45am - 12:30pm**

One month before your session starts, **you will be assigned a specific time** for your child's check-in. We ask you to stick with that time block to keep our morning – and your experience – smooth. All of your child's group will arrive in the same hour, and then can begin their day together.

### WHAT TO EXPECT:

- Staff meet you in the parking lot and take your camper and luggage to settle into the cabin while you are checking in.
- Go to the following parent stations:
  - **Black Top** - Your Program Manager will check you in and make sure we have all paperwork needed. *(Remember to bring your Health Form, Authorization to Treat, and Insurance Card if we do not have them already.)*
  - **Dining Hall** - The Camp Nurse will ask for a health update and check your child's medications from CampMeds with you.
- Visit your child's **cabin** to meet staff and say good-bye to your child. (To ease the transition, we ask that you do not linger once the above items are accomplished.) See you on Closing Day!!

*\*Other family members are welcome, but please don't bring pets. Some campers are allergic, or fearful of dogs. On this hectic day, even the camp dogs take a break*

## **PICK-UP TIME: 9am – 11am**

You will receive a checklist when you arrive. Be sure to do the following things before you leave with your child.

- **Blacktop** - Check out your child with their counselor. Please go over their inventory sheet and make sure you have all your child's belongings.
- **Program Manager** – Gather information on your camper's summer and sign out your camper.
- **Infirmary** - pick up any leftover medicines.
- **Lost and found** – set up in front of the infirmary. *(Check your child's luggage as well; you will be responsible for postage on items mailed back to you later.)*

Please let us know if you will be late as we find it helps to alleviate your child's anxiety if they are aware of your anticipated time of arrival.

Campers who are staying for multiple sessions may sign up to stay at camp between sessions. There is a \$260/day charge for this, and they will participate in a full program of events in a mixed group of campers.

# Transportation to and from Camp

**Please fill out the transportation form on Campintouch regardless of whether your child is flying or coming by car. If you are transporting to and from the airport, they are car riders.**

It is policy of Talisman Programs that all transportation information is confirmed with parents and/or guardians. If your child is flying and we are providing the shuttle, please include all flight information on the transportation form. Talisman also requires that parents pre-pay unaccompanied minor and luggage fees prior to camp or include money for luggage.

## Airport Procedures

We ask that you schedule arriving and departing flights **between 10am and 2pm** into **Greenville/Spartanburg, SC (GSP) or Asheville, NC (AVL)**. If this is not possible, please call us to discuss the best options. We recommend unaccompanied minor service or passenger assistance, especially if your child has never flown alone or has anxiety about the flight. Let us know ahead of time if you are using this service and be sure everything is set up for the return flight. (Prepay if at all possible)

If you are flying with your child, please plan to rent a car and drive to camp. We will want a chance to meet you and show you around our campus. We cannot provide round-trip transport to and from airports for parents.

Camp staff wearing staff shirts with our logo will meet your child in the airport. They carry a document with your child's photo and parent contact information. You will be notified when your child has been placed in our care. Similarly, we utilize a "wheels up" approach when campers leave. This means that you will be notified when your child's plane has left the tarmac and is enroute to their destination. Any flight delays will be communicated to you as well.

\*\*If driving to drop off or pick up your child, please notify us if you will be late. This helps us alleviate anxiety in your child who is anticipating your arrival.

## Lodging



If you and your family are looking for somewhere to stay the day before drop off or pick up, the Asheville area has numerous hotels, B&B's and more. If you are looking for a great hotel close to camp we recommend the Mountain Lodge in Flat Rock, NC, and the Mountain Inn & Suites. The Mountain Lodge offers suite style rooms, a pool, complimentary hors d'oeuvres and a wonderful breakfast. See their website below for a full list of their accommodations. Mountain Inn has rooms and suites and serves breakfast, too.

Mountain Lodge: <http://www.mountainlodgeflatrock.com/>

# Camp Life

## Food Policy

We provide wholesome food that is generally familiar to children (e.g. hamburgers, hotdogs, fresh fruit, sandwiches, bacon & eggs, etc.). We encourage them to accept a no-thank-you helping of everything, unless they are truly allergic to it. They do not have to try it, but we encourage them to consider it, and we celebrate when they do. We do have limited alternatives and will never let a child go hungry. We do not use food as reward or punishment. We do not feed our campers junk food and only occasional sweets. We have vegetarian alternatives and can meet many special dietary needs, including GF/CF. If your camper does have special dietary needs, please call and discuss them with us prior to camp.

To ensure a positive camp experience, campers must be willing to eat at least 50% of main menu items, and at least one meal alternative. Parents of picky eaters please request a menu and work with the camp director.

## What to Bring

You will find a complete gear list in your confirmation packet and on our website. Please read the list of prohibited items before you and your child pack. Call if you have any questions concerning the gear list.

## Prohibited Items

- No weapons of any kind (including pocket knives)
- No drugs, alcohol, tobacco products, or drug paraphernalia
- No mouthwash, cologne, breath fresheners, mints, gum or candy
- No radios, CD players, CD's, or MP3's (if those flying bring them on the plane, they will be held in the camp office until departure)
- No electric or electronic devices (Including e-readers and cell phones)
- No personal food
- No money in personal space (any money brought will be held in a lock box in the office)
- No medication of any kind (staff must hold all medications, even over-the-counter)
- No unapproved clothing
- No aerosols
- No inappropriate reading material

Note: The best way to avoid having anything sent home is to stick with the gear list in your confirmation pack. If you have any questions concerning items to bring, please call our office.

## Laundry

Each group does their laundry together, so please **have your child's name clearly marked** on each clothing item to prevent mix-ups. Every child should have a laundry bag, also clearly marked or monogrammed, in which to put their dirty clothing. Each group's laundry will be picked up and returned on their laundry day; the group takes time that evening to fold and put it away in their trunks. Our expedition programs will only do laundry as necessary to keep campers in good hygiene.

## A NOTE ABOUT CLOTHING AND PERSONAL ITEMS

Camp is a busy place. Over the course of a session, campers visit many places both on campus and off. This sometimes means that campers may misplace their personal items. Through our structured morning routine, close supervision, and seemingly constant reminders, we try our best to help our campers keep track of their personal items. However, campers will sometimes lose items, just as they do at home and school. Although we cannot be held responsible for lost items, every possible effort is made to return **clearly labeled** personal items. **Please do not send your child's best or most expensive clothing.** Expect that all clothing and personal items will get dirty, misplaced, or generally abused through extreme fun and adventure.

## **Bedwetting**

A handful of campers every session have a bedwetting problem due to medication or a slow maturity rate. Talisman will work to help your child alleviate this problem as well as keep it discreet, but we ask that parents please notify us before your camper arrives that this problem exists. We also ask that, for our on-campus programs, you send an extra set of sheets with your camper so that they may have bedding when their first set is in the wash. We recommend that you discuss with your child the possibility of using disposable absorbent underwear, which we can manage discreetly. This is especially important for multi-day camping trips, when using sleeping bags.

## **Birthdays**

If your camper has a birthday at camp, the kitchen staff will bake cupcakes for your camper and your camper's group. If your camper is offsite on their birthday, there will be a special birthday surprise for them. Also, if on-campus the night of their birthday, the camper will have time to call home. As there are many variables in each day at camp, please do not promise your camper any of these things; we may have to make changes due to logistical circumstances. What we do promise is a memorable camp birthday for them.

## **Sunscreen and Insect Repellent**

Staff may administer sunscreen and insect repellent in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. This means spraying insect repellent as needed in the morning and evening, and after time in the pool/pond. To keep bug bites to a minimum, staff may have campers change into a light long sleeved poly pro shirt and pants in the evenings when groups are on trail or outside at night. We use insect repellent with 25% DEET and sunscreen with SPF 30. When bug bites become a serious issue, counselors will apply anti-itch cream and cover bites with bandages if the camper won't stop scratching. If campers are continuing to pick and scratch their bug bites, the camper will be seen by the nurse. If you know your child is prone to bug bites, please let the nurse and counselors know on opening day, so they can enact preventive measures from the start.

# Managing Homesickness

Homesickness is the distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home (Thurber, 2005). For many of our students, building independence is a goal of being at camp. We believe that learning how to manage homesickness is an important step in building that independence. Talisman has been supporting campers with homesickness for over 40 years and, in partnership with families, has implemented several effective strategies. It is important for both you and your child to know that most of our campers have some amount of anxiety about the transition to camp life. Even more importantly, the overwhelming majority of them finish camp having thoroughly enjoyed their experience! In fact, campers who initially were anxious about attending camp often additionally struggle with having to leave! In order to support you and your child in these moments, our staff is specifically trained to deal with the struggles of transition both to and from our camp environment. Based on recent research and our own extensive experience, we feel that taking the following steps will help alleviate potential homesickness:

- **Learn about the program**

Spend time looking at our brochures and website. This will allow you and your child to have a better idea of what to expect as far as the structure of our programs (i.e. where they will sleep, what they will eat, what types of activities they will participate in).

- **Practice time away from home**

Practicing spending time away from home (for at least 2 nights) can prepare your child for camp life. This can take place at a friend's or relative's home, or other safe environment, giving your child a chance to adjust to life outside of their regular home environment. To make it even more fun, have your child try out their sleeping bag (if never tried before), or even try setting up a tarp (what we use for hiking trips) to sleep under in the back yard. Make sure to debrief the experience with your child, asking questions about what went well and what may have been difficult about the experience.

- **Take advantage of webinars and other online resources**

Over the spring and early summer, Talisman offers pre-camp webinars for both parents and campers. Here you can connect with fellow campers and parents, ask questions, learn more about the program itself and be better able to plan for a smooth transition into and home from camp. Campers get their own webinars in which we address questions like "what kind of food do we eat?" "what does my cabin look like?" or "where will I shower?" so that they can start to get to know camp long before they set foot on campus. You can also connect with other families and know what's going on by checking out our Facebook page, Twitter feed, and blog. Or attend our spring open house. Read [Homesick and Happy by Dr. Michael Thompson](#), an amazing book on the insight and benefits of homesickness!

- **Set them up for success**

Part of having a successful camp experience is believing that it will be just that – a new, positive experience and a whole lot of fun! You can help your child get into this mindset by having talks about camp, discussing which activities they think they may enjoy most, and also asking what concerns they may have. However, beyond clearly hearing their concerns and discussing them rationally (i.e., "I really hear you're worried about the hike and that others may go too fast - just remember that other campers will have the same worries, and the staff will make sure to set a pace that works for *everybody*."), you can additionally support them by avoiding making "I'll come get you if you don't like it" contracts. This type of a deal presumes that their camp experience *won't* be successful. Instead, continue to talk about their thoughts and concerns, and help them to think about camp in a positive light.

- **Call or email our camp**

Encourage your child to pick up the phone and call our staff (828-697-6313) or send us an email (info@talismancamps.com). We are always available to talk with you or your child about what camp will be like, answer any questions, and help to support them in the transition from home life to camp life.

# A Typical Day

Every day is different for each program. Most days for the Teen programs involve a good bit of hiking, paddling or climbing, with group members increasingly taking charge of daily tasks. Foundations, Sight, and Insight groups usually get up, clean cabins, do morning chores, eat breakfast, and head out into their day's activity. This could be a field trip to a waterfall, rock climbing, tie dying, swimming, or packing up for a camping trip. On-campus, meals are served in our dining hall, and groups take turns with kitchen clean-up. Group discussions happen throughout the day, to plan for the next activity, to talk about what we learned in the last activity, or to resolve an issue. Evenings are time to wind down and prepare for bed. Cabin and activity groups are age- and developmentally-based, allowing us to practice age-appropriate peer interactions.

## Daily Schedule for Campus-Based Programs

**7:15** - Rise and Shine and dress for the day

**7:30** – Morning Routine

**7:45** – Cabin Clean Up

**8:15** – Morning Group

*Discuss the day's activities, resolve any outstanding issues, and set goals*

**8:30** - Breakfast

**9:15** - Morning activity

*Check cabin calendar for your group's scheduled activity*

**12:15** - Lunch Group

*Discuss the plans for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the day as well as any issues and goal review*

**12:30** - Lunch

**1:30** – Downtime/rest time

*A great time for reading, writing letters or taking a nap*

**2:30** - Afternoon activities

*Check cabin calendar for your group's scheduled activity*

**5:00** – Dinner Group

*Discuss how the day's activities went- is there anything that needs to change?*

*Resolve any issues*

**5:30** - Dinner

**6:45** – Evening Activity

**8:15** – Evening Group

*Discuss how the entire day went – review goals, talk about the positive accomplishments of the day. Briefly review next day's schedule. Resolve any issues.*

**8:30** – Night Time Routine

**9:15** – Flashlight Time

**9:30** - Lights Out! Sweet Dreams

# Behavior Management

At Talisman we utilize a variety of approaches to address problem behaviors. We assess each situation as it arises to determine the most effective approach. Most often, we address issues when they happen, in “group”: we stop what we’re doing and circle up to identify the problem, have the camper take responsibility, come up with some better alternatives, and decide whether there is a natural consequence. Group lets our campers practice expressing their opinions and feelings appropriately, listening to others, taking responsibility for behavior, and problem-solving. Take-5’s are used to allow people the chance to calm down and prepare to come to group. Sensitive issues may be dealt with 1:1 with a staff person. Sometimes coaching is most helpful. Yelling, punishment, and physical discipline are never allowed.

## Natural and Logical Consequences

Talisman does not believe in using punishment to teach a child to make better choices. We use natural or logical consequences so that a child can experience a logical outcome of his choice. We look at what would have happened as a result of the action and consider how to correct the problem. Examples include having to apologize for rude comments or doing extra chores to make up for refusing to do your own. It is also important that a child understand the effects on her own and others’ emotions during any interaction. In the case of a child making a negative comment to another, the child is helped to see the reaction of the other child and then be able to do something to make up for this, like writing an apology or helping the other person with a chore.

There is, conversely, nothing natural or logical to punishment. For instance, making a child run laps for throwing a stone at a building may leave the child questioning why he is running the laps because it has nothing to do with throwing a stone. He may make a better connection if he is asked to stay out of the particular building until he can show respect for the property of others. It is always important to process a consequence with the child to be sure he or she is connecting the issue with the consequence. This is done by first bringing up the issue to the child and asking if he or she knows why it is wrong, then explaining why you feel it is wrong and what needs to be done to make up for it. Once the consequence is issued, we ask the child why he or she is doing this particular action to make up for the issue at hand.

Natural consequences are also wonderful to use in the case of a positive action done by a child. If a child has cleaned up his room without being told, he may be allowed more free time: he has saved the group time in not having to remind him. It is good for children to understand that there is a natural outcome for everything they do, positive or negative.

### Rules for Natural and Logical Consequences:

1. Make them fit the issue and severity
2. Make them appropriate for the age group
3. Don’t let campers dig too deep a hole (too many consequences)
4. Enlist their help in deciding on one
5. Be sure camper understands why they have one and how to complete it

### Some Typical Natural or Logical Consequences:

1. **Disrespect** – apologize; say 5 nice things about that person; do them a favor.
2. **Cursing** – apologize; come up with an alternative word and use it throughout the day.
3. **Refusal to do Chore** – finish own chore before moving on; do the rest of the group’s chores while they move on; get an extra chore.
4. **Refusal to get out of bed** – get up 15 minutes earlier the next day (increase if this isn’t enough); clean up after group meal if late to breakfast.
5. **Disruptive at bedtime** – come outside and run with a staff or sleep outside with a staff if chronic.
6. **Running away from staff** – have to stay within 5 feet of a staff for a period of time.
7. **Inappropriate van behavior** – lose next van trip.
8. **Inappropriate dining hall behavior** – eat rest of meal at the quiet table.
9. **Taking something that’s not yours** – give it back and apologize.
10. **Poor group behavior** – out of group with staff (usually just 5-15 minutes the first offense).

11. **Interrupting or playing in group** – lose voice in group for the rest of that group.

## **Runaway Policy**

Sometimes a camper will choose to deal with stress (like being confronted by peers on an issue or feeling homesick) by leaving the situation. They are considered to be running away once they go out of staff eyesight without permission. Most campers will just seek a place to be alone. In that case, the counselor will follow the camper, have him/her commit to staying where he/she is and attempt to discuss the issue or monitor at a distance if the camper just needs some space.

If a camper leaves the group, a counselor will follow. If the camper runs out of eyesight of the group, two staff will follow. Our main purpose is to ensure the safety of the camper. Generally, they will soon grow tired and calmer and become open to conversation with the counselor, which usually results in turning around before long. Campers who run away are required to walk back as well. If the situation is deemed unsafe, trained staff may opt to restrain the camper to prevent him/her from going further while transport is arranged. If a camper were to leave unnoticed, the local sheriff would be called to assist in apprehending the runaway. This would only be grounds for dismissal if it were a chronic behavior. Generally, the natural consequences for running are to have to remain within arm's length of a counselor at all times, and maybe to work off the time they took from the counselor by doing a chore for the group.

## **Aggression Policy**

**Talisman maintains a policy and attitude of zero aggression, and habitually aggressive students are excluded from enrollment.** While our desire and intent is that aggression never be a primary issue, we are working with campers who have sometimes used aggression to deal with frustration. Therefore, we recognize that it will occasionally occur, and always confront it with appropriate and immediate consequences. These consequences may range from apologies and out-of-group time to 24 hours away from group.

If aggression is significant enough that staff and campers do not feel comfortable being around the camper, he or she is immediately removed from the group. An experienced staff provides supervision and guidance and will determine when the child is appropriate to return to group. The time away is to provide for the safety of others and to allow the camper time to calm down, regain control of him or herself, analyze his or her actions, and demonstrate compliance with camp standards before rejoining his or her peers. The camper will practice using the group process and complying with camp rules while participating in camp work projects. Our intent is to instill the idea that all social interaction, including camp, is a privilege earned through respectful behavior and compliance with publicly-accepted rules. This intervention may also be used with severely non-compliant, defiant campers who substantially disrupt the camp program. If we enact this plan, we will notify parents. It is our goal to allow all campers to successfully complete their summer with us. However, if this intervention proves ineffective, we will discuss early dismissal with the parents.

## **Discharge Policy**

Talisman maintains the right to discharge any camper who is deemed inappropriate for the program. **Parents will be notified 24 hours in advance that they need to remove their child from the campus.** The Director will be in charge of this notification. Most campers give ample warning that they are inappropriate for the program through their actions, and parents will be notified immediately that discharge is a possibility. Once notification is given of the decision to dismiss a camper, parents have 24 hours, unless otherwise specified, to remove the child. Our desire and intent is for a child to never have to be removed from our program but even through a thorough screening process, sometimes unexpected behaviors show up. To prevent early discharge, we ask parents to please be very truthful when answering questions about their child, especially about aggression. Talisman does not want a child to feel failure. If a child does get discharged, Talisman will do all it can to recommend another program. No money is refunded for discharged campers. (Sessions not begun will be refunded.)

# Talisman's Group Process

Talisman Programs use a group format to deal with problem behaviors as they arise over the course of the summer. The process we use has been specifically developed to meet the needs of the campers who typically come to Talisman. Most of it will seem like common sense, especially to a parent of an exceptional child. The following explanation of group will help you understand how we work with your child, and if you choose to use this at home, can guide you in structuring your own groups. Why is this a good tool for you?

1. You **do not need advanced training** to run group (it is not therapy, it is problem-solving).
2. It supports your efforts by adding a **common structure for communicating**.
3. It is **simple** and your child has been practicing group for at least two weeks.

## Group has four major rules:

### 1. **Anybody can and should call "Group" if they cannot work out a problem immediately.**

Unless safety or another serious issue is at stake, everyone should stop what they are doing and form a circle. On the way to group, nobody is allowed to discuss the issue. Once everyone is in the circle, silent, and has appropriate body language, the person who called the group can talk.

### 2. **Talk about one issue at a time.**

When people are angry, they often want to bring up several intertwined issues at once. As we all know, this can be a problem because if we talk about many issues at once, none can get solved.

### 3. **All members of group must use appropriate body language, low voice tone and appropriate words. No members may interrupt.**

You can call them social skills, you can call them social graces, but no matter what they're called, everybody needs to learn those little nit-picky things that help you get along with others. Our campers are often not adept at the rules of conversation. They also may not fully understand the ramifications of doing something as small as taking their hands out of their pockets.

You may literally have to teach them where to hold their hands when they are angry, or how to maintain appropriate eye contact. Then it is important to consistently review how good body language and voice tone are the keys to being listened to. Be clear from the beginning about your expectations in this area.

### 4. **Ideally, all members of group must take responsibility for any inappropriate behaviors under all circumstances.**

Our culture places a great deal of value on rights and freedoms. Sadly, this has sometimes meant that the value of responsibility has been overlooked. Additionally, children with diagnoses hear more about what they can't do or are excused from doing than what they can do. This means is that your children are constantly given subtle messages that they are not responsible for their behavior (e.g., "You can't be calm, you have ADHD."). Children are quick learners, and they often learn that if that excuse works, many others can too (e.g., "He was cursing at me so I punched him...I am too tired, my meds aren't working yet"). When these excuses are accepted, children often believe that they are not responsible for their behavior.

At Talisman, we emphasize that individuals can choose their behaviors. For instance, nobody can make another person yell and curse (Although at times it may seem as if your children are trying their hardest!). We find this to be effective because it breaks down the myth that their behavior is not controllable. Once children can admit that they chose and can control a behavior (i.e., hold themselves accountable), it becomes much easier for them to choose a more appropriate behavior the next time. It is generally a good idea to be very consistent with this. In fact, until the behavior has been taken responsibility for, it is generally not a good idea to allow any comments or questions. However, sometimes it is more effective to take a break, help your child calm down, process the issue one-on-one and return to group later. Do try to resolve all issues before going to bed.

## Step-by-Step Process of Group:

1. Group is called - say "Group" in a tone loud enough that all needed for the group can hear. The person who calls group must be calm and in control of their body and state of mind, and ready to talk about the issue appropriately.
2. Come to group in silence - form a circle (the issue at hand should not be discussed until the group has officially started).
3. Name the issue - the person who called the group needs to begin the group by saying, "I have an issue on so and so for (insert issue here)".
4. Resolve the group -The person who the issue is called on then has one of three options:

**A. Take responsibility for the issue at hand.** The ultimate goal, done by saying, "I take responsibility for (insert issue here) and in the future I will (name a positive way to deal with the issue in the future)." It is important that the child state what they *will* do, not what they *will not* do because the child needs to name a positive action with which they will replace the negative action.

**B. Ask for a time out.** If the child is too upset or refuses to deal with the issue, he may take a time-out. He needs to find an appropriate place within view of the guardians. He may not play and must return to the group as soon as he is ready to address the issue.

**C. Ask the person who called the issue to "please explain".** This should occur if the child does not understand why the issue has been called. Using the term "please explain" is better than asking "why" because it is more respectful and does not allow for the child to make excuses for their behavior. Avoid this being used to get out of dealing with the behavior, by limiting the amount of times that this can be asked during one issue.

5. Issue Closed - Once the person has taken responsibility for the issue at hand and everyone feels good about the response, the issue may be closed by the person who called the group. If a natural and logical consequence is appropriate, assign it at this time. After closing the issue you may then call another issue to discuss or adjourn the group. Remember: discuss only one issue at a time. Bringing up many issues at once may cause confusion and does not allow closure on each issue.

## Glossary of terms

### A Note on The Importance Of Language:

At times, the language used in group can seem tedious, if not mechanical. This is intentional: one of the goals of group is to take the complexities of problem-solving and break them up into steps that our children can handle. Many of you are familiar with the need to break down tasks into steps and give them one at a time. Your child may shut down if faced with the intimidation of dealing with some serious behavior; having a familiar sequence of steps gives them the power to work through the issue. For instance, a camper may think, "First I need to take responsibility, then I need to accept a consequence, and finally I can express my frustrations to mom and dad."

The second value of the language of group is the need to form a connection between discussing a problem and using wisely-chosen words. For instance, if a child is used to saying "I take responsibility for..." in group, then she will be more likely to use that language in other situations.

### **Group Adjourned**

This phrase is the last one spoken in group, and can only be stated by either the person with the last issue or the facilitator. (The "facilitator" is typically the adult. It is that person's job to ensure that the "rules" of group are being followed. Children can facilitate the discussions if they have shown that they can respect the group process) "**Group Adjourned**" is used if there are no more issues, or if the facilitator feels that the group is not being productive.

I have a concern on \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_; I need for you to hear my concern.

This expression is used when someone wants to express something that is not as substantial as an issue, but still needs to be expressed.

### **I hear your concern**

This is the expected response if a “concern” is called on somebody. It is essentially a way of letting them know that you have listened to them, and can understand why they are concerned. Saying this does not necessarily mean that you agree with the person but that you hear what they are trying to say.

### **I take responsibility for \_\_\_\_\_, and in the future I will \_\_\_\_\_.**

As explained above, this is the expected response when an issue is called on someone. It implies ownership of one’s behaviors, and a willingness to accept the consequences of that behavior. It also helps the person to think about more productive and positive behaviors.

### **Issue closed**

This means that no more questions, comments, or concerns may be discussed around the issue at hand. It has been dealt with, and the group needs to move on to the next issue.

### **Natural Consequence**

This is a consequence, positive or negative, which is directly related to the behavior. An example is if somebody knocks over a trash can, his or her natural consequence may be to pick it up. If this was a consistent problem with the trash can, then the consequence may be to empty and clean the trash area.

### **Questions, comments, or concerns on this issue**

This is generally asked after somebody has taken responsibility for an issue and a consequence, if any, has been assigned. While it is generally a good idea to allow questions, comments, or concerns, one must be careful not to let the comments distract from the original issue.

### Words of Wisdom

Remember, it is only the concepts of group which are important. We understand that you are busy and may not have time to hold “Groups” with your family all the time. At the same time, group can be an effective way of communicating. You may choose to use “Group” at some times, but not others. That’s okay. Size of group is not important; it could just be you and your child. You may choose to say “I can see we’re starting to fight; let’s handle this the way you did at camp so that we can work things out more quickly.” It will work sometimes, and at other times it may not, but it is a tool in your parenting toolbox that your child knows well. It is also important that all members of the family, including parents, hold themselves accountable in group. This means that your child may call group on you, and that is a very positive step, because he or she is choosing to communicate a complaint to you in an appropriate way. Your dealing in group both protects the integrity of the process and is a powerful role modeling opportunity.

# TALISMAN PROGRAMS CAMPUS MAP

