



VIII. MENTORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Mentors are hand-picked volunteers who love the outdoors, want to share their knowledge and experiences, truly enjoy people, and are willing to invest in their Camp Charlie family over the course of the weekend. Often, they form bonds with their families that are long-lasting and help make Camp Charlie an experience which lasts in the hearts of the participants.

Camp Charlie mentors are essentially role models and guides for Camp Charlie participants. Mentors should be people-oriented, comfortable with diversity, and willing to teach as well as learn from their families. Mentors help their families learn outdoor skills, sit with their families at meals, and, in some cases, participate in or lead classes.

The success of a Camp Charlie weekend also depends upon a good group of **volunteers** to make the weekend run smoothly and efficiently. Volunteer tasks can include setting up and breaking down campsites and meeting areas, preparing and serving meals, assisting in activities and entertainment, and registering participants.

The Mentor & Volunteer Committee will be expected to:

1. Work with other committees to determine how many volunteers are needed for the weekend.
2. Determine mentor and volunteer qualifications and oversee the application process.
3. Train mentors and volunteers as needed.
4. Work with the Executive Committee to assign mentors to appropriate camper families. Make sure volunteers and mentors have clear assignments and directions for the weekend.
5. Recognize and thank volunteers appropriately.



Determine How Many Volunteers Are Needed

In general, 25 volunteers (including mentors) will be needed to handle 50 participants. As a general guide, plan for:

- One mentor per family; large families or families with small children may require an additional mentor, or a mentor family to provide extra assistance.
- Two cooks/kitchen volunteers.
- One volunteer per family to assist the mentor as needed
- Three volunteers to handle logistics
- Ten volunteers to facilitate programs and activities, evening entertainment, and serve as hosts

Your mentors may be able to perform some of these tasks, but just make sure their schedule is free enough to make tending to their camping families the first priority.

Determine Mentor and Volunteer Qualifications and Oversee Application Process

The success of your Camp Charlie weekend will be determined by the volunteers who run it. Selecting those volunteers will be one of the most important things you do to ensure that your program has the quality you want. Hopefully, recruitment will not be difficult, since the Camp Charlie concept appeals to a wide range of people, including teachers, sportspersons, outdoor enthusiasts, youth leaders and others.

When recruiting volunteers, check for expertise in these areas:

- knowledge and experience in basic camping skills
- strong people skills
- good organization skills
- sensitivity to the needs of beginners
- love of the outdoors and enthusiasm in sharing it
- conservation-mindedness and concern about protecting natural resources
- support for the goals of the Camp Charlie program

All volunteers are required to sign the standard GWF Liability Form, submit a letter of reference, and sign the Camp Charlie Volunteer Policy. In addition, background checks and interviews are required for all mentors. Background checks will be administered by GWF staff.

When selecting mentors and volunteers, some qualities to look for are:

- *Patience*
- *Kindness*
- *Ability to be a role model*
- *Creativity*
- *Knowledge or experience*
- *Dedication*
- *Open-mindedness*
- *Enthusiasm*
- *Willingness to devote time to the program*
- *Friendly and outgoing*

Train Mentors and Volunteers

Provide a packet of information to both mentors and volunteers upon acceptance. In your packet, be sure to include:

- An overview of Georgia's Camp Charlie
- The theme, goals and expectations for the weekend
- A condensed overview of the schedule
- Directions and map of the site in order to facilitate the mentors' familiarity with the area
- If applicable, the rules and policies of the specific campground
- Emergency procedures: Go over policies and procedures for safety and health.

Additional training for mentors may or may not be required. Mentor training sessions allow you to communicate your goals and get to know the people who will be working with you and your Camp Charlie families. These sessions will instill a spirit of enthusiasm and community in the mentors while giving you a chance to go over important topics such as schedules, family needs, and safety and emergency procedures. Some possible activities and subjects to cover at a mentor training are:

- Introduction to Camp Charlie: Briefly give an overview of the Camp Charlie concept, what it means to be a mentor, and the schedule for the weekend.
- Ice Breakers/Team Building: Introduce mentors and staff, get to know each other, and discover one another's talents and interests.
- Walk through the weekend: Go over the weekend schedule, focusing on mentor duties.
- Give an overview of your participants' demographics since many of your mentors and their families may come from varying ethnic, social, or economic backgrounds. Help make your mentors feel comfortable and discuss with them the benefits of interacting with a diverse group of participants. You may want to bring in outside speakers, for example, someone who knows the families/communities you are trying to attract as participants.

Assign Mentors to Families and Give Clear Assignments for the Weekend

Once you have chosen and trained your mentors, you will need to assign mentors to families. Hopefully, by this point in the process, you

During Camp Charlie, mentors need to:

- *Be an example in all you do! Good stewardship is the underlying message.*
- *Be available to answer questions.*
- *Be a friend! Enjoy yourself and your families.*
- *Be aware of safety.*
- *Be sensitive to the needs of your family. Those with small children may need to opt-out of some activities, or just need an additional rest period during the day.*

Remember — the goal is for your group to have a great weekend in hopes they continue getting their family outdoors.

Flexibility is key to success.

are familiar with the various personalities in your group and will be able to best determine which mentors will work well with certain families.

During the Camp Charlie weekend, **mentors** will have a variety of responsibilities. The following is a sample schedule:

FRIDAY:

- Greet families as they arrive. Help them set up camp and get settled.
- Sit with your family at dinner.
- Lead ice-breaker/orientation sessions as needed.
- Establish a comfortable atmosphere for your family.
- Go to evening program with your families.
- Let your families know what will happen over the next few days.

SATURDAY:

- Wake up families if needed.
- Greet families at breakfast.
- Assemble families and outline the day's schedule. If options are available, make sure family members have selected the programs they want to attend and have necessary supplies.
- Dine and participate in activities with family.

SUNDAY:

- Wake up families if needed.
- Assist in leading families in morning activities.
- Assist families in breaking down camp.
- Assist as needed in closing ceremony.
- Assist family with completing survey

Specific tasks for **volunteers** will vary greatly. Make sure committee leaders, especially those in logistics, programs, and food, are in contact with volunteers and clearly define tasks for the weekend. Again, mentors may be able to perform some of these tasks, but tending to their family is their first priority.



At the Okefenokee, campfire treats were very popular with the kids. Mentors are pictured above helping their families assemble ice cream cone treats.

Recognize and Thank Volunteers Appropriately

Notes:

It is always a good idea to recognize and reward your volunteers for their hard work. Camp Charlie volunteers will probably appreciate a Camp Charlie t-shirt or other useful mementos. Perhaps area merchants might donate items or contribute gift certificates. Hosting a party after the event is another nice touch to say thanks. The more personal your effort, the more it will be appreciated. Often, it's the little things that really count.



For Camp Charlie at the Okefenokee, most mentors were professionals from the Georgia Wildlife Federation, US Fish & Wildlife Service, or the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Their formal training, however, is not what made them a great mentor. Their willingness to share a genuine love and respect for the natural world is what made the biggest impact.