

CAMP HARLAM

OPEN AND SAFE Q & A

Q: WHY DO YOU SHARE PRONOUNS WHEN INTRODUCING ONE ANOTHER?

The sharing of pronouns is an easy way to establish that we are a community that values people's gender identities, and we do not take for granted that someone's pronouns are not always clear to the observer. Most youth spaces now ask this question, and while we don't force anyone to share, we find that it is often much appreciated and helps everyone start out on a level playing field.

Q: WILL THERE BE TRANSGENDER CAMPERS IN MY CHILD'S CABIN?

Harlam is a camp that affirms gender identity through living arrangements. Campers are able to choose where they are most comfortable living, with the support of their parents and in collaboration with camp professionals. Staff members are trained in how to manage privacy for all campers who might be living with different body types.

Q: DO YOU ALLOW KIDS TO COME TO CAMP WHO HAVE BEEN HOSPITALIZED FOR SIGNIFICANT MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS?

We work closely with campers, parents, clinicians, and other professionals to determine readiness after a mental health struggle that may have resulted in a hospitalization. We know that with time and the right support, children can return to camp and have a very successful experience. We hope to be a supportive and nurturing environment for kids on their mental health journeys, recognizing that while Harlam is not a therapeutic camp, camp can be therapeutic. We also talk with families about helping their child be able to "tell their story" in a way that does not put any pressure on their peers to do more than be a listening ear and a supportive presence.

Q: WHEN THINKING ABOUT INCLUSION, WHAT IS THE "YES UNLESS IT HAS TO BE A NO" PHILOSOPHY?

We strongly believe that if you wish for your child to be a part of our camp community and believe that they can adhere to the expectations, then we can be creative and innovative about how we provide accommodations for them to be successful. We know that navigating a neurotypical world for a special needs child often results in bumping up against a lot of closed doors. We don't want Harlam to be one of those places. If we cannot welcome your child to Harlam, it is for a very good reason, usually because we do not feel we can adequately keep your child safe given their ability to manage their own behavior.

Q: HOW DO YOU CREATE PRIVACY AT CAMP?

Every living space has a private changing area for those who seek it. Though we know that camp can tend to be a place where kids change freely in front of each other, and feel free in their bodies, we know that this is not comfortable for everyone, and we encourage kids to be discreet and maintain privacy as their counselors supervise shower hour and bedtime, as well as other unstructured periods throughout the day.

Q: WHY DO YOU ASSIGN BUNKS BY GENDER IDENTITY RATHER THAN BY BIOLOGICAL SEX?

We recognize that children who have a different gender expression than their biological sex assigned at birth may feel more comfortable bunking with other children who express themselves in a similar manner to themselves, but this is not always 100% true. We know that the LGBTQ adolescent

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population has a rate of 23% expressing suicidality. We know that camp and the sense of belonging it provides can be a powerful protective factor for these children.

Q: WHEN DO YOU THINK YOU'D BE ABLE TO OFFER AN ALL-GENDER BUNK? WHO WOULD BE IN IT?

We are confident that we will be able to offer an all-gender bunk when there is a critical mass of campers in the same age range who are interested. Because bunk size at Harlam is usually 12-14 campers, we feel philosophically that we would not want less than 6 campers in this cabin and would not want to mix ages more than two grades.

Q: HOW DO YOU HELP CAMPERS UNDERSTAND WHEN PRONOUNS/NAMES MIGHT CHANGE MIDSUMMER? WOULD YOU CALL HOME TO SHARE THAT INFORMATION?

We help campers understand that at Harlam you get to be the best version of yourself – and sometimes camp gives you the freedom to explore parts of your identity that might be different than in prior summers, or than it is at home. We respect a camper's desire to go by different names or pronouns at camp as a way of honoring that choice and demonstrating respect. We also honor a camper's decision to be able to share that with their parents if they choose to. We recognize that campers who are exploring gender are on a journey, and we see camp as a place that affirms identity.

Q: HOW DO YOU PAY ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT EVERYONE DOESN'T COME FROM A TWO PARENT OR HETERONORMATIVE HOME?

Our staff are trained to not assume anything about a camper's homelife, unless explained in the "Dear Counselor" letter that families submit. We teach our staff that campers come from a variety of backgrounds: same sex parent households, living with grandparents, and single parent homes are just as common as two-parent households of different genders. When talking about home, or encouraging campers to write home, staff will say something like "write home to your grownup" or "send a letter to someone at home who loves you and will be happy to hear from you" or "time to write home to your family".