***New Beginnings First Day***

**Title:** First Day of New Beginnings Camp

**Why:**  This day sets the tone for camp, and potentially for the whole High Rocks experience.

For families:

* Make them feel safe and excited about dropping off their girls!
* Have some context for the program and the camp so they can understand their daughter’s experience and talk with her about it afterward (the first day begins this process; it continues on the last day with parent conferences, etc.).
* Build family investment in the program overall, including letting them know about what they will be expected to volunteer for.

For staff:

* Get a feel for the group dynamic of the staff “in action” and troubleshoot logistics
* Build leadership and responsibility for the whole camp among the whole staff—everyone steps up as needed
* Begin to get a feel for the group of New Beginnings girls as a whole, begin to observe group dynamics that will affect the camp and their classes
* Meet each girl and begin the process of making connections; this includes each camp staff person presenting herself or himself, being mindful of the power of first impressions and personas
* Make logistic adjustments based on how many and which girls show up
* Deal with any crises, melt-downs, homesickness among girls

For JCs:

* Practice their leadership roles in the context of the New Beginnings group, including beginning to get over their own shyness, self-consciousness, etc.
* Meet the new girls and help them get settled in
* Take ownership of HR and the HR experience by starting the process of passing it on

For New Girls:

* To make each girl feel proud of being at Camp and begin to build her identity as a High Rocks Girl. To help girls feel ownership of their own camp experience.
* To begin to build a feeling of belonging and safety among the girls as a group.
* To orient new girls to High Rocks, both logistically--where things are, schedules, ways of communicating--and culturally--how people talk to each other and interact.
* To have girls engage in genuine and thoughtful conversation about something (themselves, their schools, ideas…whatever).

**Goals:** Primary: For every family to leave the campground feeling confident in the program and proud of their daughter’s participation. To set expectations, through modeling, for both staff and girls of what is expected at High Rocks in terms of individual engagement, group participation and emotional safety (even if everyone doesn’t get there on the first day). Demonstrate the High Rocks value of being silly and not being “cool” all the time. To accomplish something as a group that girls’ feel proud of and is a significant shared experience.

Secondary (these may have to be postponed or take a backseat to the primary goals): Plans, logistics and schedules to be tweaked as necessary. Girls, staff, and JCs meet each other and begin to learn names and faces. Girls get settled into their shelters and have a “home” at camp. Girls get their schedules, get oriented to the campground. Girls start to get to know their pods and support each other as sisters.

**References:**

Outdoor education/adventure education/ropes course methodology.

High Rocks group building—having a group work together first, do something hard, have a goal, so they have something beyond themselves and their image as a basis for connecting and talking about.

TRIBES (in the sense of building group ownership of experience)

Adlerian psychology of groups and identity

**“Before You Begin” or Skills Required:**

Main skill sets required directly for first day activities:

* Group building techniques (Tribes-based)
* Sparkle and Charisma in the classroom
* Sharing power with students
* Giving GREAT instructions
* Effective discussion facilitation
* Offering choice within learning and lessons
* Reflective listening
* Disengaging from power struggles with students
* Dealing with problems: Smokers and Cell Phones
* Contracts: Honor codes, group agreements and consequences
* Mentoring an intern or new teacher
* Openings and closings
* Mentoring students
* Ways to connect (specific things you can say, etc. -- maybe this is mentoring)
* Using older students to help facilitate (JCs)

**First Day Lesson Plans:**

**Before you go:**

1.       Pre-Planning –

Before the first day of camp, you should have the list of all the girls you are expecting, and have checked in with them and their families by phone about a week before camp to answer questions, confirm they are planning to come, make sure they have a ride, and get them excited.

All staff, interns, and JCs should have a schedule specific to the first day, knowing—as best as we can—who is “on” and when for directing traffic, meeting parents, running the parent meeting, getting kids settled in, preparing food, facilitating, logistics (making phone calls, running supplies up/down the hill, etc.), and facilitating activities with campers. Having a couple of extra hands in the kitchen is essential; can have volunteers.

JC training should be completed and the JC schedule worked out. JCs (along with interns, AmeriCorps, etc.) should be prepared to be smiling faces at the campground from the moment girls arrive and should be clear on the importance of going up to say hello, know who is living where and how to help get campers settled in, etc.

All staff have completed staff day, including reading applications for incoming girls, getting assignments for their “pods” so they know what girls to make special outreach to, and all have their own sleeping assignments, schedules, class plans and supplies, etc.

2.       Partnership Development –

It’s possible (but not required) that you may want to bring in a guest to do something special on the first day. A group-building exercise, a craft project, or some special facilitated activity might work great led by someone with some kind of specialized knowledge, and can “buy” core staff time to meet with interns, figure out last minute schedule and pod changes, get their class spaces together, work with horses, etc.

Downsides are that you’re missing a chance for new girls to start building relationships with people who are going to be there all through camp; upside that the girls (and JCs) can have something that is their own group experience, separate from staff.

This only works if what is offered is REALLY GOOD and the person who is leading it understands the goal of their activity in the context of the whole camp (and/or it is co-planned and co-facilitated with a solid staff member). If you decide to go this route, the person leading should be part of conversations and the staff day, all the staff should understand what it is the girls will be doing; maybe that person could even facilitate a version of the activity with the staff on the staff day....

3.       Student Recruiting methods and materials: (See recruiting! ☺ )

4.       Materials and Supplies:

Campground prepared (kitchen clean & stocked, outhouses pumped, cabins and classrooms set up)

Camper notebooks with schedules, class lists, sleeping arrangements taped in

Water bottles and bags counted out and ready to distribute; tape and markers to label

Name tags (labels and markers)

Binder with contact/med forms at picnic shelter, medication bags, labels, and forms ready

Tee shirts, enough for everyone in a variety of sizes

Handout for parent meeting prepared, including mailing address, phone numbers (see network)

Craft supplies (magazines for notebook collage, materials for mobiles, paint for rocks, whatever…)

REALLY good lunch planned, lots of yummy easy snacks ready to go, water and lemonade available

**Plan or Agenda:**

First Day Plan – Overall goal is to keep the girls busy and moving! Spaces for one on one conversations are built in, but focus in on keeping things in groups.

8:00 Staff, Interns, JCs ready to go at picnic shelter.

10:00 Girls Arrive Check in stations…

* Traffic directing and greeting - hugely important! This is the first friendly face parents and girls see and where you start building relationships with families.
* Snacks –available for staff and also parents and girls. Keep up the energy and make it feel like home.
* Medications, forms, update parent contact info – Key for safety and camp administration. Double check all med forms and make sure someone totally understands each girl’s medication, allergies, needs, etc.
* Name Tags, Label Bags and Bottles --a chance to make each girl feel special and welcome as they personalize their own things.
* Meet your JCs and move in

11:00 Parent Meeting (Notes from Susan, Sarah?)

Some kind of group building activity with girls

Name Game in the Field

Circle activity, break out into groups (not pods)

Perform for judges ( *Zonies)* to go first at lunch

12:00 Lunch in Pods - Give them an activity.

Sitting in pods lets them start to make connections with the people they will be going to sleep next to that night. It also takes away the stress of who sits with who, etc. Even though kids may roll their eyes at having everything facilitated, it reduces social pressure in terms of girls figuring out what to talk about, and keeps them out of talking about school, boys, friends, etc. It also helps JCs, interns and new staff, who sometimes don’t know how to engage with girls right away, or aren’t skilled enough to facilitate a casual conversation to make sure everyone gets to talk and listen.

Past activities:

Animal drawing activity—everyone draws and animal that represents something about who they are, then the pod members combine parts into a drawing and name. Kind of silly and simple, encourages imagination and active creativity. This gives some space for girls who process better with a little bit of quiet and also ensures everyone speaks and listens as each person presents their animal, which makes facilitation simple. Some girls felt self-conscious about their drawing skills or didn’t know what to do for theirs.

Name your pod and/or make a mascot—builds “pod identity,” also encourages silliness and creativity. This needs to be facilitated more carefully, since it’s a whole group conversation, to make sure everyone’s ideas are heard and no one is dominating the group (including the JCs).

Fishbowl—each table has slips of paper with questions or discussion prompts. You can have each person pick a question, read it aloud, and then everyone at the table goes around and answers that question OR each person chooses a question and picks one other person at the table to ask it to OR each person picks a question and answers it for herself. The questions should be thoughtfully chosen to be interesting but not too hard to answer. Maybe girls group facilitators could write these questions and test them on the staff ahead of time.

1:00—2:10 Horses (*Zonies)* or Crafts

2:20—3:30 Horses or Crafts

1:00-3:30 JC class

3:40 Snack in campfire ring, Decorate Platforms (JCs)

4:20-5:05 Collage Journals or Collect Solo Rocks

5:15-6:00 Collage or Rocks

6:10 Skit Practice in Pods (animate your pod animals) *JCs and Interns*

7:00 Dinner – JCs model gratefuls

8:00 Jobs intro and do jobs with JCs

8:45 Campfire*—some ideas:*

*“Whose story is it?” little group and big group bonding. This is fun to play on the first day because people don’t all know each other yet. It’s a low-stakes way for people to share something about themselves and also to perform.*

*JCs c*

9:30 Head to bed

9:45 Tuck ins (JCs and interns)

10:00 Lights out.

1.       Opening  
2.       Sections of the lesson  
a.       Section topic and goal  
b.      Facilitation Strategy  
3.       Plan B  
a.       If you have extra time  
b.      If you run out of time  
4.       End product  
5.       Evaluation  
6.       Closing

Schedule or timeline  
**Resources:**  
1.       Evaluation for students  
2.       Evaluation for facilitator  
3.       Relevant websites, research  
4.       Powerpoints, articles, etc.  
5.       Photos  
6.       List of partners, partnership descriptions and contact info  
**Tips for promoting youth voice in this lesson:**  
  
Most plans will be framed in terms of ideas, suggestions, and examples; even detailed plans will  ideally include a couple of options for the teacher. For example, the lesson plan might include ideas of two or three different “Openings” that could be used based on the group size, energy, time available, or other factors.

**High Rocks Context:** New Beginnings (previously “First Year Camp,” and before that…”Camp” ☺ ) is the foundational High Rocks experience, the core from which all the rest of HR grew. New Beginnings Camp was originally designed as a stand-alone program to prepare 13 year olds to enter high school feeling smart, confident, and supported by a peer group that was based on mutual respect and positive connections, not images and gossip. It still serves the overall purpose of empowering girls as they transition toward high school, but now also functions as a “doorway,” setting the context for the rest of High Rocks programs. New Beginnings has changed throughout the years, but of all High Rocks programs, it might remain closest to its original form.

There have been some general changes over the years in terms of the first day activities. The first year or two, the focus was really on Outward Bound, wilderness challenge style introductions, like ditch digging and rock climbing—“Are you tough enough for the High Rocks?” At some point, staff and board members (Ruby, especially) questioned whether the number of girls that were scared off by these activities was not worth the empowerment and satisfaction girls got from doing them.

The compromise was to drop the super-intense physical challenges, but keep what was important about them in terms of group building. First day became focused on completing one or more ropes course style group building challenges (spiderweb, get everyone on the block, etc.). These could literally take all day, and were heavily facilitated, but by only one or two staff members. This was good for creating a shared group identity apart from the staff, but the level of exhaustion (both facilitators and girls) and frustration among the girls could be an issue. Also included on the first day was a walk to the knoll and a girls group, where girls took M&Ms and then had to say nice things about themselves for each M&M they took.

The shift away from physically difficult team-building and the knoll walk was largely driven by Barbara McFadden, who came to do Girls Group at NB based on a TRIBES model, which prioritized safety and inclusion. A hike on the first day, or group building based on physical challenges immediately put out of shape or overweight girls literally at the back of the line, which was a problem before girls had bonded and formed a group that would support each other (like what happens on the hike later on in camp).

Over the past several years, there has been a focus instead on safe, low-impact group activities that got people to laugh together, be silly together, and perform a little bit, but don’t have the same challenge and high stakes feeling as the wilderness or group building challenges—i.e. name game with dance moves. There were experiments with doing facilitated discussion groups about camp, cliques, etc., but those haven’t really stuck.

There’s also over the past several years been a shift toward doing some smaller group activities on the first day, based in pods rather than whole group. Pods did drawings and facilitated activities within their own small groups—like drawing an animal that represented your self—that would be brought back to the whole group. These were good because it mixed up the groupings, so girls were connecting with different girls throughout the day, made it easier to make sure every single camper was engaged and participating, and was a way to do some neat activities (like drawing and sharing) that couldn’t be done well in a large group; these smaller groups also helped facilitate girl-JC-staff connections. There is some trade-off of not building the whole group or giving a collective shared experience that girls can draw on for the rest of camp.

Another thing that has developed over the last few years is having girls actually go to their classes on the first day. This has some of the same advantages of the other small group activities, helps get girls invested and excited about what’s coming up at camp, gives teachers a little bit more time and breathing room for their class plans, and helps get girls oriented to the schedule, switching classes, and the layout of the campground and property.