

COUNSELING AT THE MUSLIM YOUTH CAMP OF CALIFORNIA

www.muslimyouthcamp.org

Since 1961 the Muslim Youth Camp (MYC) has aimed to be a place where each individual feels a valuable and loved part of the whole Muslim community. Counselors are essential to creating this environment by comforting, inspiring, and guiding young Muslims. The counselor's work is to create a relationship of encouragement and trust with each camper and to create a friendly, supportive relationship between members of the cabin group. The MYC counselor is one who:

- a) supports campers through respect and compassion for each camper's personal growth.
- b) guides campers by providing tools for resolving personal and social concerns.
- c) inspires faith in God (Allah *subhana wa ta'ala*)
- d) nurtures a healthy bond of friendship between campers.
- e) connects the group with the entire MYC family.

Being involved and concerned from the first minute will put the counselor on the path to developing a good relationship with his/her counselees and establishing trust. It may not be possible to solve a camper's problems (remember we only have one week), but what is important is for the counselors to demonstrate their care and hopes for each camper without judgment, conveying that God's help is always near.

Although we do not expect counselors to be experts or scholars of Islam, we do ask that counselors have some knowledge about basic Islamic beliefs, practices, and ethics because campers often have questions related to these issues and often confide in counselors before their teachers. MYC values a diversity of Islamic thought, cultural backgrounds and levels of Islamic practice because it seeks to provide real learning about Islam and Muslim life. MYC seeks to create a safe space for campers to sincerely ask questions without feeling judged. Thus, counselors are asked to gently inform where necessary, respectfully discerning the counselees' stage of religious development. Alternatively, the counselor may guide counselees to teachers with requisite knowledge to answer the counselee's questions.

The MYC staff members, including counselors, are selected because they practice love and respect for one another as Muslims and serve as an example to the campers. MYC expects all staff and campers to observe the camp rules and participate in group rituals such as the five daily prayers (*salāh*) and supplication prayer (*du`a*) before meals, and to follow guidelines for modest and kind interactions with the MYC family. Counselors must therefore assume the responsibility of helping the camp establish these norms and themselves serve as models for their counselees.

Counseling at MYC is a delicate balance of developing a big-brother/big-sister relationship with counselees while maintaining a certain degree of authority in order to ensure safety and to stick to the greater camp schedule. Sometimes the biggest challenge is to get 9 year-olds to remember to brush their teeth! Counselors are also the first line of safety when it comes to watching out for illegal substances, abuse or disregard for camp rules.

The counselor's job can be tiring, taking care of the campers all week, day and night, but it is rewarding and enlightening. Many counselors say they learn a lot about themselves during this week and that they develop special bonds of trust and closeness with their counselees. They also feel they are contributing to developing the potential of the most amazing of God's creations, the human individual. For these reasons and many more, the Muslim Youth Camp has become a home that stays in the hearts of its campers from year to year.

CABIN GROUPS:

Each counselor works in a team of two to four and is assigned to a cabin group of approximately eight to twelve campers. Cabin groups are divided by grade: Junior (grades 3-6), Junior High (grades 7-8), Senior (grades 9-10), Senior High (grades 11-12), and College. We pair each counselor with peers from different ethnic, linguistic, and social backgrounds, personalities, and Islamic outlooks. In this way, counselors benefit from each other's strengths in their cooperative effort to make the most of the MYC experience for the camper. Together, they demonstrate the diversity of the Muslim community, and at the same time, the unity of faith in God.

COUNSELOR TRAINING:

To help each counselor develop his/her own skills, MYC requires counselors to attend a one-day training workshop the day before the camp begins. MYC recruits specialists in child development, education and psychotherapy to participate in the pre-camp training for counselors. In addition counselors will have an opportunity to refine their skills and ideas through training and meetings scheduled throughout the week of camp.

ELIGIBILITY AND SALARY

Applicants must have completed at least one year of college and be at least 18 years of age. A letter of recommendation from a previous or current MYC staff member is preferred. Contact Amira Quraishi, head of counselors, at counseling@muslimyouthcamp.org for more information.

MYC is operated entirely by volunteers. Regretfully, MYC does not currently have the funds to pay counselors for their time and effort. MYC can, however, waive the registration fee.