

PROGRAMMING TRENDS AND TIPS

CCCA members share new ideas and resources

Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon



I don't know if anyone could pinpoint the origination of the game Capture the Flag, but it feels like it's been part of camp life forever! And while there's no harm in continuing a game that keeps kids engaged and creates lasting memories, we know programs need to incorporate fresh ideas continually. Whether it's a new game or resource or integrating program themes across the rest of a camper's experience, program staff are always looking to innovate. ►

We asked several program staffers across the CCCA membership what trends and new ideas they are discovering, creating and implementing in their camps and conference centers. Here are a few of the responses we received.

Games and Icebreakers

Happy Salmon

Willie Felderman, program director at Iowa Regular Baptist Camp (Ventura, Iowa), recently converted the card game Happy Salmon into a large-group game (that was used with groups of about 500 campers last summer). “We had games that would last 35 minutes,” he shared, noting that the game was fun and energized for the duration. (Of course, his program team lives by the rule to kill something before it dies.)

The cabin leaders and other staff are usually equipped with a deck of Happy Salmon cards to play with smaller groups during downtime or as an ice-breaker. There are four kinds of cards in a deck: high five, fist bump, happy salmon and switch it up. When everyone draws a card, they must find someone with a matching card, complete the action on the card and then they’re able to drop that card. Whoever is out of cards first is the winner.

Felderman envisioned how they could play the game on a large scale. He recreated the cards with the same four tasks using different graphics, made enough for eight teams to have 100 cards each and laminated the cards to last through the summer.

Each team received a stack of 100 cards, and for each round, a leader handed a camper a card from the deck. All the campers with cards ran into the center of the game area to find someone else with the same card, perform the task and then run back to their team. It repeated over and over until a team ran out of cards — and they were crowned the winning team.

Felderman loves the game because “it’s loud and chaotic and it forces you to interact with people.” He said it’s a simple game to execute, and it opens people up and gets them connecting. Another benefit, “You don’t have to be athletic to play it,” Felderman added.

Whipped Cream Whiffle Ball

At IdRaHaJe (Bailey, Colorado), Travis Badding, summer program supervisor, shared a new addition to the camp’s program. When the team needed a new activity for the high school camp, he wanted to bring in a classic game, but with a twist. At first, they tried whiffle ball in a “matt-ball style,” where any number of people could be on a base at once, and there were no forced outs. “The game did OK, but the campers weren’t fully into it,” Badding shared.

After talking with some co-workers, the team joked about adding whipped cream inside the ball on every pitch, so on a whim, Badding gave it a try. Whipped cream whiffle ball was born, and it was an immediate hit.

“One thing we learned was to have a five-gallon bucket of water next to the pitcher and have a staff person in the pitcher position to control the whipped cream usage and wash the ball off before each pitch,” Badding explained. ►

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Photo courtesy of Camp IdRahale



Whipped Cream Whiffle Ball



Photo courtesy of Camp IdRahale

Photo courtesy of Iowa Regular Baptist Camp



Happy Salmon



Photo courtesy of Iowa Regular Baptist Camp



Be a Better Facilitator

5 ideas for facilitating more effectively

by Jim Cain, Ph.D.

1. **Simplify.** If you require more than five minutes to present an activity, you have probably lost some people in your audience. As a facilitator, your role is to make things easier, simpler, clearer, better.
2. **Adopt the “Abundance Mentality.”** The abundance mentality implies that there is enough for everyone and that it is a good idea to share, so share what you know freely with everyone. When I do this in my books, emails and conversations, I often receive feedback and suggestions for further improving my activities, skills and ideas. [Editor’s note: Share your ideas on the Camp Forums in My CCCA for the benefit of all members.]
3. **Be comfortable with silence.** There is a natural tendency for new facilitators to talk too much and too often. I recommend that facilitators become comfortable with silence. Don’t rush to fill silence with your own words. If you are patient, someone in the group will eventually speak.
4. **Retire what doesn’t produce.** In the same way that some people create a to-do list, it can be helpful for a facilitator to create a not-to-do list of activities and training methods that do not work for them. I encourage facilitators to retire activities that do not produce the desired teachable moments or outcomes.
5. **Take your time.** Don’t be in a hurry to go on to the next activity if the one you are currently in is producing valuable results with the group. One of the basic mistakes made by new facilitators is to rush through a pre-planned series of activities so participants have the full range of experiences during the event, minimizing the richness of the experience with any specific activity. It is more important (in my opinion) to pull the full measure of value from an activity than to rush on to another activity.



Team-building guru Dr. Jim Cain is the author of 29 well-loved books filled with team and community building activities. His real-world, in-person, train-the-trainer events are legendary in the adventure-based learning community, and his virtual activities are used around the world. Jim’s most recent books include Extraordinary Facilitation, The Teambuilders Toolbox, The Adventure Trail and Rise Again: The Story of the Mary Ellen Carter.

Escape Rooms (in a Bag)

Providing a fun activity for groups (especially for those who aren't looking for athletic challenges) is an essential part of programming. For the past few years, Chris Kallal, executive director at Southeastern Baptist Youth Camp (Greensburg, Indiana), has been dreaming up and putting together creative escape rooms that can happen anywhere at camp.

After building a physical escape room at his previous camp, Kallal realized that while it was a popular activity, it could only serve one cabin group at a time. That's when he started to create escape bags instead. Kallal finds a bag to inspire a theme and then creates puzzles and clues to help the group accomplish the goal. Every bag is different, and all of them are accessible for any group to grab and use (and come in handy on rainy days when outdoor activities are limited).

In addition to escape bags like the 80s-themed fanny pack or the diaper bag, Kallal is developing what he calls "Mystery Trails," a series of puzzles that need to be solved along a hike on the property.

Kallal spent 10 years as a program director at his first camp and loves to build and create things. With 23 years of camping ministry under his belt, Kallal is still like many other program people, sharing with other camps what he discovers and invents. In fact, on his website, www.stealthisstuff.com, CCCA members can download any of his books or plans for free using the coupon code *happycamper* at checkout. You'll find the escape bags and several other games, activities and books perfect for summer camp. ►

Photo courtesy of Southeastern Baptist Youth Camp



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Tap Into Tech Tools

Free and affordable resources to serve your camp

At Grace Adventures (Mears, Michigan), program consultant Abby Banfield said they recently got the internet on their property “for better or worse!” The team has utilized it in new ways with their adult guest groups by creating a Linktree landing page that contains everything they’d typically include in a printed program (and more).

At www.linktree.com, you can sign up for a free account to create a custom landing page with as many links as you want. In addition to the ability to use colors and logos that represent your brand, you can reorder the links and add or delete links as needed, which is perfect if you’re serving a different retreat group each week.

“We post the link using a QR code on our wall schedules, welcome booklets and around campus,” Banfield explained. On the Linktree landing page, they present the schedule, workshop information, announcements and anything else

they want to include, such as a summer staff recruiting page. It also makes it easy to communicate changes to the schedule since it is all online and not in print.

Another resource Banfield and the team at Grace Adventures have implemented (and has proven to be a game-changer) is www.canva.com. An online design platform, Canva allows you to design everything from social media graphics and flyers to posters and ads.

Canva offers a free version for nonprofits that is worth exploring. Banfield’s team opted to pay for an account that allows them to see one another’s designs and templates. The platform gives you the option to create a style guide with your brand’s logo, colors and preferred fonts, making it easy for anyone across the camp or conference center to create graphics for print or online that feel cohesive.



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship

At Grace Adventures, Banfield said that since they recently got internet service on the property, they've discovered ways to use it in programming for their adult guest groups. Her team implemented Aha Slides for trivia games. "Our favorite game has been *Bacon Bits of Truth*, a men's retreat stage game where participants answered bacon trivia questions," Banfield said.

In December, they created a trivia game for their staff Christmas party, and everyone had a blast. Banfield's team also used Aha Slides during winter blast retreats with 90s-themed trivia. The youth leaders competed in the game while students cheered them on. (Since they don't allow campers to have phones, they only use these kinds of games with adult players.) Most recently, Banfield emceed CCCA's Michigan sectional and used Aha Slides to unite more than 190 attendees in a fun icebreaker.



Anyone who was at TOGETHER, CCCA's national conference in December 2022, experienced Boomwhackers for themselves and know how fun these musical tubes can be.

Ingham Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camps (Milford, Iowa) was a lucky winner of a set of Boomwhackers at TOGETHER. Director of Programs Dan Antoine said the camp is planning to use them this summer.

If you're still not sure what Boomwhackers are all about, Antoine says to "think of it like a kid's version of a bell choir." At Ingham Okoboji, Antoine's hope for Boomwhackers is "to utilize for camper worship services, campfires and talent shows for our youth and family camps." Antoine adds, "Without a lot of time, camper groups can use the set and play a simple song, like 'Jesus Loves Me' or 'Amazing Grace.'"

You can learn more at boomwhackers.com and find dozens of song books if you search “Boomwhackers music books” on Amazon. ►

What do you do when nothing goes according to plan ... and you're left with a room filled with energized campers? It's always good to have a plan B.

Photo courtesy of CRISTA Camps



Plan-B Games

What do you do when nothing goes according to plan — the projector stops working, the speaker is running late or a storm cancels your outdoor plans — and you're left with a room filled with energized campers? It's always good to have a plan B.

Consider sites like www.crowdcontrolgames.com and www.downloadyouthministry.com (DYM). Both sites offer countless downloadable games for every budget that you can easily implement to engage and entertain campers or guests.

DYM adds fresh games to the site weekly, including seasonal and holiday-specific games and games related to current events. The games have been developed (and tested) by youth pastors, so you can trust that kids and teens will have fun.

DYM offers a membership that offers discounts on all downloads and access to exclusive member-only content.



Photo courtesy of Crowd Control Games

Crowd Control features buzzer games, game shows, crowd games and more. They partnered with CCCA's national conference, TOGETHER, and developed a much-loved crowd game called 3CA.

Similar to their game, 1Arm2ArmNone (www.ccca.org/go/1arm2armnone), each member of the crowd chooses a position to pose in before the music stops. Once the music stops, a position appears on the screen and everyone who is in that position is out. The game keeps going until there's a showdown between just a few players and a winner is crowned.

Crowd Control site offers licenses with different pricing for nonprofit versus for-profit organizations and boasts that national brands like Chick-fil-A and Walmart use their games. ■



If you'd like to learn more from any of the program team members featured in this article, you can reach them directly at:

Travis Badding — travis@idrahaje.org

Abby Banfield — abby@graceadventures.org

Willie Felderman — wfelderman@irbc.org

Chris Kallal — christopherkallal@yahoo.com

Dan Antoine — dan@okoboji.org



Jen Howver was once a camp kid who later spent two summers working at Camp Paradise (Newberry, Michigan), where she met and later married her husband, Jay. Fast forward more than 25 years and now Jen works with The Skit Guys and as editor of InSite magazine. She and Jay live in Monument, Colorado, with their daughters, Noelle and Chloe, and way too many pets.