



Dear Walden families,

On December 10, 2018, CBS News aired a story about sexual abuse at summer camps. The discussion referenced the horrible fact that hundreds of children have been abused at summer camps over decades.

The report is certainly a wake-up call to any camp that ignores the fact that predators attempt to gain employment where children congregate, including camps. For Walden, it is a reminder that the steps we take each year to prevent abuse are among the most important responsibility that we have.

The health and safety of your children has always been, and will continue to be, our number one priority. The staff we hire are checked by every means available to us—and that includes our international staff, who undergo background checks performed by the respected cultural organizations that send them overseas.

But the CBS story is a scary one, and we concluded that making general statements about your camper's safety at Walden is not enough. Here are some details:

As part of the hiring process, Walden staff fill out a Personal Disclosure Statement purposely designed to illicit answers that raise red flags. Before camp opens each summer, ALL staff are required to take online training courses that examine child sexual abuse and detail the grooming process by which predators gain the trust of their future victims.

Our staff also attend a mandatory on-site awareness program, which for years has been led by Gary Kimball, executive director of the Camp-ALERT Network, a division of our insurance company, A.M. Skier. Gary leads a "scared-straight"-type presentation, which is not only meant as educational but also as a message to a would-be molester that Camp Walden knows what you look like.

"If you're here for the wrong reasons," Gary tells our staff, "if you think you might be a danger to children, then find an excuse to leave, before the campers arrive. Say your grandparent is sick, or you got a better offer for the summer. But do not stay at Walden."

During staff seminar, we cover everything from how to accept a hug from a camper, and "safe touch," to "the rule of three": Walden staff know that under no circumstances are they to be alone with a camper.

Walden meets the rigorous accreditation standards set forth by the American Camp Association. We are also, of course, licensed by the State of Michigan, which has some of the most demanding requirements for camps in the nation. This year, as in the past, Liz and Scott will be attending the ACA National Conference. We will join camping professionals from across the nation to discuss best practices, to gather resources, and to hear industry experts.

The issue of camper safety is always front and center at these gatherings, but nothing is more important than how we translate this knowledge to our boots-on-the-ground vigilance every day camp is in session.

Thank you for entrusting the care of your children to us. We are available to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,
Scott and Liz

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