WCC SCHEDULE 2026

WESTERN CAMPING CONFERENCE
YMCA CAMP SURF

MONDAY NOVEMBER 9TH

2pm: Check in begins and lodging opens
***Choose your primary program- OE, Summer, Day, Family, Conferences etc.**
***Bring auction items to McKinney dining hall**

5:30pm: Dinner
7pm: Evening program – Campfire

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 10TH

8am: Breakfast
9:15am: Welcome
9:30-10:30am: Keynote: Michele Rowcliffe: Beyond our own Campfires
10:30am: Break

10:45am-12pm: Workshops
1: Cabin 8 - Behavioral Breakthroughs: A Staff Training Blueprint for Handling Behavioral Concerns - Emma Marshall: Are your staff frequently needing support in addressing behavioral challenges? This session will examine root causes of this hot topic and help you to restructure your training to empower counselors to interpret and respond to youth behavior. Walk away with practical, hands-on tools and materials to enhance and integrate into your staff training program.

3. Dining Hall - AI At Camp - From Emails to Emergencies - Mary Sullivan: This is how I use AI in camp operations to save time, strengthen communication, organize ideas, and solve everyday problems. This session will look at real-world examples from the camp setting, including emails, parent communication, staff training, policies, program planning, marketing, problem-solving, and more — while also discussing where AI has limits and where human judgment still matters most.
We'll also use real-world examples from the camp professionals in the room and test out a few scenarios together so participants can see how AI can be applied to everyday camp challenges.
AI is a tool, and this is a practical approach to using it in the camp world.

4. The Reef - Seven Top Risks. Seven Solutions. A YMCA Camp Leader's Guide to Managing Risk in 2027 - Joan Dove: Join Gallagher Insurance and discuss key risks affecting a YMCA Camp's insurability and how to manage them effectively. This session will include a presentation as well as a question and answer portion.

12:30pm: Lunch
1:30pm: Auction bidding begins

2-3:15pm: Workshops

5. The Reef - Building Emotionally Intelligent Kids at Camp - Alexandra Canta: Based on the chapter "Building Emotionally Intelligent Youth Around the World", from the Going Global resource, this session explores how camp professionals can intentionally create experiences that strengthen emotional intelligence. Drawing from psychology, youth work, and more than 20 years of hands-on camp experience, we will connect theory with practical strategies that can be integrated into daily camp life, from activities and group dynamics to difficult moments and informal interactions. Participants will leave with a clearer understanding of why emotional intelligence belongs at the heart of camp and how ordinary camp moments can become powerful opportunities for growth.

6: Dining Hall - The Loneliness Epidemic: Impact on the Generations in Camping - Drew Kelley: Loneliness and social disconnection affect every generation, but they do not always look the same. This interactive session explores the loneliness epidemic through a generational lens, examining how the needs of campers, staff, families, and camp leaders shape the camp experience. Participants will challenge current practices and leave with practical ideas for creating stronger connection, belonging, and community across generations.

7: Arts and Crafts - Beyond Check-out Convos: Building Meaningful Year Round Relationships with Day Camp Parents - Emma Marshall: Explore opportunities for fostering connections with (and between) your day camp families that last once they leave the parking lot. Elevate your approach to cultivating long lasting and mutually beneficial relationships for these key stakeholders.

Patio - Roundtable #1: The Future of Western - Ashley Gibson

3:15pm: Break
3:30-5:00pm: Camp Activities

5:30pm: Dinner
7pm: Evening program – Game night with YMCA Camp Marston, Raintree Ranch and YMCA Camp Surf

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 11TH

*Day Camp single day

8am: Breakfast
9:15am: Morning Announcements
9:30-10:30am: Keynote - Alex Kretzinger
10:30: Break

10:45am-12pm: Workshops
8: Patio- Self Care at Camp: What it really looks like - Jessie Emmons: Self-care at camp isn't spa days and long breaks, it's the small, intentional choices that help us keep showing up as leaders. It looks like taking 10 minutes to sit quietly, eating a real meal instead of working through it, getting outside, setting a boundary, asking for help, and knowing when you need to step away.
For directors, self-care is also about building a team you trust, delegating instead of carrying everything yourself, and giving yourself permission to not have every answer. Camp will always need something from us. The goal isn't to do less, it's to make sure we have enough of ourselves left to lead well.

9: Arts and Crafts – The Staff Training Remix – Melk Ekberg: Bring a staff training topic you want to rework. Maybe it's a session that feels too much like a lecture, or one that staff enjoy but don't seem to remember. We'll put our heads together, trade ideas, and find ways to get staff practicing what they'll actually do at camp. You'll leave with a fresh plan for your session and ideas to borrow from other camps.

10: Dining Hall– The Hidden Art of Resilience (Getting Tough) – Kylie Helterbrand and Owen Ells: The word of the summer was resilience, and they will be discussing how they intentionally wove pillars of resilience into their staff training with the hope it would permeate into their staff culture and attitude. Having a resiliency focused staff who can model self-regulation, conflict management, problem solving, and connection building shows campers determined young adults who can do hard things. Come to chat about resilience and share ideas for building staff with a resilient attitude!

12:30: Lunch
1:30pm: Group photo at Pirate ship

2-3:15pm: Workshops

12: Patio – Challenge Course Operations Reviews-Turning a standard into a safety advantage! Nathan Pfeffercorn: Operation Reviews have been part of ACCT standards for years, yet many organizations still struggle to understand their purpose, value, and practical application. This session demystifies the Operation Review process, explains why most incidents stem from operational—not equipment—failures, and shows how third-party reviews can improve safety, consistency, and confidence across your program. Attendees will gain a clear understanding of what's required, what to expect, and how to prepare for an Operation Review in a way that maximizes learning and real-world operational improvement.

13: The Reef – Sensitive Conversations and Topics: Daniel Alpers: Campers are constantly testing camp staff boundaries around behaviors and conversations, and many staff young and old can struggle with appropriate boundaries and how to redirect and handle when these things come up. This session will help give leadership staff the tools to teach their seasonal staff how to navigate these interactions.

14. Dining Hall – Triggered, Addicted, and Overloaded: Youth Development in a Dopamine Saturated World – Laura Mahan: Ever wonder why your campers behave like they do? Why the first few days of camp seem fraught with anxiety and distress? Let's talk about how a dopamine saturated world has literally changed the way children's brains develop, how that shows up for us at camp and why camping, especially overnight camping, is essential to disrupting the cycle.

Arts and Crafts – Roundtable #2: SKIP Panel – Andrew Corley

3:15pm: Break
3:30-5pm:
Vendors
Camp Store open
Auction bidding closes @5pm
Screen printing t shirts/totes

5:30pm: Dinner
7pm: Keynote: Natalia Bernal – Una C.H.I.M.B.A: The people You Want at Camp
Evening Program – Loteria!!

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 12TH

8am: Breakfast
9am: Welcome final day
9:15–9:45am: Keynote: Chris Rehs-Dupin (TQAMP)

10:00–11:30am: Workshops:

14. The Reef – From First Hello to What's Next – Supporting Staff Before, During, and After Camp – Melk Ekberg: Supporting camp staff starts long before they arrive for training and continues after they head home. We'll walk through the full staff experience, from the first job post and interview to the tough weeks of summer, the last day of camp, and the months that follow. Along the way, we'll look at small, practical ways to make expectations clearer, help staff feel supported, and keep the connection going beyond one season.

15: Arts and Crafts – Jamie Davies: Description incoming!

15. Dining Hall – Y to Y Partnerships – Brittney James & Mariah McLellan: Description incoming!

Patio – Executive Roundtable: Jessie Emmons

11am–1pm: Depart Camp

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