

The Mayonnaise Jar

Publicly acknowledging or thanking others for what they have done, whether for us or someone else, is a great lesson to teach children. The “Mayonnaise Jar” does just that.

Children assemble in a comfortable meeting place, like on a porch or in a gazebo, where everyone fits and feels included. A leader asks for volunteers to stand up when called upon to publicly thank someone for something nice they have seen that person do this day or something thoughtful or helpful that person has done for them this day. The first time this exercise is done, the leader may want to model what is expected by acknowledging someone him or herself. Children catch on quickly. Here are some pointers when explaining the mayonnaise jar to children;

- keep it *positive*
- mention something that happened *today*
- mention the person by *name*

When someone is acknowledged (e.g., “I want to thank Sally for helping me find my baseball glove this morning...”), the group applauds the person being acknowledged (e.g., “Sally”), and their name gets written on a piece of paper which is then put in a clean jar (thus the name of the exercise). Every three to five days names are drawn from the jar for small prizes (e.g., free canteen, a special hike, an extra chance to water ski or participate in some special activity and so on).

The mayonnaise jar emphasizes the positive and provides a forum for children to express their thanks and practice appreciation. Also, the public recognition is probably enough of a reward in itself. Adding the drawing only reinforces the fact that the camp places a value on cooperation, helpfulness and the power of positive recognition. In a culture with complaining and negativism about, this is a great way to create a more positive camp culture based on gratitude.