

DIGGING DEEP

Using *Digging Deep* in a Medical Camp Setting

Digging Deep is a very flexible tool that can accommodate many different needs in a variety of settings. Children, teens, and young adults with every kind of ongoing health challenge or disability can find exercises that they can relate to in *Digging Deep*.

There is no right or wrong way to use *Digging Deep*—the key is to let the young person take the lead. Never push a child or teen to respond to an exercise that he or she resists. Likewise, if the person working through the journal does not want to share what they write, respect their wishes—they will share if and when they are ready.

Digging Deep is designed for youth approximately 10-18 years old, but much younger kids have learned to express themselves through *Digging Deep*'s artwork and many young adults find journaling with *Digging Deep* a safe place to work through the many issues they confront and feelings they have.

Many young camp counselors have had childhood illness or a sibling facing health challenges. They may not have had an opportunity to work through their own issues, so *Digging Deep* can be just the right tool for them as well. He or she can modify and answer the prompts in a more sophisticated way.

Below are a variety of ways to introduce *Digging Deep* at your camp:

As an Art Activity

Digging Deep provides a restful alternative to the active outdoor programming at camp and can be a launching point for a lifetime of journaling, which can help them through all kinds of adversities, health or otherwise.

This journal embodies our belief that art inspires our feelings and vice versa. Beautiful images encourage expression of our deepest feelings. Using materials you already have in the art room, invite children and teens to make homemade pockets and envelopes to hold their private thoughts, wishes, or worries. This makes journaling fun, creative, and all “their own.”

Campers can even create their very own journal with their personal drawings, paintings, hand made borders, and collage materials. Once the journaling pages are made, they can then make up their own writing prompts or free-write. The idea is simply to have fun and get their feelings out.

Group Activity

If you are looking for an interactive activity that supports the emotional needs of kids and teens, journaling can be a fun thing to try. Here are some tips:

- Start with an icebreaker such as “silly signs” (asking the kids around the group to create a hand sign or motion when saying their name.) An alternative icebreaker is to have each child choose an emoticon sticker that shows how they are feeling now or have felt in the past. If the members of the group would like to share why they choose their stickers, all the better! Emoticon stickers can be ordered online.
- Supply fine colored markers and gel pens in addition to both pencils and ballpoint pens to give the journal writers a choice for personalizing their writing.
- For group work, allow the kids or teens to choose a page from *Digging Deep*. They can choose to work alone or as a team, where one person is the storyteller and the other person is the scribe and writes down what their partner is sharing. 30-45 minutes is a good target length for the entire group activity for younger children, and up to 1½ hours is generally needed for older children and teens.
- We have found these pages especially popular for group activities at camps:

The Masked Me (p.22)	Good Fortunes (page 80)
An Upside Down World (p. 28)	Unique or Different Friends (page 84)
Life Awards You (p. 52)	Throwing Out the Trash (p. 110)
The Wild Ride (p.57)	Blessings After a Storm (p. 122)
Talking, Listening and Hearing (p. 76)	100 Dreams and Desires (p. 129)
- The group may decide to share their completed journal exercise with each other. If some members prefer to remain anonymous, the facilitator can read the journal exercises anonymously. Having one’s story witnessed, even if it is anonymous, can be incredibly powerful. It is very important for a young person to hear his or her own words reflected back. Relating to each other’s stories expresses empathy and also heals a part of everyone in the group.

Cabin Activity

Digging Deep is a perfect quiet time cabin activity before bedtime. Campers may enjoy completing an exercise before falling asleep. Simply reading through the exercises, they feel heard, understood, and less alone. They realize their peers must worry about their very same issues, since they appear in a book! If a camper doesn’t feel like *writing* at night, as they read through pages they can earmark the ones they want to go back to when they do feel like writing. Cabin time can also be used for journaling in a group (see above ideas for group work.)

Family Activity

At family camp, the whole family can get involved in journaling together and sharing. You can order free PDF worksheets for both parents and siblings by contacting Stephen@diggingdeep.org. The whole family can benefit from expressing their thoughts and feelings on paper. If the family likes the process of journaling, be sure they take home their own copy of *Digging Deep* or be directed to order a complementary copy at diggingdeep.org.

Parting Gift

Consider providing *Digging Deep* as a resource to support a camper's emotional health and healing throughout the year. Camps may choose simply to make *Digging Deep* available to interested campers and their families, rather than incorporating *Digging Deep* into their programming. A journal is like a friend they can confide in. Just as a young person feels understood and accepted at camp, a journal can be the long-term "safe place" where your camper finds great comfort and emotional relief from the daily burdens of his illness.

Digging Deep may not be the right tool for every child or teen, but it is important to offer it freely to everyone. Counselors and families are often surprised at which campers are the most responsive to *Digging Deep*! Teenage boys, for instance, who have a reputation for bottling up their feelings, sometimes pour their hearts out when given a chance to journal. Be sure to give *everyone* at your camp that chance.