



Mental Health Briefing Summer 2022

Prepared by Dr. Daniel Olson, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Research, NRC

This mental health briefing builds off the Mental Health Report from summer 2021. Data for this briefing mostly came from a detailed survey sent to all yoatzim and rashei eidah who worked at Ramah camps in 2022. There were 48 responses from rashei eidah and 23 from yoatzim.

While the survey asked about many aspects of mental health care at camp in 2022 including training, effective and less effective methods of mental health care, and ideas for improving mental health care at camp, this briefing will focus on two:

- A. The Differences in Mental Health Care between 2021 and 2022**
- B. Yoetz to Camper Ratios**

A. The Differences in Mental Health Care between 2021 and 2022

All respondents who worked at camp in both 2021 and 2022 were asked to compare the mental health issues faced by campers, staff, and themselves in each year. No single dominant pattern emerges across all camps and individuals. Fortunately, it does not appear that there were significant *increases* in mental health challenges in 2022 compared to 2021. Respondents were split on whether mental health challenges decreased or stayed the same. While the survey did not specifically ask about *parents'* mental health, a few respondents mentioned an increase in parent anxiety expressed in phone calls and emails to camp staff.

Those who reported decreases in mental health challenges speculated as to why. They named two main reasons: (1) children and teenagers had experienced more significant social interaction in the 2021-22 school year than in the 2020-21 school year, and (2) camps were more prepared to meet camper and staff mental health needs. This preparation looked like greater readiness to support campers and having specific plans in place to meet camper needs.

The survey's quantitative data tells a similar story. To the extent that there are differences in summer 2022, they are slight, mostly decreasing by a small amount, remaining the same, or in rare cases with some campers, increasing. The most significant increase occurred among staff. Rashei Eidah reported that a greater proportion of staff needed repeated and direct instruction to do their jobs in 2022 (26%) compared to 2021 (19%). For full numbers, see tables 1 and 2 on the next pages.

Changes in personal mental health also varied by individual and camp, but with a general positive trend. Rashei Eidah and yoatzim appreciated being able to leave camp. Some new rashei eidah reported that the new role brought new stressors.

Table 1: Camper Mental Health Issues in 2022 and 2021

Mental Health Issue	Elementary School (2022)	Elementary School (2021)	Middle School (2022)	Middle School (2021)	High School (2022)	High School (2021)	All (2022)	All (2021)
Needing repeated and direct instruction to do basic camp activities	9%	18%	15%	15%	12%	10%	13%	17%
Anxiety	4%	10%	14%	16%	14%	10%	11%	14%
Homesickness	8%	21%	13%	18%	5%	3%	9%	14%
Bullying or being bullied	3%	7%	12%	12%	6%	4%	8%	8%
Challenges with executive functioning (dressing appropriately, doing laundry, showering, brushing teeth, getting to activities on time)	10%	9%	9%	8%	4%	4%	8%	10%
Difficulty with emotional regulation	6%	11%	7%	7%	5%	4%	6%	9%
Depression	1%	2%	7%	6%	8%	6%	5%	5%
Difficulty with anger management	3%	7%	5%	5%	3%	2%	4%	6%
Disordered eating	1%	1%	4%	3%	4%	3%	3%	2%
Discussion of self-harm (including cutting)	0%	0%	1%	5%	4%	2%	1%	3%
Suicidal ideation	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Self-harm (including cutting)	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%

Table 2: Staff Mental Health Issues in 2022 and 2021

Mental Health Issue	Staff 2022	Staff 2021
Needing repeated and direct instruction to do their jobs	26%	19%
Anxiety	19%	25%
Homesickness	7%	6%
Difficulty with emotional regulation	7%	8%
Depression	6%	9%
Challenges with executive functioning (dressing appropriately doing laundry, showering, brushing teeth, getting to activities on time)	5%	3%
Difficulty with anger management	5%	4%
Bullying or being bullied	4%	2%
Disordered eating	2%	1%
Discussion of self-harm (including cutting)	0%	1%
Suicidal ideation	0%	0%
Self-harm (including cutting)	0%	0%

Illustrative Quotes on 2021 to 2022 changes:

For campers:

“I think camp was overall more prepared for the needs of kids in summer 2022 because of summer 2021. I think kids are gaining language around mental health at a younger age and are able to express their experiences better. Although this can also sometimes lead to campers who don't know how to talk about these issues feeling overwhelmed and/or uncomfortable” —Rosh Eidah for 8th graders

“There were fewer crisis situations. This all was in part due to the past school year being more ‘regular’ than the previous year” —Yoetzet

“I think 2022 was more challenging than 2021 because there was COVID in camp. This caused anxiety levels to rise due to fear of getting COVID” —Rosh Eidah for 11th graders

For staff members:

“I felt better prepared for staff mental health issues, and therefore felt like there were less or less extreme mental health needs” —Yoetz

“[Staff mental health needs] were similar, but I think overall it was better because staff could leave camp for days off” —Rosh Eidah for 7th graders

“Staff members continued to struggle with the line between self advocacy around mental health and unwillingness to do their jobs” —Rosh Eidah for 11th graders

For themselves:

“This summer seeing the behind the scenes and having to manage both counselors and campers was a very different experience. There was a lot more ‘bigger picture thinking’ that took a toll on my mental health throughout the summer” —First-time Rosh Eidah

“I felt that I did a much better job of taking care of myself this summer. I had more of a solid daily routine which helped allow me to take care of myself” —Rosh Eidah for rising 6th graders

“My mental health was about the same (meaning camp is stressful and frenetic with all kinds of fires appearing all the time)--with no time or outlet” —Yoetz

B. Yoetz to Camper Ratios

Survey respondents were also asked to share what they think the maximum number of campers served by a yoetz should be. The range of answers was striking: 20 to 100. It’s hard to know if those who responded with lower numbers were referring to the maximum number of campers a yoetz can serve with significant needs, or the total number of campers in a theoretical caseload (i.e. the number of kids in the eidah or eidot a yoetz is responsible for).

Without including low numbers (anything below 40), on average, Rashei Eidah said that yoatzim should work with no more than 58 campers and yoatzim said that they should work with no more than 74 campers, with an overall average of 62 campers.

Table 3 reports the actual ratio of yoatzim to campers at each Ramah overnight camp in 2022. It uses Full Yoetz Equivalent (FYE) and Full Camper Equivalent (FCE), the average numbers of yoatzim and campers at camp at a given time during the summer. Directors of Camper Care are included as yoatzim. Many camps were within the maximum camper to yoetz ratio shared by rashei eidah and yoatzim. Specialty camps had a lower camper to yoetz ratio.

These numbers alone cannot be used to interpret how successful supporting mental health at camp was in 2022. Other factors to weigh include training, experience of yoatzim, scope of the yoetz role, staff morale, severity of camper need, leadership, and many more.

Table 3: Yoetz to Camper Ratio in Summer 2022

Overnight Camps	Total Number of Yoatzim	FYE (Full Yoetz Equivalent)	Ratio of FCE (Full Camper Equivalent) to FYE
Berkshires	7	5.25	111.81
Darom	9	5	84.4
Canada	5	4	82
Poconos	8	5.125	76.68
Wisconsin	12	5.875	61.79
California	17	8.5	56.24
New England	15	10.25	54.73
Northern California	5	3	49.67
Rockies	9	3.875	43.35
RSA	4	2.25	40