

Initiatives FAQs

- 1. What exactly *is* the initiatives department? What happens when my child goes there?**

We developed the initiatives department to focus on group development. Many class periods are spent playing games that help the group either energize themselves, learn more about others in the group, develop trust in one another, or solve problems together. Campers will build skills in communication, collaboration, group leadership, creative thinking, problem solving, and many others. Many group games and challenges take place on the ground, and others will take place on our newly constructed challenge course. At the beginning of the session, campers will participate in activities that help the group get to know one another. Towards the middle of the session, activities will shift focus to strengthening inter and intrapersonal understanding, communication, and empathy, and near the end of the session as the group cohesiveness continues to develop, the evolution and selection of activities will progress towards increasing group trust and support.
- 2. What is the challenge course?** The challenge course is a series of cabled and wooden elements that challenge individual campers' physical abilities but also the group's ability to strategically and creatively problem-solve, communicate, cooperate, and support one another. Groups must work together to traverse simple but challenging obstacles as a team. Some examples of the elements and activities include: organizing and reorganizing the group in sequential orders atop a fallen log without touching the ground; walking across a 'tightrope' using hand-lines, and balancing the group on an elevated platform that tilts a little bit along a fulcrum in the middle. This is not a high ropes course; the highest point of the course is about 2 feet off the ground, much lower than most elementary school play structures.
- 3. Was the course built by a professional?** Yes, the course was built by a professional course builder who has been building courses of all kinds (most of them much more intensive than ours) for several decades. The challenge course at Riverlea was built to current ACCT (Association for Challenge Course Technology) standards, the international high-bar for challenge and ropes course construction. It will be inspected annually.
- 4. Will campers be using the challenge course every time they go to initiatives?** No. Most classes will include activities, games, and conversations on the ground in addition to using specific elements of the challenge course. Moreover, not every age group will use every element. Because some require more nuanced physical and communication skills, some elements are reserved for older campers only. Each element can be custom facilitated to meet the physical, emotional, and social developmental needs of the individual campers and group as a whole.
- 5. Are the counselors trained to do this?** Yes. Before allowing campers onto the course, staff participate in an extensive training for how to safely facilitate each element as well as the course as a whole. Moreover, the head counselor in this department has been facilitating at a ropes course in western North Carolina for several years. Our staff to camper ratio at initiatives will be about 1:5. Immediately before beginning any element, all campers are taught the rules and guidelines for how to participate safely on the element.