Many camps, including Scout camps, have bunk beds that participants use during their stay, whether it’s for a summer or resident camp or just for the weekend. However, bunk beds are not always used according to how they were designed. Injuries can result from horseplay, improper placement, poor lighting, or poor maintenance.

Incident Reviews #1 and #2
A 7-year-old sprained his arm when it was caught in a bunk bed ladder, and he fell to the floor. The Scout was in a lot of pain and sustained a large bump on his right arm. The arm was braced and the child’s mother transported him to a local hospital.

An 11-year-old Scout fell from the ladder getting into the top bunk of a bunk bed. The Scout initially refused treatment but complained of pain for two days and was ultimately diagnosed with a small fracture.

Key Points

- Proper bracing and positioning of ladders is critical for safety, as is regular inspection.
- Younger Scouts should not use the upper bunk. Most injuries occur with children ages 6 and younger, and youth ages 18 to 22.

Incident Review #3
A 17-year-old staff member was sleeping on the top bunk. He woke suddenly in the middle of the night, struck the ceiling with his head, and fell out of the bed. The staff member didn’t report the incident until the next afternoon. Due to extensive symptoms and the potential for complications, he was taken to an urgent care center where he was diagnosed with a concussion.

Key Points

- Proper positioning of a bunk bed would leave 4 feet between the upper bunk and the ceiling.
- Other obstructions such as lights, roof joists, and rafters may also determine placement.

“Participants involved in falls from ladders or bunk beds, especially youth who hit their heads, should receive an examination as soon as possible from a medical professional.”
Incident Review #4
A 9-year-old Scout fell off the top bunk. He vomited once, complained of a headache, and vomited again. Overall he was alert with no signs of lacerations or swelling on his head or scalp. Upon further examination, the Scout stated that he had hit his head. The Scout was kept awake and his emergency contact was notified prior to transport to an emergency care center for further evaluation.

Key Points
- Not all bunk beds currently in use were designed with safety rails. Retrofits are available. Positioning a bunk bed with one side against a solid wall or in a corner where two sides are protected by the walls is a good practice.
- Vomiting after hitting one’s head is a possible sign of a concussion or other traumatic brain injury.

Incident Review #5
A young Scout was sleeping in the top bunk. During the night, he rolled out of bed and fell to the floor. The next morning, adult leaders found him on the floor still asleep in his sleeping bag. Medical staff checked him, and he said that he was fine. The child moved to the lower bunk the next night, but the following day complained of his arm hurting. His parent took him to a doctor, and he was diagnosed with a fractured clavicle.

Key Points
- Injuries caused by falling from the top of a bunk bed usually affect the head and upper body such as shoulders, arms, etc.
- Leaders should be aware of any medical conditions, history of sleepwalking, or peer pressure when helping youth select appropriate sleeping locations.

Discussion Questions
- Tell us about the last time you slept in a bunk bed.
- What are the risks when getting in and out of the bunk beds at your camp?
- What illumination is available if you must get down from a top bunk in the middle of the night?
- What are the risks of ladders not being properly positioned and secured?
- Is there sufficient clearance between the bunks and the ceiling, rafters, joists, lights, etc., to prevent head injuries?
- Are the bunk beds sturdy and well maintained and is there a weight limit on the top bunk?

Resources
- American Academy of Pediatrics: Bunk Bed Safety Tips—http://www.aappublications.org/content/33/7/22.6

Bunk bed cots are often sold without rails. Consider safety rails when the top bunk is more than 30 inches off the floor.”