

SOME INFO ON HOMESICKNESS

Homesickness is part of normal development. Our job is to coach children through the experience, not to avoid the topic altogether. There's great news about homesickness! For starters, you should know that:

- Homesickness (or "missing home") is normal. Recent studies indicate that as many as 95% of boys and girls who were spending at least two weeks at overnight camp felt some degree of homesickness.
- Homesickness is usually mild. Nearly everyone misses something about home when they're away. Some campers miss their parents; others, a sibling, or the family pet. Whatever they miss the most, children have a great time at camp and are not bothered by mild homesickness.
- Homesickness is something everyone can learn to cope with.
- Homesickness builds confidence. Overcoming a bout of homesickness and enjoying time away from home fosters children's independence. The fact that second-year campers are usually less homesick than first-year campers is evidence of this powerful growth.
- Homesickness has a silver lining. If there's something about home children miss, that means there's something about home they love, and that's a wonderful thing. Sometimes just knowing that what they feel is a reflection of love makes campers feel better.

Knowing that every child experiences some level of homesickness, here are some Do's and Don't's to help minimize homesickness:

DO:

- Make camp decisions together. When to go, and how long to stay are decisions you and your child can make together. Also, shop and pack for camp together. Involving children gives them a sense of ownership.
- Arrange practice time away from home. Overnights at a friends' house, and weekends with grandparents, teach children to cope effectively with separation.
- Speaking of letter writing...If you want to get any mail yourself, be sure to pack pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes in your child's luggage.

- ☑ Talk about all the positive aspects of camp. If you have some hesitation, share your concerns only with another adult, such as your spouse or the camp director.

DON'T:

- ☒ Confuse your child, even jokingly, about “Have a great time at camp. I hope I remember to feed your dog.” Giving your child something to worry about while she’s away will only increase homesickness.
- ☒ Never ever make a pick-up deal. Saying, “If you feel homesick, we’ll come to get you” undermines children’s confidence and ensures they’ll be preoccupied with home from the moment they arrive at camp. Instead of making a pick-up deal, say, “I’m sure that if you miss home, you and your cabin leader will be able to work together to help you feel better. Camp will be a blast!”

OK, then, what are the most effective ways of coping with homesickness at camp? What advice can you write in a letter or e-mail to your son or daughter if you get a homesick letter?

- Stay busy. Doing a fun, physical activity nearly always reduces homesickness intensity.
- Stay positive. Remembering all the cool stuff you can do at camp keeps the focus on fun, not on home.
- Stay in touch. Writing letters, looking at a photo from home, or holding a memento from home can be very comforting.
- Stay social. Making new friends is a perfect antidote to bothersome homesickness. Talking to the staff at camp is also reassuring.
- Stay focused. Remember that you’re not at camp forever, just a few weeks. Bringing a calendar to camp helps you be clear about the length of your stay.
- Stay confident. Anti-homesickness strategies take some time to work. Kids who stick with their strategies for five or six days almost always feel better.

Mom and Dad, your help preparing your child for this amazing growth experience will pay huge dividends. After a session of camp, you’ll see an increase in your child’s confidence, social skills, and leadership. And while your son or daughter is at camp, you can enjoy a well-deserved break from full-time parenthood.