

## Heading off Homesickness

Homesickness is a natural part of life and an affliction that can affect anyone of any age and/or stage in life. In fact, we expect it in our campers, and as parents, you should expect it, too.

Despite the natural tendency for campers to miss home during a long separation (for many this is their first time away for more than just a couple of nights), we work hard to minimize its effects on the children and look to our parents to help prepare.

There are several strategies you can use in setting the tone for your child's potential homesickness.

1. First and foremost, don't deny its existence. As you and your child prepare for camp, if he/ she comments on being nervous or afraid of missing you, the dog, the cat, friends, etc., take the opportunity to teach about homesickness. Resist the temptation to say, "oh you won't be homesick, you will be having too much fun!" and dismiss the concerns. Instead, normalize homesickness and share some coping strategies with your children.
2. Tell your child the good news about homesickness is there are things that can be done to help them feel better. Suggest they find a friend (or make a new one) and play a fun game together; read a book; write a letter to someone to feel closer to home; go see someone whom they like to talk to; talk to a staff member ; focus on the moment and the day and night's activities; make a calendar and then cross off the days already spent at camp to give visual perspective on the relatively short amount of time left; start a list/journal of all the really positive things they like about camp.
3. Practice. Have your child spend some time away from you and away from home prior to going to camp. Ideally, let him/her stay at a friend's or relative's for at least 2-3 days without parental contact. Afterwards, discuss with your child how he/she coped with the separation and any anxiety he/she experienced.
4. Help your child get to know as much about camp and the people there as you can. Study the web site and information mailed out to you with your child. Watch the videos and help your child imagine him/herself in the same environment.
5. Stay positive about camp and share your enthusiasm with your child about the new experiences he/she is going to have and the important step in growing up he/she is taking. Express your sincere faith in his/her ability to be successful.
6. Perhaps most importantly, don't make a deal with your child to pick him/her up if he/she doesn't like it or is homesick. Doing so will send a message to your child that you are not confident in his/her coping strategies, do not trust the camp staff to handle concerns and care, and will ultimately put you in the difficult position of having to decide to fulfill the request or renege and damage your relationship with your child.

Learning to live away from home is a lot like riding a bike. It can be difficult at first. There are bumps, bruises, and even a few tears along the way. But it gets easier and easier and much more fun if you stick it out. Trust us, your children will agree!