



Tips to prepare your camper and yourself for camp



We get many questions each year from first time camp parents regarding how we handle homesickness. One of the best ways to help campers is to offer helpful support before they depart for their camping experience. As one psychologist put it “Children who are homesick suffer guilt and anxiety. They’re anxious because they don’t feel confident in their ability to make it on their own and survive, and they feel guilty because they don’t feel that their parents can live without them”.

The best way to handle homesickness is to start preparing your campers early for their experience. That is not to say that your camper will not miss home. All of our campers do, but good preparation can help ward off the crisis in confidence we describe above. It’s not too early to start preparing your child. Here are some tips:

- As a parent, emphasize that your child is “going” to camp rather than you are “sending” him to camp.
- It is advisable to avoid statements like “I’m going to miss you terribly”. This gives them permission to go to camp and have a great time without worrying about their loved ones at home.
- Don’t make the promise; “If you don’t like camp you can come home” or “we’ll pick you up if you’re not happy”. Children who are experiencing difficulties adjusting to camp will compound the problem by not giving camp a fair chance. Their agenda then becomes one of ending the homesickness by going home. The end result is that they will either lose a developmental opportunity to work through this normal stage of development or you’ll have to break the promise, putting their trust in you in jeopardy.
- Heighten your child’s interest by pointing out some of the great opportunities or sharing some of your own positive experiences about your own camping experience.
- While painting a bright and promising picture of camp do not forget to mention some of the not so glamorous realities of rustic outdoor living. Paint a realistic picture in a non-threatening way. There should be no surprises.
- Don’t be afraid to speak openly about homesickness before camp. When children understand that homesickness is a normal occurrence while adjusting to a new environment they are more willing to accept it with less anxiety. Tell them that they may feel a little homesick at first but that if they keep themselves busy it is short lived.
- Help prepare your child to care for themselves. (i.e: Help with packing, making bed, taking responsibility for the activities of daily living.)
- Practice problem solving...think about anticipatory problems. For example: “What will you do if you don’t feel well, can’t sleep, if you have a problem, or you lose something?” Keep it positive, stressing that there are many people to help at camp. The camper handbook enclosed will cover most of your son’s questions.

We would like to emphasize that while all your sons will miss home we usually only have a few boys who find it difficult to make the adjustment to camp. We give these boys a lot of support and keep them very busy and in a very short time they relax and begin to let themselves have fun. If you receive a homesick letter from your camper feel free to call us. Occasionally we are not aware of the homesickness and we can do a lot to help.