



HELPING YOUR CAMPER DEAL WITH ANXIOUS FEELINGS LEADING UP TO CAMP

We get many questions each year from camp parents regarding how to handle their camper's anxiety and nerves as the summer approaches. The most important thing to remember is that these feelings are totally normal. First year campers, returning campers and even staff all have some level of nervousness leading into the summer.

Homesickness is part of the camp experience. Regardless to what level your camper feels it, our camp staff will help him cope, manage those feelings, and he will quickly feel safe and supported at camp. Portray confidence in your camper and he will be better for it.

Camp is going to be awesome, but it's not going to be perfect. There will be things that bother your camper this summer. As long as he shares what is bothering him with his counselors or another staff member, we are going to be able to support him and ensure that he has a safe, successful and fun summer at North Star!



TIPS FOR PARENTS WHEN THEIR CAMPER FEELS NERVOUS

- Acknowledge his feelings & let him know that being nervous is a totally normal feeling. Be supportive. Things you can say:
 - *"Thank you for telling me how you're feeling."*
 - *"It's okay to be nervous. In fact, it's a normal part of going somewhere for the first time."*
 - *"What are some things you're feeling nervous about?"*
- Camp is meant to push campers outside their comfort zone.
 - That's how they grow! Trying new things, overcoming nerves, gaining confidence and independence are all parts of camp and require them stepping outside their comfort zone.
 - Talk about the difference between Unsafe vs. Uncomfortable.
 - Unsafe = Something is dangerous.
 - Uncomfortable = Something that might feel unsafe, but really is just outside their comfort zone.



SETTING YOUR CAMPER UP FOR SUCCESS THIS SUMMER

- Keep conversations positive when talking about camp: how much fun he's going to have, how much he's going to grow, the new activities he'll try, the new friends he'll make, etc.
 - Avoid statements like *"I'm going to miss you terribly."* Anything that plants a seed that may make him feel guilty or worry about missing loved ones at home.
 - Here are some common anxious camper sentiments leading up to camp and how to respond:

IF A CAMPER SAYS:

AN APPROPRIATE PARENT RESPONSE IS:

"I'm going to miss you so much."

"I'll miss you too, but you're going to have so much fun!
And your counselors are there to support you."

"What happens if I don't like it?"

"You may not like everything you do at camp and that's okay. There are going to be so many fun activities and new people you'll meet, and remember the staff at camp are there to take care of you.
What are you most excited about?"

"I don't know anybody."

"You're going to live in a cabin with new friends and meet so many new people from all over the world! Your counselors will help make sure you get to know lots of new people at camp."

"What if nobody likes me?"

"Be you're your best self and we know that you will be loved for that at North Star. And your counselors will help you to make friends."

"What if I get sick or injured?"

"That's okay. Make sure you tell a counselor or visit the health center. They'll take great care of you."

"What if there's nothing for me to eat?"

"North Star has lots of food options. I hear their food is super delicious too. If you don't like a meal, ask a counselor and they'll be able to help!"



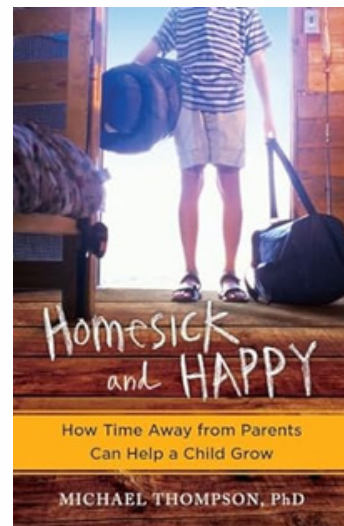
The most important thing for your camper to know is that the North Star staff will support him every step of the way, regardless of the issue.

- His counselors, village directors, and camp directors are always there to help.
- Remind him that sharing his feelings may seem scary, but it is the best way to be successful.
- Counselors check-in with their campers every day! This is a great time for your camper to share any concerns he has.



SETTING YOUR CAMPER UP FOR SUCCESS THIS SUMMER (CONTINUED)

- Speak openly about homesickness... you are supposed to miss home!
 - Feelings of missing home (a parent, grandparent sibling, pet, stuffed animal, their own bed, etc.) are totally normal. When campers know that missing home is a normal occurrence while adjusting to a new environment, they are more willing to accept it with less anxiety.
 - Tell your camper he may exhibit feelings of missing home at first, but if he keeps himself busy (and he'll be plenty busy at camp!), those feelings will be short-lived.
- Don't make promises that can't be kept.
 - ~~"If you don't like camp, you can come home."~~ or ~~"We'll pick you up if you're not happy."~~ -- We refer to this as **"the kiss of death."**
 - This plants the seed that you don't believe in your camper's ability to succeed at camp.
 - Instead, say: *"I know you're feeling nervous, but we know that North Star will provide you with all the support you need to be successful and have a great time."*
 - ~~"If you don't want to do something, you don't have to."~~
 - Part of camp is campers pushing themselves outside of their comfort zone and exploring new things. That's where growth happens!
 - Instead, say: *"There will be things that may be new or hard for you, but you'll have all of the support you need at camp."* or *"Give it a try! You may find you actually enjoy it."*



[Highly recommended reading](#)



FINAL THOUGHTS

It's normal for campers to miss home or have anxious feelings the days and weeks leading up to camp. Talking positively about camp and providing reassurance is key in setting campers up for success.

We'll say it again: Camp is going to be awesome, but it's not going to be perfect. Things are going to bother your camper this summer. As long as he shares what is bothering him with his counselors or another staff member, we are going to be able to support him and ensure that he has a safe, successful and fun summer at North Star!

If you would like any additional assistance preparing your camper for camp, you can call 715-462-3254 or email us at office@northstarcamp.com.

