



Homesickness: Dr. Christopher Thurber defines homesickness as the distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home. These feelings relate to fears of the unknown, fears of failure, fears of loss of loved ones, and overall anxiety. Homesickness is common and it usually manifests in stomachaches, headaches, misbehaving and statements of “disliking camp and missing home”. Generally, it lasts for a short period of time and the camper adjusts to camp by feeling familiar with his surroundings, schedule, friends and counselors. The key to dealing with homesickness is to try and prevent it by preparing your child before camp. Here are a few tips and suggestions:

- Discuss the camp schedule and what camp will be like and give him a chance to voice any concerns he might have.
- Plan sleepovers with friends and relatives to help him get used to being away from home.
- Please do not tell your child that you will “rescue” him from camp if he doesn’t like camp. He will hold onto this thought into his camp session and it could prolong his homesickness.
- Try not to mention how much you will miss your son. Instead, emphasize how proud you are of him and how excited you are about his camp opportunity.
- Send a letter to your child before camp so that he has a letter waiting for him at camp.
- Let your child bring a favorite stuffed animal or family photo so he can feel comfortable in his new surroundings.

If your son sends you the dreaded “I hate camp and I want to come home” letter, please consider the following when writing a letter in return:

- First, don’t panic. Your child may simply have expressed those feelings when he wrote the letter several days earlier. By the time you receive the letter, chances are he is already having fun and adjusting well.
- Since camp is an opportunity for your child to grow, mature and gain independence, tell him you love him very much and you have confidence in his ability to cope with his feelings and overcome any anxiety. It is important to be calm, reassuring and consistent.
- Acknowledge your child’s feelings by writing him, for example, “you seem scared (or lonely or sad). Have you talked with your counselor about how you are feeling?” Encourage your son to take advantage of all the activities at camp and focus on simple goals he can attain. Design your letter to acknowledge his feelings but move on to questions about what he can accomplish and achieve at camp. Please avoid ending your letters by saying you miss him or what he may be missing at home.
- Do not make promises or rescue deals like, “I’ll pick you up from camp next week if you’re still unhappy”, or, “I’ll call you on Tuesday at 4:00 p.m.”. These statements will only prolong his homesickness, not reassure him of your love.

Research has shown that 95% of all children miss something about home while away at camp. Even though homesick feelings are common, most kids enjoy themselves tremendously at overnight summer camp. Homesickness, and getting over it, is a normal process that helps children develop independence and self-confidence.

Recommended Readings: Please think of us as a parenting partner. We have a common interest – the growth, safety, and happiness of your son(s). Good communication between campers, counselors, parents and directors is essential. There are many excellent books on parenting and child development. Here are a few books that you may want to read:

- How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk, by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish
- The Blessing of a Skinned Knee, by Wendy Mogel, Ph.D.
- Raising Cain, by Michael Thompson, Ph.D. and Dan Kindlon, Ph.D.
- The Summer Camp Handbook, by Christopher Thurber, Ph.D. and Jon Malinowski, Ph.D.
- The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness, by Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.
- Get Out of My Life, by Anthony E. Wolf, Ph.D.
- Positive Discipline, by Jane Nelson, Ed.D.
- Homesick & Happy, by Michael Thompson, Ph.D.
- Last Child in the Woods, Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, by Richard Louv
- Bob Ditter articles – www.bobditter.com