



THE YES: PARENT'S GUIDE

HOW TO PREPARE FOR SUMMER CAMP



PREPARING FOR CAMP



Welcome to The YES!

As a parent or guardian, you might be asking yourself how to prepare your teen for summer camp and why it's important? Overnight summer camps can play an important role in shaping young lives, fostering new friendships, engaging in our natural environment and building leadership. At the same time, it can be nerve wracking, and some teens might be fearful as they step into this new experience for the first time.

So now you've registered - that's great! It's time to build up excitement for your teen. While you may be excited for your youth to experience a summer of a lifetime, they still may be nervous or have questions about the program that they're attending.

RECOGNIZING STRENGTHS



A great tactic is to discuss the upcoming experience by fielding your teen's concerns and highlighting their strengths. This might look like:

- Reviewing some of the things they did well during the school year and how attending a camp program will give them an opportunity to build on these skills and develop new ones
- Talk about problems they had during the year or their opportunities for improvement and suggest how attending a summer camp can support and build up their skills.

EXPLORING ACTIVITIES



Some youth may think that summer camp is for a certain type of person - perhaps they believe that it is for the most athletic kids, or teens who are in leadership or student government at school. While The YES can cater to these youth, we also take pride in ensuring that there is an activity for everyone through an inclusive lens that focuses on self-awareness and community care.

We find that most youth who are nervous about fitting in or finding their place feel at ease after just a day or two at camp. We're lucky to be able to host our overnight camps on beautiful Lake Cowichan - a place where activities can range from canoeing, spike ball, making friendship bracelets, tie-dye and more.

You can read about [examples of our summer camp activities](#) here.



SECOND OPINIONS

It is our commitment to provide a rich and wonderful camping experience for all campers. While we could go on about the benefits of camps for teenagers, sometimes it's more helpful for teens to hear it from other teens. Anxiety is often caused from fear of the unknown. The more familiarity they have with the camp, the less nervous they'll be.

Take a look at a camp program's [photo gallery](#), [testimonial section](#), or [YouTube Channel and videos](#) – it's a great way to get a clearer visual of what to expect when you arrive at camp, as well as to read about the experiences of other youth who may have once been in a similar situation.



HOMESICKNESS & SEPERATION ANXIETY

Homesickness is a normal feeling for all teenagers (and adults) to experience at some point. It is the natural result of separating from home, our loved ones, and our rituals. There are a few leading factors as to why children in particular may feel homesick. For example, those children might have little previous experience away from home, they may have low expectations of camp, they could feel forced to go to camp, and they might be unsure whether adults will help them if they need help. Most feelings of homesickness are not problematic. In fact, missing home isn't a problem until it becomes a preoccupation. When the feelings of sadness and anxiety associated with missing home become so strong that making friends, having fun, sleeping, eating, and participating in activities is difficult, something must be done.



One way to counteract homesickness is to start at **home**. Tactics look different for all families, but here are some basic strategies:

- Involve your youth in camp planning; let them explore a camp's website, view a day in the life, scroll through galleries; try to make camp their choice!
- Review any camp policies or Camper Code of Conduct to establish behavioural expectations
- Check in with your camp's Leadership Team to chat about the benefits of camp and give your child a friendly face once they arrive
- Try to foster independence before sending your teen to camp – this might look like asking your child to help with chores and packing a bag for camp by themselves
- Encourage your teen to spend a day or weekend away at a friend's house

“At its core, homesickness is a yearning to be at home within ourselves. The cure for homesickness is camp itself, because at camp you can learn everything you need to know about finding your way home”.

– Tilda Shalof, a long-term camp nurse



It might be normal for a child to ask: “What happens when I feel homesick? Can I go home then?”. Some parents and caretakers may have an urge to respond with “I’ll come get you if you’re homesick”. Telling a child that you’ll be able to get them can undermine their confidence and independence.

Our Executive Director, Chelsea Lake, talks about the **Care & Respect Model** that we value at The YES [here](#). She describes how one of the necessary factors in the healthy development of teens is the development and independence. This is achieved by parents showing their kids respect by empowering them to make decisions, take on responsibilities and experience periods of interdependence. Unfortunately some teens have not been given this respect and empowerment and instead have, “helicopter parents, ready to swoop down and intervene at a moment’s notice”. Telling your child that you’ll pick them up after the first sign of homesickness can become a negative crutch for them to hold onto for far too long. Instead, challenging your child and offering them reminders of the benefits of what they are experiencing can be helpful.

HOW TO RESPOND TO MY HOMESICK TEEN

Your teen may give you a call while their at camp. The following are great tactics

- Encouraging them to stay busy with activities at camp
- Pack something small that gives them comfort from home (blanket, book, stuffed animal)
- Connect with the staff team for any concerns – chances are that the camp staff are already aware of what your child is experiencing and may already be offering support through things like check-in's, friend matching, and encouragement
- Reminding them that they're only at camp for a few days, and that they'll feel a sense of accomplishment when they make it to the end of the week



Sometimes parents and caregivers may need to take on the role of **'the villain'** on a phone call. While this role can be quite uncomfortable, it doesn't last long. If your child calls to share that they're feeling homesick, it's important to acknowledge their feelings and communicate your love. It's also important to challenge them, and yourself. Instead of saying "I'll pick you up tomorrow", you may want to say something like "If you still feel this way in two days, we'll discuss what we can do" or "Give it your best try this summer and at the end of your stay, we will discuss if you want to return next year". More often than not, pushing your child to get through a few days of camp without contact starts off rocky but can lead to your child's increased personal growth, self-esteem, and a completed commitment.

PACKING

You can find our packing list [here](#). Packing things like musical instruments, books, simple art supplies, a journal or other hobbies is also a great way for teens to bond with other youth and bring them a sense of comfort. It's also important to know what not to pack - some things aren't appropriate to bring to camp. Feel free to contact us if you have questions.

At The YES, we ask participants to hand in their cellphones as it allows us to focus on the people in our community and be present with one another. Ensuring that your youth is aware of this and any other camp protocols is helpful and decreases any 'shock' or frustration. Of course, participants can still access phones for emergencies and check-ins on a case by case basis. Sometimes teens reply on their phones for music to fall asleep at night, or as an alarm clock. Bringing a non-wifi connecting MP3 player or alarm clock can help reduce these dependencies.

After our annual programming, we consistently see that more than 90% of our participants enjoy their break from technology and social media.



QUESTIONS?

At The YES we want all youth to succeed; we want to be able to push through our comfort zones together to achieve a transformative experience. Following the above tips to prepare for your first summer camp can do wonders to contribute to diminishing fear and creating life-long memories and friendships.

If you have any further questions about our programming and how to encourage success, please reach out to our team at info@theyes.ca.

