

# Homesickness

Summer is fast approaching and many kids are busy packing their suitcases for the annual pilgrimage to summer camp. At the same time, many parents are preparing for the usual bout of homesickness that kicks in a short while after children have been separated from their families and homes.

The following are some guidelines to help you and your child prepare for the ups-and-downs of a week at camp:

1. Involve children in the decision to spend time away from home, so that children have a sense of control.
2. Speak openly of possible homesickness. Feeling homesick and missing family, friends and pets is normal. Knowing this, your child may accept homesick feeling with less anxiety.
3. Arrange for a practice time away from home, such as a two- or three-day stay with relatives. If a child has reached high school without having gone to summer camp or more than a night away from home, this is especially important to prepare them for college or independent life.
4. Practice writing letters, and supply pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes before the child leaves home.
5. Work with your child to learn about the camp ahead of time, so they know what to anticipate. Heighten their interest by pointing out some of the exciting activities at camp, perhaps by viewing the photographs and reading descriptions on the Sunset Lake Camp web site.
6. If possible, try to introduce kids to other campers or counselors ahead of time. A familiar face can make all the difference.
7. Discuss what camp will be like before your child leaves. Consider role-playing anticipated situations, such as using a flashlight to find the bathroom.
8. Encourage your child to make friends with others and seek out trusted adults to connect to.
9. Use a calendar to show exactly the amount of time a child will be away. Predictability and perspective on the length of separation is important whenever possible.
10. Pack a personal item from home, such as a stuffed animal or favorite blanket.
11. Don't make a "pick up plan" or a deal with a child to bring he or she home if they don't like the experience of being away. This undermines the child's sense that their parents have confidence in their ability to be on their own, and set an expectation that they won't like the new experience.

*12. Warn children against keeping feelings of homesickness to themselves, doing something "bad" or inappropriate in order to get sent home or trying to escape.*

*13. If for some reason you do wind-up on the phone with a crying, homesick child, be supportive and positive about his or her ability to adjust and be absolutely firm about sticking it out. "Just try it one more day" likely translates to "I'm going home in a day." Again, such statements invite the child to fail. Alternatively, "You must stay," is more likely to translate to, "I don't have a choice so I might as well make the best of it."*

*14. Don't feel guilty about encouraging your child to stay at camp. For many children, camp is the first step toward independence and plays an important role in their growth and development.*

*15. Before the separation, avoid making comments that express anxiety about the child going away. Even "I hope you'll be okay" or "what will I do without you" can leave a child worried that something bad might happen to them or their parents, and make them preoccupied with thoughts of home. Rather, acknowledge in a positive way that you will miss your child. For example, say "I'm going to miss you, but I know you will have a good time at camp."*

*16. When dropping your child off at camp, take enough time to see the facilities, meet the counselors, then leave. This is not a good time to visit and watch activities. A cheerful, confident attitude on your part will get the week off to a good start.*

*17. Above all, know whether your child is really ready for a separation.*

*Adapted from the American Camping Association web site.*