



CARING FOR HOMESICKNESS

*Homesickness is normal and can affect **campers of all ages**, with **all ranges of experiences being away from home**. The good news is that when those feelings bubble up, campers are in a caring community, with staff who are trained to walk alongside them, and resources they can try.*

Tips to try before camp:

- **Tell your child how much you love them and how proud you are of them for trying something new.** Tell them what you're looking forward to hearing about camp when they return home. Consider replacing the language of "I'll miss you so much" with "I love you so much." We find this infinitely more empowering than telling campers that if they are homesick, you'll come pick them up. Campers who hear the message that they can be picked up at any time if they start to feel homesick are less likely to have a positive experience at camp.
- **Talk to your child about who they can reach out to** if they have feelings of homesickness at camp. They can talk to their cabin leader, our health coordinator, or any camp staff - including the camp directors.
- Remind your child of times they have been away from home, done hard things, or surprised themselves. These reminders of resilience can build confidence!
- **Practice some of your routines and independent skills**, especially around bedtime routines. This can give campers confidence in the evening when homesickness is most likely to arise. Include campers in the packing process or give them a tour of the bag. Often, when a camper thinks they've left something at home, it's simply behind a zipper or in a pocket they didn't realize was there.
- **Have your child practice sleeping somewhere other than their bed.** If campers are used to sleeping in a bed in their bedroom, try bringing their sleeping bags they plan to take to camp and sleeping in the living room. Maybe they'll hear the refrigerator's hum, the street light's flicker, the washing machine's whooshing. This simple move can help your child build confidence in sleeping somewhere that has different noises or stimuli. It can even help them get used to the slippery feeling of a sleeping bag.
- You **can contact your child through one-way email during their time at camp.** An email from home can ease a camper's heart, knowing their family is safe and cheering for their success. Consider an email that conveys the message that all is well at home; go have fun; we can't wait to hear about it! Staff monitor the email address, print the emails, and deliver the messages to campers.

How we train our staff:

- **Our camp staff know that homesickness is real and can manifest in real, physical, symptoms.** Homesickness is treated with sincerity. We will avoid dismissing concerns because it is "just homesickness."
- **We will redirect where appropriate** by getting the camper involved in an activity or giving them ownership over a responsibility. We may ask another camper to extend a specific invitation to participate or identify which schedule elements excite the camper most and try to create extra time in those environments - "Just one more hour until Gaga Ball!"

- **Camp staff know that engaging in conversation with campers about home or homesickness can be very comforting and validating.** We will not avoid it or pretend it doesn't exist. Staff may help campers write a letter home or ask questions about what they're missing - a favorite fluffy dog or how their grown-up cuts the crust off their toast. Sometimes, this gives information to a staff member to support the camper - "Oh! You're used to sleeping with a night light; that's not a problem; I have one right here!"
- **Camp staff may give campers a time to check in next.** "I hear you are missing home; let's try to enjoy worship and see how you're feeling at lunch!"
- **Specifically, at bedtime, camp staff use a variety of resources.** Staff may read books aloud or play calming music. They also let campers know that if they need something in the night, they can wake the staff up.
- **Camp staff will also pay special attention to tender times during the day, like meal times and unstructured time.** Some advanced conversations about meals can instill confidence in your child if food is an area of worry for them or if they have restrictions or selective tendencies.
- **Camp staff also know how to ask for help themselves** if the homesickness is persistent and intense if they've run out of tools to try, when it is hindering other campers' ability to enjoy the camp experience, or if physical symptoms escalate (vomiting, etc.).
- Campers occasionally ask to call home - this is not typically our first line of defense as camp staff. **We want to validate their feelings and offer some interventions first, like redirection, conversation, participation, and encouragement.** In some instances, a phone call is the right next step. We try to arrange for these phone calls to be made during the day, and it would be even better if they were made directly before an activity the camper is excited about so they can move directly into something they enjoy. For the camper's safety, the Camp Director will facilitate all contact home from a camper.
- **Camp staff are equipped! They are caring, attentive adults who can guide campers.**

When will we contact you?

- Camp staff will be in touch when homesickness is affecting the physical, social, or emotional well-being of your camper and initial interventions like redirection, conversation, participation and encouragement have not been effective.
- We will contact the camper family if homesickness is significantly impacting the camper's experience at camp or the experience of other campers.
- We will also contact you if homesickness is a barrier to inclusion or full participation.

Contact Us:

We are your partner in a safe, positive, camp experience. Please reach out with any questions or concerns.

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