

# HOMESICKNESS PREVENTION

Prior to the start of camp, talk with your child about homesickness. Most children are pretty good at predicting how strong their own homesick feelings will be, and talking about homesickness will not cause it, or make it worse. Let your camper know that there might be times when she will feel a little homesick, even though she is having a great time at camp and that is perfectly normal. Let her know that there are lots of things to think about or do to feel better if she feels homesick. Many campers have found that the following ideas help reduce homesickness at camp:

- **Do something fun** - Stay busy at camp with activities and with friends in between activities
- **Do something to feel closer to home** - Write letters to family, look at pictures and read letters
- **Think about the good components of being at camp** - Think of all the interesting and novel things you can do at camp that you can not do at home
- **Try to be happy and have fun** - Try to change the way that you feel - sometimes just thinking about feeling good is enough to change your mood
- **Remind yourself that camp is not really that long** - Think about how short camp is
- **Talk with someone who can help you feel better** - At camp, there are many people around you who are there for your support. Talk to your counselors or other staff; they are there to help you through tough times, and they are experts at helping kids get over their homesickness!



Talking about these coping strategies and working on them with your camper are great ways to diminish the chances that she will have significant homesickness while at Camp.

# A GUARDIAN'S GUIDE TO HOMESICKNESS

Here are some things you can do as a parent to help reduce the threat of homesickness:

- **Keep doubts to yourself** – Try not to say things that will make your child worry about how you will feel when she is away at camp. If you are uncertain about your child's ability to cope with homesickness, it is best to not share your doubts with them. It is preferable for children to hear positive messages from their parents. If you let them know that you believe they can do it, they will be more likely to succeed.
- **Send your child a letter at camp before the first day** – receiving mail at camp helps children feel loved and remembered. Personal, positive letters from home are often the cure for almost any illness.
- **Do not make deals about early pick-ups** – Unfortunately, some well-meaning parents try to comfort their child by saying something like, "Well, if you still feel homesick, we will come to camp and pick you up." This promise almost guarantees that the child will be homesick. They inevitably remember the discussion and hold onto your promise no matter how wonderful their camp experience is.

There are two other reasons why pick up deals usually backfire. First, the deal sends a negative message. The message is "Mom and Dad do not think I can make it through camp. They think I will be so homesick that the only solution will be to leave camp." They also give campers a powerful, home-related thought to dwell on: The Pick-Up. Every time your child encounters a stressful situation at camp, or feels a twinge of homesickness, her thoughts turn to the pick-up. "My parents said that if I do not like Camp, they will come to pick me up." This thought becomes a mental crutch. The camper leans on it, rather than developing their skills to cope with new situations.

If your child asks you straight out, "Mom, will you come pick me up if I get really homesick and hate camp?" a good response could be, "You sound a little nervous about going to camp, but I think you are really going to love it. It is normal to feel nervous before you go. If you do have some homesick feelings at camp, there will be people there who can help you through those feelings. Even though you might have some homesick feelings, I think you are going to have a great time at camp."

Learning to cope with homesickness is a skill your child can use the next time she is away from home. Once kids recognize the feeling of homesickness, cope with it, and survive a brief separation from home, their confidence about future separations skyrockets.