

Camp provides a wonderful opportunity for children to gain independence. Being away from home, particularly for the first time, can be both exciting and, sometimes, a little anxiety provoking. Homesickness is a normal, predictable response to being away from home and is not limited to younger or first time campers. Homesickness typically means that there are lots of things about home that campers love and miss. That being said, however, homesickness can be uncomfortable and parents should know that there are ways to prepare their campers for camp that can reduce the chance that they will feel homesick.

Managing and minimizing homesickness:

1. Talk with your child about the upcoming time apart from you. Sometimes parents think that if they talk about homesickness, it will cause their child to feel homesick. Actually, the opposite is true. Talking a little bit about missing home and being prepared for it can help your child feel better. You can honestly tell your child that almost everyone misses something from home when they are away, and the good news is that there are lots of things that they can do if they feel bothered by homesickness.
2. Prepare your child by discussing strategies to use should he or she feel homesick. Encourage your child to talk to their counselors, friends, or adults in camp to help feel better. Most importantly, specifically encourage your child to make new friends and participate in activities to both to help distract them from their homesick feelings and because having fun will help them feel better.
3. Although it may be tempting, avoid making a “pick-up deal.” Sometimes parents feel that if they promise, “if you don’t like it, I’ll come and pick you up” they are showing concern for their child. This type of bargain actually increases the likelihood that the child will feel homesick. It also gives the child the impression that the parent has little confidence in the child’s ability to cope and the parent must come to rescue them.
4. Work together with your child to learn about camp. Use the website to look at pictures of the different activities at camp, and read our blogs about the adventures campers are having. Being familiar with camp and our programs will help your camper feel more comfortable when they arrive.
5. Keep it positive! Avoid expressing whatever anxieties or ambivalent feelings you may have about your child’s time away from home.
6. Help your child keep in touch and still feel connected to you by providing them with paper, envelopes, stamps and address, or better yet, address labels!

*Adapted from Thurber CA, Walton EA. Preventing and treating homesickness. Child and Adolescent Psy Clin of North America 2007, 843-858.*