



Homesick Camper

Almost all new campers and even a few returning campers go through an adjustment phase upon arriving at camp. This is to be expected; even the seasoned overnigher cannot anticipate all of the realities of a new environment and is bound to wonder what they have gotten themselves into. Suddenly, four or eight weeks seem like a lifetime. Most campers pass through this transition period within hours of arriving at camp. A few take longer. The following are complaints we've heard during the first few days of camp:

"I miss my parents."

"I miss my brother/sister."

"Everybody else knows each other."

"There's nothing to do."

"I miss my house."

"I don't feel well." (The nurse prescribes Tums, Tylenol and lots of TLC the first week.)

"There's nobody to talk to."

"This camp is fine, I just want to go home."

"This camp rots, I just want to go home."

Happily, homesickness usually resolves itself quickly and we have a good laugh about the things that were said the first few days. A few kids - one or two each month - do take longer to adjust. Over the years we have noticed common patterns among homesick campers and have learned some methods for parents and camp staff to work together to help kids quickly through the adjustment period. Below are some observations and suggestions:

The two-week "no telephone" rule is essential. Though it seems like cruel and unusual punishment to some kids, it really does shorten the adjustment time. Your camper must be given the opportunity to rely on friends and staff at camp and realize that parents cannot solve their problems. Of course we make exceptions for emergencies. While phone calls are allowed after two weeks, we do not necessarily recommend that you call. We discourage frequent calling as it means your camper is spending too much time during meals away from the table and distracted from what they are at camp for. Discussing expectations with your child before they leave for camp will prevent problems and disappointments later on.

Arrange a regular pattern of communication with your camper before camp. Try to send off a letter before your camper leaves home so that it will arrive at camp soon after they do. Every camper loves mail! Please remember that letters written by campers in the first days of camp are often negative. By the time you get these letters things have most likely changed! It is difficult for families who are used to instant communications to change habits, and yet summer camp is a



wonderful opportunity to learn to communicate via the written word. Parents must set the stage however, and write often, even if kids fail to respond frequently. While we make e-mail available for your incoming correspondence, we ask that you limit your use to a few each week and use the postal service as much as possible. (Campers living outside of North America may ask the Office to scan and send letters; however, we limit this to twice a week.)

Homesickness is typically an intermittent phenomenon. Some campers claim that they are “always miserable” yet we see them engaged and happy during activities. Kids often choose to write when they feel low. Because children feel closest to their parents, they will unload on you. Over the years we have seen many a smiling and happy camper receive a phone call and return sobbing a few minutes later!

Commit to the whole camp experience. Some parents bargain with their children and agree to take them home if they don’t like camp after a specified time period. While this is done with the best of intentions, the end result is disastrous. Children who have elicited this kind of bargain cease to make an effort and focus only on making it through the agreed upon length of time.

Both you and your child are being asked to adapt. Having a child away from home can be wrenching, and there is definitely an adjustment phase for parents. Over the years, many parents have told us about the unexpected feelings of loss they experienced when their child departed. Some sensitive kids perceive their parents’ grief and feel guilty for enjoying themselves away from home. These kids need added reassurance that all is well on the home front.

It is essential for parents to give kids the message that they can and will adjust. As in most things, a “this is hard, but you can do it” attitude is enormously encouraging! Feeling sorry for a camper will tell them to feel sorry for themselves. Remember that your child is not being expected to handle this on their own. There are people here to help them through a difficult time. We work hard to help those few unsure kids find their niche at camp. Have faith in us and in yourself for choosing the right camp for your child.

No news is good news! Rest assured that if there were a real problem or emergency, or if we feel we need your insight as parents on a particular situation, we will give you a phone call to check in. If you don’t hear from us, this is a good sign. Our staff are doing all they can to support and get to know each camper as they settle into camp life.

Curious to learn more? Here is a book recommendation for parents. A great resource on how to prepare your camper for camp in a way that minimizes homesickness is “[The Summer Camp Handbook](#)” by Chris Thurber. If you have concerns about your child’s adjustment, please feel free to call camp and the Director will give you a call back.