

HOMESICKNESS AND GOING AWAY TO CAMP

For your child who is going away to camp for the first time. The following suggestions are from the American Academy of Pediatrics (Thurber, C. Preventing and Treating Homesickness. Pediatrics 2007; 119: 192-201.)

We also suggest that you compose a letter to be given to your child's camp counselor that can be shared with your child in the event that he/she becomes homesick and upset. Please include that you are proud of your child for going to camp and that you know that he/she has the ability to enjoy camp and complete the week.

Homesickness Prevention Strategies:

1. Discuss the upcoming separation with your child. Young people should be told, "Almost everyone misses something about home when they are away. Homesickness is normal. And the good news is that there are lots of things you can think and do to help make things better if homesickness bothers you."
2. Involve your child in the decision to spend time away from home. Prepare and pack as a family. Taking part in even the smallest decisions will increase perceptions of control. By contrast, feeling forced to leave home often increases the severity of homesickness.
3. Discuss coping strategies with your child. Using some of these strategies during practice time away from home will boost your child's confidence about the separation.
 - a. Do something fun, like play with friends, to forget about homesick feelings.
 - b. Do something (write a letter, look at a family picture) to feel closer to home.
 - c. Go see someone who can talk with you to help you feel better.
 - d. Think about the good side of things (activities, friends) to feel better.
 - e. Think that the time away is actually pretty short to make time go by faster.
 - f. Try not to think about home and loved ones to forget about homesickness.
 - g. Think about loved ones to figure out what they would say to help.
4. Practice correspondence. Ensuring that children know how to write traditional letters increases the likelihood that they will maintain some contact with home. Give children pre-stamped, preaddressed envelopes and notebook paper.
5. Work together with your child to learn about their new environment. The more young people know about the place to which they are going, the more at home they will feel when they arrive.
6. Help your child get to know some of the people in the new environment. Having at least one familiar face - be it an adult or a peer - in a new place can diminish feelings of homesickness by increasing feelings of social support and connection.
7. Encourage your child to make new friends and seek the support of trusted adults. Both kinds of connections ease the transition to the new environment.
8. Avoid expressing anxious or ambivalent feelings about time away from home to your child. Instead, express enthusiasm and optimism about the fun your child is going to have in the new environment.

9. Use a wall calendar to show your child the time between today and the day of separation. Highlight which days or weeks they will be away so that he or she can see that it is a discrete period, not an eternity. During the separation, a calendar might be a way for your child to keep perspective on the separation.

10. Do not make a "pick-up deal" with your child. Promising that "if you don't like it, I'll come pick you up" decreases your child's likelihood of success in the new environment; this will give the impression to your child that you have so little confidence in his ability to cope with the separation that the only solution is to be rescued. Also, such deals create difficulties for staff members, who after enthusiastic support and coaching may be faced with a child who says, "My parents said that if I didn't like it here, they would come to get me." It also puts you in the position of either (1) fulfilling your promise to pick up your child, robbing him/her of a wonderful opportunity to grow and develop, or (2) renegeing on your promise, causing an erosion of trust in your relationship with your child. Respond to the query, "What if I feel homesick?" with a statement such as, "You probably will feel a little homesick, but we have discussed what to think or do in case homesickness bothers you. Plus, staff members will be there to talk with you and help you make it through. "You'll have a great time"