



The Great News about Homesickness

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That's right...there's great news about homesickness! For starters, you should know that...

- Homesickness (or "missing home") is normal. In study after study, researchers found that 95 percent of boys and girls who were spending at least two weeks at overnight camp felt some degree of homesickness. Children at day camp may also feel pangs of homesickness, but less frequently.
- Homesickness is typically mild. Nearly everyone misses something about home when they're away. Some campers most miss their parents; others most miss home cooking, a sibling, or the family pet. Whatever they miss, the vast majority of children have a great time at camp and are not bothered by mild homesickness.
- Homesickness is something everyone can learn to cope with. In fact, research has uncovered multiple strategies that work for kids. Most kids use more than one strategy to help them deal with homesickness.
- Homesickness builds confidence. Overcoming a bout of homesickness and enjoying time away from home nurtures children's independence and prepares them for the future. The fact that second-year campers are usually less homesick than first-year campers is evidence of this powerful growth.
- Homesickness has a silver lining. If there's something about home children miss, that means there's something about home they love — and that's a wonderful thing. Sometimes just knowing that what they feel is a reflection of love makes campers feel much better.

So if nearly everyone feels some homesickness, what can be done to prevent a really strong case of homesickness?



Recipe for positive camp preparation:

- Make camp decisions together.
- Arrange lots of practice time away from home.
- Share your optimism, not your anxiety.
- Never ever make a pick-up deal.

Ok, then, what are the most effective ways of coping with homesickness at camp? What advice can you write in a letter or e-mail to your son or daughter if you get a homesick letter?

Anti-Homesick Strategies for Kids

- Stay busy. Doing a fun, physical activity nearly always reduces homesickness intensity.
- Stay positive. Remembering all the cool stuff you can do at camp keeps the focus on fun, not on home.
- Stay in touch. Writing letters, looking at a photo from home, or holding a memento from home can be very comforting.
- Stay social. Making new friends is a perfect antidote to bothersome homesickness. Talking to the staff at camp is also reassuring.

- Stay focused. Remember that you're not at camp forever, just a few weeks. Bringing a calendar to camp helps you be clear about the length of your stay.
- Stay confident. Anti-homesickness strategies take some time to work. Kids who stick with their strategies for five or six days almost always feel better.

Mom and Dad, your help preparing your child for this amazing growth experience will pay huge dividends. After a session of camp, you'll see an increase in your child's confidence, social skills, and leadership. And while your son or daughter is at camp, you can enjoy a well-deserved break from full-time parenthood. Remember: Homesickness is part of normal development. Our job should be to coach children through the experience, not to avoid the topic altogether.

The article originally appeared in Camp, a copyrighted publication of the American Camp Association. Christopher Thurber is a board-certified clinical psychologist and author of a new DVD/CD set for new camper families called "The Secret Ingredients of Summer Camp Success." Visit CampSpirit.com to learn more



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