

Missing Home

Preparing the First-Time Camper and Family

First time campers and their parents sometimes spend a good bit of time worrying about missing home. For the first-time camper, how he/she is prepared will influence the overall experience. Most kids do just fine... but here are some thoughts which may help:

Before camp, parents should be supportive and sensitive. Any new experience, especially in a new environment, causes nervousness, but a positive outlook and encouragement are crucial to a successful camp experience. This includes parents as well as campers! Talk to your child/teen about camp, the expectations, the activities, the environment and, of course, the fun they will have. Speak openly of possible missing home. Missing home is natural, and certain feelings of missing home, parents, pets or friends are normal. Once this is understood, your child/teen may accept missing home feelings with less anxiety. Avoid statements like "I'm going to be so lonely without you!" Don't make your child/teen feel guilty about going away. In your letters to camper, don't dwell on how much you miss them, how lonely things are without them, or give too much information about home. This may cause anxiety. Ask lots of questions about camp, their activities, new friends, and be encouraging.

Please avoid the temptation to "make a deal". Avoid telling your child/teen, "If you give camp a few days and don't like it, I will come get you." The offer to rescue your camper is done with the best of intentions, but a child/teen may focus on nothing else but how to make this happen and will never give camp a fair chance. Don't feel guilty about encouraging your child/teen to stay at camp. This opportunity is the first step toward independence and plays an important role in growth and development.

Summer camp is a unique place. In addition to being fun, attending camp is a wonderful growing and learning opportunity for your child/teen, and will provide him/her with skills, lessons, friendships, and memories that will last a lifetime. Camp is a great place to unlock a child's potential, develop self-esteem, and enhance social skills while having the time of their lives.

Missing Home **is a normal reaction.** Most people experience missing home at some time in their lives. Many people learn to cope with missing home at summer camp, and camp is a good place to deal with the feeling of missing home. Camp is a place for children to learn self-confidence. Camp is a place where children learn about responsibility. Camp is a place to have fun with new friends. Camp is a safe, caring environment where nurturing adults are trained to support children through this sometimes difficult growth process. Missing home is normal and often will go away!

If you should receive a missing home letter from your camper, don't panic! Often the first couple of days are a big adjustment and it may take some time for your camper to become more involved in the program, cabin, activities, and to make new friends.

What do we do at camp to limit the onset of missing home? Our opening day and daily schedules are designed to minimize the opportunity for the onset of missing home. We spend extra time and effort with every new camper at the beginning of each session and are constantly alert to the outward signs of missing home. We have a strong support system that includes the camp director, senior staff, camper psychosocial support staff, nurses, and cabin counselors.

Please do not send a cell phone with your camper to camp. We will call you if your child/teen continues to express sadness and wants to go home. **What do we do when your child is missing home?** Our job is to help your camper work through these feelings and to learn to feel secure in the camp environment. Rest assured that if your child/teen is having a difficult time at camp that someone from camp will contact you to discuss the best way to handle the situation and your child. Have faith in your camper and the camp staff. Your child/teen's camp counselors play an important role in the adjustment process and are probably the most instrumental in dealing with your camper. They are prepared. We will work with you to develop the best plan for your child/teen.

We care very much about your camper. Over our 43 year camp history, we have had a great deal of experience with this problem, and have had much success. We don't treat it lightly and we are willing to spend as much time as is necessary to ensure a positive camping experience. However, trust your instincts. On occasion it may be necessary for your child/teen to have a shortened stay at camp. A shortened stay is not seen as a failure. Hopefully your child/teen will share the fun they did have while attending camp. Focus on the positive and encourage your child/teen to try a new adventure or program next summer.

We will do everything in our power to ensure a memorable and happy camp experience for your camper. If you have any concerns this summer, please let us know. Our goal is for Camp Sunshine to be a "home away from home"!