

How to Help Your Child Have a Great Time at Camp

-First-Time Camp Experiences-

For thousands, the camp experience has been a long-standing family tradition. For others, the camp experience seems almost counterintuitive. Send your child off to camp for maybe weeks at a time? "As parents, recognizing that you and your child are growing and learning on a journey together is key to adequately preparing yourself and your child for any type of separation, including going to camp for the first time," states Peg Smith, executive director of the American Camp Association (ACA).

Following are helpful tips to consider as you ask yourself, "Who's going through separation anxiety, me or my child?"

- **Separation is a part of growing up.** Find opportunities to give your child independence in safe, structured surroundings with caring adults such as the camp environment. Understanding that healthy separation prepares your child to be a confident, productive adult sometimes makes the process more successful.

- **Understand that separation is natural and necessary;** remember your baby's first crawl, the first time your child stepped onto a school bus, and the overnight at a friend's or relative's – these memories are all important developmental phases you and your child successfully encountered. Each successful separation gives your child confidence for the next challenge. Recognize and expect success.

Implement steps to help prepare you and your child to have a smooth transition to camp. Both parents and children benefit from these recommendations. Share the experience.

- **Recognize separating from your child may be just as difficult for you as for your child, maybe even more so.**

Opportunities for children to experience healthy, successful separation helps your child discover who they are and to recognize their strengths.

"As children prepare to eventually leave home permanently, I often wonder who is being prepared during each separation experience throughout a child's life – the growing child or the maturing adult," comments Smith. "I think it proves learning is a lifelong process."