

How to Help Your Child Have a Great Time at Camp

-Homesickness: Preparing Your Camper-

This summer, your child will get their first taste of independence at a summer resident camp. For many, it will also be their first experience with homesickness. But parents don't have to feel helpless when homesickness strikes. The prescription for camper homesickness is a simple solution of preparation and patience.

- **Be Prepared.** Tell children that homesickness is normal, but that they can use strategies like writing letters home, sharing their feelings with other people, and thinking about all the good things that camp is giving them, to help ease their worry.
- **Encourage** your child's independence throughout the year. Practice separations, such as sleepovers at a friend's house, can simulate the camp environment.
- **Discuss** what camp will be like before your child leaves. Consider role-playing anticipated situations, such as using a flashlight to find the bathroom.
- **Learn About the Camp.** Work with the child to learn about the camp ahead of time, so they know what to anticipate. Attend the Camp Open House at the camp your child will be attending so that she will be familiar with her surroundings. She will also be able to meet the Camp Director so she can have a familiar face to greet her when she comes to camp.
- **Be Positive.** Before the separation, don't make comments that express anxiety or ambivalence about the child going away. Even "I hope you'll be okay" or "what will I do without you" can leave a child worried that something bad might happen to them or their parents, and make them preoccupied with thoughts of home.

Please do not bribe your camper. Linking a successful stay at camp to a material object sends the wrong message. The reward should be your child's new found confidence and independence.

- **Provide familiarity to the camp experience.** Pack a personal item from home, such as a stuffed animal.

If your child takes medicine for attention, behavior or psychological conditions, don't use camp as an excuse to take a "drug holiday." Make sure that they, and the camp's nurse or counselors, know their medication schedule and the importance of sticking to it.

- **Don't make major changes at home.** This is not the time to reconfigure your marital relationship, move to a new neighborhood, sanitize or gut and redecorate your child's room or get rid of her fossilized frog collection. When most kids return from camp, they like to find things exactly as they had left them.

- **Don't make a "pick up plan"** or a deal with a child to bring her home if she doesn't like the experience of being away. This undermines the child's sense that her parents have confidence in her ability to be on her own, and sets an expectation that she won't like the new experience.