

Tips for Dealing with Homesickness

The following are some guidelines to help you and your child prepare for the ups-and-downs of a week at camp:

1. Involve children in the decision to spend time away from home, so that children have a sense of control.
2. Speak openly of possible homesickness. Feeling homesick and missing family, friends and pets is normal. Knowing this, your child may accept homesick feelings with less anxiety.
3. Arrange for a practice time away from home, such as a two or three-day stay with relatives. If a child has reached high school without having gone to summer camp or more than a night away from home, this is especially important to prepare them for college or independent life.
4. Practice writing letters or emails, and supply pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes before the child leaves home.
5. Work with your child to learn about the camp ahead of time, so they know what to anticipate. Heighten their interest by pointing out some of the exciting activities at camp, perhaps by viewing the photographs and reading descriptions on the Lakeview Ministries web site.
6. Discuss what camp will be like before your child leaves. Consider role-playing anticipated situations, such as using a flashlight to find the bathroom.
7. Encourage your child to make friends with others and seek out trusted summer staff to connect to.
8. Use a calendar to show exactly the amount of time a child will be away. Predictability and perspective on the length of separation is important whenever possible.
9. Pack a personal item from home, such as a stuffed animal or favorite blanket.
10. Don't make a "pick up plan" or a deal with a child to bring them home if they don't like the experience of being away. This undermines the child's sense that their parents have confidence in their ability to be on their own, and set an expectation that they won't like the new experience.
11. Warn children against keeping feelings of homesickness to themselves. Talking with other people helps.
12. If for some reason you do wind-up on the phone with a crying, homesick child, be supportive and positive about his or her ability to adjust and be absolutely firm about sticking it out. "Just try it one more day" likely translates to "I'm going home in a day." Again, such statements invite the child to fail. Alternatively, "You are going to stay; I know you can do it." is more likely to translate to, "I don't have a choice so I might as well make the best of it."
13. Don't feel guilty about encouraging your child to stay at camp. For many children, camp is the first step toward independence and plays an important role in their growth and development.
14. Before the separation, avoid making comments that express anxiety 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. Rather, acknowledge in a positive way that you will miss your child. For example, say "I'm going to miss you, but I know you will have a good time at camp."
15. When dropping your child off at camp, take enough time to see the facilities, meet the counselors, then leave. A cheerful, confident attitude on your part will get the week off to a good start.
16. Above all, know whether your child is really ready for a separation.