



II99SEIU Child Care Corporation

Understanding and Overcoming Homesickness

WHAT IS HOMESICKNESS?

Homesickness is a natural feeling of loneliness or disorientation that occurs when a person is separated from familiar environments. Homesickness can occur at any age. It commonly occurs when children are away at camp, visiting family out of town or even when going away to college.

Homesickness gets better as the person gets used to a new environment and makes new friends. This process often happens so gradually, that many times people do not even realize that they are no longer homesick.

Homesickness tends to be worse when children have free time, such as early in the morning, just before bed or during periods of rest. These are the same periods of time that campers typically write letters home. If letters from your child seem sad at times, rest assured that there are some positive experiences as well.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

When children go away to camp, homesickness is the norm and not the exception. According to several studies, more than 80% of campers experience homesickness while away. There are several ways to prepare for the possibility of homesickness:

- ❑ Involve your child in the camp selection.
- ❑ Discuss expectations for camp, including the expected behavior and the benefits of attending camp.
- ❑ Plan practice separations. For example, have your child spend a night away from home in preparation for a longer period of time away.
- ❑ Prearrange communication. Know the camp's policies regarding communication and make a plan to contact your child within those guidelines.
- ❑ Visit the camp, if possible. This way, your child knows what to expect upon arrival.
- ❑ Talk to the camp director and camp staff regarding any concerns. Your child will not be the first, nor the last, child to be homesick at camp.
- ❑ Send a little piece of home to camp with your child. A small, personal item such as a stuffed animal, serves as a reminder of home.
- ❑ Write letters. Kind and reassuring words from home let the child know that your love and support is still there.
- ❑ Encourage your child to get involved in camp activities. The best way to beat homesickness is for children to participate in all activities. Sitting on the sidelines just gives campers more time to feel sad.

Remember, it is perfectly normal for a child to experience homesickness. Part of the success of camp is to overcome challenges to successfully complete the experience.

WHAT IF HOMESICKNESS PERSISTS?

Sometimes a child will not be able to overcome those difficulties. A commonly asked question is, "How do I know if my child needs to come home or if this is just a normal part of the experience?" If you are concerned, remain in contact with the camp staff. They can give you regular updates and check in on your child in a way that does not interfere with the camp experience.

If a child needs to come home, that does not mean that you should discourage camp enrollment next summer. Remember to celebrate the successes that your child may have experienced away from home and understand that taking these first steps toward independence is not an easy thing to do.

Sometimes parents experience "reverse homesickness." It is important to keep the lines of communication open with program directors; they are there to support you and help you through this process. Trust in your decision to send your child to camp – everyone involved has your child's best interest at heart!