

# Beating the Homesick Blues

First time campers and their parents sometimes spend a good bit of time worrying about homesickness. Most kids do just fine... but here are some thoughts which may help minimize potential emotional distress:

## Before camp...

- Speak openly of possible homesickness. Homesickness is natural, and certain feelings of missing home, parents, pets or friends are pretty normal. Once this is understood, your child may accept homesick feelings with less anxiety.
- Avoid statements like "I'm going to be so lonely without you!" Don't make your child feel guilty about going away.
- Heighten your child's interest by pointing out some of the exciting things you remember about your own camping experience. Be sure to be positive about how you were able to handle being away from your mom and dad.
- While painting a bright, promising picture of camp, be sure his expectations are realistic. He'll be expected to really work on some skills (such as swimming, if he's not a good swimmer already), share in camp chores (such as making his own bed and taking turns sweeping the cabin), etc.

***Please don't say,*** "If you have problems, call us and we'll come get you." A camper thus invited to fail is likely to give up at the first difficulty, abandon thoughts of adjusting to camp, and focus immediately on going home. You might say something like, "This is a commitment for one camp session. We expect you to have lots of fun... but if it's hard at times, you have to stick with it. If you don't like it, you don't have to go back... but no changing your mind in the middle!"

- If you bring him to camp, take long enough to see the facilities and meet his counselors; then leave. This is not a good time to visit and watch activities. A cheerful, confident attitude on your part will help greatly in getting the summer off to a good start.

## During camp...

- Phone calls are generally not a good idea. Some campers may be doing just fine 'til the sound of a parent's voice triggers a setback unexpected by either party. If for some reason you do wind up on the phone with a crying, homesick child, you need to be supportive, encouraging, positive about his ability to adjust, and absolutely firm about "sticking it out". "Just try it one more week" is likely to

translate to, "I'm going home in a week!". It's an invitation to fail; it leaves open the possibility of going home as a goal just when the focus needs to be on adjusting to camp. "You must stay" is more likely to translate to, "Well, I don't have a choice, so I might as well make the best of it..."

- Realize that you will probably hear the very worst. We have often seen a youngster be absolutely miserable on the phone, and be perfectly happy 30 minutes later.
- Letters from home which reassure and give confidence are wonderful. (A letter on the second or third day of camp is always welcome.)

**Our approach is to...**

1. Be supportive, encouraging, empathetic but firm.
2. Keep him busy.
3. Try to identify and solve any underlying problems (being teased, perhaps) or help him learn to live with the insoluble ones (it's raining, the water's cold, etc.).
4. Keep you informed.

We can't win the battle without your support. Some homesick campers want the world to know; others are embarrassed and try not to show it. We do want you to tell us about homesickness and other problems of which we may not be aware, and we're glad to give you feedback about your son anytime. Feel free to call us any time if you have concerns. If we're not by the phone, we'll be happy to call you back.