

Homesickness

1. Most youngsters experience homesickness to some degree when they are away from home.
2. Homesickness can be seen as separation anxiety or as a crisis in confidence: "Can I make it on my own?"
3. Homesickness is experienced by children of any age, boy or girl, at sleep-away or at day camp.
4. Homesickness often reflects a child's fears: Will my leaders like me? Will kids tease me? What if I'm scared or not good at something?
5. Homesickness is not confined to first year campers.
6. Homesickness often carries with it a social stigma. It is often less socially acceptable for a 14 year old boy to show signs of it than a 6 year old.
7. For those who experience it, the pain is very real. Either dismissing this pain or dwelling on it does a disservice to the child suffering from it.
8. Homesickness is often a parent problem. Parents often miss their children as much as (and maybe more than) their children miss them. This may be communicated, wittingly or unwittingly, to the child.
9. Children who perceive their parents' grief or loss may feel guilty going to camp -- as if they were abandoning their parents.
10. Children may send a homesick letter the first day of camp. After three days, when the letter arrives, most kids are doing better. Now it is the parent who needs help!
11. When homesickness appears in a child who has previously adjusted well to camp, it is a red flag. It usually means the child:

- a) has received some worrisome news from home or is living through a family crisis
- b) has been humiliated or has suffered some emotional injury at camp possibly even unreported physical or sexual abuse.

Some suggested approaches for addressing homesickness:

- * Acknowledge the child's feelings: Gee, Tommy, you look/sound sad/upset.
- * Share your own experience: You know, I was homesick when I went to camp, too.
- * Take time to find out a child's interests.
- * Involve the child in activities
- * Get other children to help involve the child or to show him/her around.
- * Make the child a helper or give him/her a special job.
- * Get support from other staff.