



WORKING TOGETHER TO TACKLE HOMESICKNESS

Whether your camper is returning or about to enjoy their first O-AT-KA summer, please take a few moments to familiarize yourself with some important ideas, which will assist you to help your child in the transition from home to camp. This is important every year and at every age!

HomeSICKness: There is no such thing! What?!?

When a Camper is missing home, they are not sick! They are simply missing the familiar things, people they love, and the comforts of home. If this happens, we immediately acknowledge and qualify the camper's feelings. Most of our counselors are former campers and have experienced this themselves so can share that with your camper. After reassurance, we will work together to teach skills to help deal with the feelings of missing home.

These skills prepare your camper for future endeavors of independence and ensure they understand the possibilities right in front of them. We ask for your assistance as we work as a team to prepare your child for camp.

Here are some important guidelines and resources:

- Be confident in your camper! When parents make the decision to send their child to camp, it is often the parents who are more anxious about this decision than the child. Don't let your camper pickup on your worries. Be encouraging about the great adventure they are about to take.
- Prepare your child by making a calendar (with important dates on it like Opening Day, birthdays, 4th of July) to help him visualize the length of stay at camp; assure them when they get home, things will be just as he left them; make sure he knows you will look after and love any pets while they are gone.
- Have a letter waiting for your camper upon arrival at camp. A cheerful letter encouraging him to have a wonderful time at camp will help him not dwell on feelings of sadness or what he might be missing at home. To allow for mail delays, please mail your letter the week before your camper arrives at camp.
- Speaking of letters, we recommend not oversharing if you are doing fun things without them; let them know that everything is routine at home and that they aren't missing much. Ask open ended questions for them to write back about, "*What's your favorite activity, tell me the names of your cabinmates, what's your favorite meal?*"
- Especially for new campers, the first few days can be exhilarating, exhausting and sometimes a little sad. Our staff is well trained to watch for this and will help your camper through this time period. Remember, we will call all new camper families during the first week to give you an update. And, for all campers, the best thing to remind yourself is, no news is good news!
- Most importantly, NEVER discuss a "pick-up deal" with your child. Example: "*If you don't like camp, you can come home,*" or "*Just try it and see if you like it - if not I will come get you.*" Your child has committed to camp and it is important they know you believe they are strong enough and you have confidence that they can do it. While well-meaning, making promises about pick-up is subtly telling them that you are not sure they are ready for this. In our experience, if you make a deal like this, they will hold you to your promise to pick them up – even if they are having a great time. If, at the end of his stay at camp, he decides he does not wish to return the following year, he will have made an informed decision having accomplished his original goal. Our goal is for your camper to take pride and ownership in his camp journey.
- While we will do everything we can, should your camper become extremely homesick, one of our directors will contact you and we will work together to help him understand and master the skills to overcome these feelings; or develop an alternative plan. Know it is very, very rare for a child to not overcome these feelings and leave camp.
- **Believe in your child.** You have given them a great gift in camp by fostering independence, curiosity, growth and adventure. It's a tremendous life lesson to be uncomfortable and/or do hard things - your child can do it and will thank you for it. High five to YOU!