



Homesickness Advice for Parents

(Advice for Campers on page 3)

For many Camp STIX campers, this summer will be their first experience with homesickness. But parents don't have to feel helpless when homesickness strikes. The prescription for camper homesickness is a simple solution of preparation and patience. Here's some info garnered from the internet which we'd like to share with you:

Phillips Exeter Academy psychologist Dr. Christopher Thurber studied homesickness in 329 boys between the ages of 8 and 16 at resident camp. According to his results, homesickness is the norm rather than the exception. A whopping 83 percent of the campers studied reported homesickness on at least one day of camp.

Thurber and the American Camp Association (ACA) suggest the following tips for parents to help their child deal with homesickness at camp:

- Encourage your child's independence throughout the year. Practice separations, such as sleepovers at a friend's house, which can simulate the camp environment.
- Involve your child in the process of choosing a camp. The more that your child owns the decision, the more comfortable s/he will feel being at camp.
- Discuss what camp will be like before your child leaves. Consider role playing anticipated situations, such as using a flashlight to find the bathroom.
- Because Camp STIX has a no-phone-calls policy, discuss how you plan to honor it. Here at Camp STIX, we don't think of homesickness as being an emergency. We believe that most kids find it harder if they call home, and that the victory of successfully dealing with separation is an important milestone for families to accomplish.
- Send a note or care package ahead of time to arrive the first day of camp. Acknowledge, in a positive way, that you will miss your child. For example, you can say "I am going to miss you, but I know that you will have a terrific time at camp."
- Send a letter or two. Receiving such contact from home gives reassurance that you're thinking of your child, and you can speak with pride about how your child is growing through this time at camp, and about how much fun you know is available at camp.
- Don't bribe. Linking a successful stay at camp to a material object sends the wrong message. The reward should be your child's new-found confidence and independence.
- Pack a personal item from home, such as a stuffed animal.
- If an emergency "rescue call" should come from camp about your child, try to offer calm reassurance and to put the time frame into perspective for your child (e.g. "three more days – that's like a holiday weekend, remember how fast that went last 4th of July?"). Talk candidly with the camp staff member, to obtain his/her perspective on your child's adjustment, and try

to avoid offering to take your child home early, unless advised to do so by the camp person contacting you.

- Don't feel guilty about encouraging your child to stay at camp. For many children, camp is a first step toward independence, and this milestone plays an important role in their growth and development.

You must trust your instincts. While most incidents of homesickness will pass in a day or two, Thurber's research shows that approximately seven percent of the cases are severe. If your child is not eating or sleeping because of anxiety or depression, it is time to go home. However, don't make your child feel like a failure if their stay at camp is cut short. Focus on the positive and encourage your child to try camp again next year. If you feel it will be helpful, read over the information in the following pages, and consider reading some or all of this to your child before camp.

Good luck! Feel free to call us if you have questions or wish to discuss this further with us.

Sincerely,

The Camp STIX Leadership Team

Homesickness Advice for Campers

Sometimes, feeling homesick is a big part of the camp experience.

Panda, 8 told us: “When I was in summer camp I missed my family, so I wrote them a note. Then they wrote me a note back that said about how they felt the first time they went to summer camp with a picture of them and a stuffed animal to keep me company.”

Says **Ruth, 12**: “The first night there was AWFUL! I was cold and I was homesick and I cried a lot. I think it was in the middle of the night when I finally fell asleep. But the rest was fun. I made new friends and I can't wait until next year.”

When you're far away from your home, family, and friends, it's only natural to feel a little sad inside. There might be times, especially at night, when you feel a little sick to your stomach. You might wish you were back in familiar surroundings, and you might even find yourself crying. This is totally normal, but there ARE ways to deal with it and go on to have a great time at camp.

Here are some things that can really help:

Remember that you're not the only person feeling this way

- Feeling homesick is bad enough, but it can make things worse if you think you're the only camper dealing with this sort of fear and sadness. The truth is, most campers go through times when they miss their family or friends back home.
- Tell yourself that it's okay to feel a little sad, but it doesn't mean you're not ready for camp or that you won't have a wonderful time.

Have a reminder of home

- When you start to miss home, it can help to have a photo of your family or pet to keep by your bed.
- You might also want to bring your own pillow or blanket from home so you feel more comfortable. (But remember: don't bring anything that's so special you couldn't bear it if it got lost.)
- Ask a family member to write you an encouraging letter that you can read in bed, or give you a special necklace you can wear so they'll always be with you in spirit.
- Before you leave for camp, set aside some little tokens (like a small toy or a favorite book) that will remind you of home and ask a parent to send one to you every couple days.

Write plenty of letters

- This will not only make you feel closer to the people you are writing to, but it will help you collect your thoughts, sort out your emotions (just like writing in a journal, which is also a good idea) and remind you of things you're doing at camp.
- If you're feeling lonely at the end of the day, sit down and write a letter about the stuff you did since you woke up...you might realize that it was a pretty awesome day after all!

Calling home

- Of course, your parents or emergency contact person is available by phone for an emergency.
- Here at Camp STIX, we don't think of homesickness as being an emergency. We believe that most kids find it harder if they call home. We encourage you to face this challenge with bravery

and courage, and we'll support you and help you to overcome this difficulty, so you can feel the joy of having worked through this challenge and grown a lot by doing so.

Talk to a counselor

- It's your counselors' job to be there for you if you have feelings about being away from home. S/he is eager to hear your feelings and support you in a time of difficulty.
- Since counselors have heard the same sort of stuff from lots of other campers, they will probably have some good ideas for helping you out and making it easier for you to adjust to camp life.
- Your counselor may even be able to match you up with other campers who are feeling the same way, or older campers who have been through it and know how to deal.

Try to make friends

- If you're homesick, feeling lonely can just make things worse.
- Although there may be times when you need to be alone with your feelings, nothing washes away sadness like spending time with someone who cares about you. So get to know your counselors and cabin mates, and spend time being social.
- Being a "part of the group" can make homesickness fade away, and eventually the other campers can even feel like a new family to you!
- Believe it or not, when you get home, you might miss your counselors and camp friends as much as you missed your regular family!

Remember that "different" can be good

- One of the things that make it hard for many kids to adjust to camp at first is that everything seems strange.
- You're sleeping someplace new, interacting with people you just met, eating different food ... it can all seem like the first day of school, except you don't go back home at the end of the day!
- To feel better, try to remember that new things can be exciting instead of scary.
- Try to change your attitude so that you're enthusiastic about new experiences, instead of being freaked out by them.
- Remember: If nothing ever changed, life would be boring, right?

Stay active and busy

- It's harder to feel homesick when you're having a good time, so make sure you get out of your cabin and participate in lots of camp activities.
- When your days are filled up with fun, you won't have as much time to think about the things you miss about being home.
- Getting involved with games, activities, and camp traditions can also make it easier to make friends.
- Before you know it, you might be so into camp that you wish you could stay longer!

What If You Try These Things, And You Still Feel Like You Need To Go Home?

- If you're absolutely miserable, or hurt in some way, your parents will come to the camp and bring you home, or arrange for you to come home some other way. But campers should only quit under extreme circumstances, because the truth is that it really does get better. Here are some ideas to help get you over the hump:

Try to make it through the first few nights

- The very first nights at camp can be the hardest, and feelings of homesickness might be very strong.
- Almost all campers who tough it out and stay will tell you that it gets much easier. Once you get into the swing of camp life, you'll be having fun, meeting new people, and staying busy. The homesickness will get much easier to bear.

Avoid making a “come get me” promise with your family

- Many people are nervous or upset when they head off to camp for the first time, and they ask their parents questions like: “If I don't like it, will you come pick me up?” Many parents agree to this deal, because it gives kids the confidence they need to show up at camp.
- This kind of promise can actually HURT, because it means that you might not be totally committed to the idea of staying at camp. If you've always got your eye on the door and are ready to call home for your “pick-up,” you won't do the things you need to fit in and make friends.

Instead, make a promise to do your best

- Decide that you're in for the long haul and make a promise to yourself that you'll stay and make the most out of a great opportunity. Once you get through the first days, you'll probably be fine, and in the following weeks, and over the next several years, you might be very glad you made the commitment to becoming a camper.
- Remember: Camp can be one of the greatest experiences of your life, even if it's a little hard at first. You might someday look back on your great memories and wonder why you ever thought about quitting!