

Getting Your Camper Ready

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Are You Ready?

How do you know if your daughter (and you) are ready for her to go to sleep-away camp?

- Has your daughter been asking to go to camp? Does she seem excited about the prospect of going to camp? Who is more excited about her going to camp—you or your daughter?
- Has your daughter had successful sleepovers or other overnight trips without you? Although you may miss her, how do you handle her being away overnight?
- Does your daughter like to try new things, with a little preparation? Not all kids like to jump headlong into new things, and that's okay. But is your child usually ready to try new things or meet new people when she gets used to the idea?
- Does your daughter take care of most of her own needs, such as brushing her teeth, combing her hair and changing her clothes with just a few reminders? Note: kids with special needs may still be ready and able to come to resident camp. Please contact the Camp Director for a discussion about your child's specific needs.

Preparing for Camp

We want your camper to have the best possible experience at Camp Four Echoes. We have found that when camp staff and parents work together as partners, each girl gets the most out of her camp experience. To help get ready for camp, we recommend "The Summer Camp Handbook" by Dr. Chris Thurber. You can also go to his website <http://www.campspirit.com/parents/the-summer-camp-handbook.html> for some great tips on preparing your camper for summer camp, such as:

- Involve your camper in the planning/preparation. Help her as she packs her own suitcase and rolls her sleeping bag. Make sure everything is labeled with her name.
- Practice having time away, like staying at Grandma's house or a troop sleep over.
- Visit camp. Come to Family Fun Day so everyone can see what camp will be like.
- Write to your camper while she's at camp
- Avoid "pick-up" deals (For more info on this, please refer to Dr. Thurber's book or website!). Pickup deals are when a parent tells their camper, "If you get homesick or don't like it, just call me and I'll come **pick you up!**" Pickup deals tell campers that their parent does not feel sure that camp is a safe place and that the counselors might not be trustworthy. Why else would she need to go home early? Pick up deals hamper a counselor's ability to comfort a child and help them deal with feelings of nervousness or homesickness. Let your camper know that you have checked out camp and that it's a good and safe place with people who will care for her and keep her safe. Express confidence in your child. Let her know that *you* know she can handle being nervous about being away from home and possibly feeling homesick. You know she'll make new friends and will have a good time trying new things.
- Talk openly about homesickness and make plans for what to do if she gets homesick (or if parents get "kidsick!").

- Use phrases such as “taking you to camp” instead of “sending you to camp.”

Homesickness and Kidsickness

One of a child’s (and parents’) top fears is that she will get homesick. Often, parents think that if they *talk* about being homesick, their daughter will *get* homesick. Actually, the reverse is true. Campers who have talked about being homesick and are prepared with a plan are less likely to become homesick and more likely to deal positively with homesickness if it occurs.

Different children have different needs regarding homesickness. Not every “trick” works for every kid. Even siblings have different ways of handling homesickness. One thing that helps one child might be exact opposite of what another child needs. Talk with your camper about what she thinks will help her deal with possible homesickness. Some suggestions for her might be:

- Write home. Tell your family how you feel about being away from home. Tell them what you miss about them. It’s okay to miss your family and home. That tells you there is something good there that you miss!
- Bring a photograph of your family, pet or bedroom.
- Bring a special stuffed animal, blanket or other item from home. Some kids like to bring a sweatshirt of mom’s to use as a pillowcase. It’s nice to have something that smells familiar.
- Look around your group at camp. Is there someone who is sad or needs a friend? Could you be her buddy? Sometimes helping others takes your mind off your own worries.
- Bring a homemade calendar that lists the days you’ll be at camp. Check off a day each night before going to sleep. See how fast the time flies at camp.

It’s also good to know that kids may often skip being homesick their first year of camp, but be homesick the second. Even with its traditions and routine, camp is a little different each year with new staff, new campers and new things to try. Campers are sometimes caught unaware by these new things and that can trigger homesickness. Make sure to mention this to your camper so she is prepared!

“Kidsickness” is a phrase coined by Bob Ditter (see website below) to give a name to the feeling parents have when their kids go off to camp and...they just miss their child! Remember: it’s normal to miss your child when she goes away for the first time. You love her and want her to be safe, protected and happy. She’s the most important thing in your life, so of course you miss her! What can parents do to help them through their “kidsickness?”

- Remember that you have checked out camp and made sure it was a safe and happy place for your child to be. You sent her to camp with everything she needed and prepared her as well as you could. Compliment yourself for being a good parent!
- Talk with other parents who have sent or are sending their child to camp. Share your feelings and find out that you’re not alone. Maybe spend some time together one evening and just talk about your kids. And then enjoy the time talking with adults!
- It’s okay to call camp and check on your camper, if you have a specific worry. You might have just received that letter that she wrote when she was feeling homesick and want to check to make sure she’s adjusting to camp and is doing well now. Remember that camp staff are doing their job when they are out leading activities with your camper, so you might have to leave a message and wait for someone to return your call.

- Write letters and send packages to your camper. Remember to keep your letters upbeat and cheerful. It's okay to tell your camper that you love her and that you'll be excited to see her at the end of camp and hear all about her adventures. Please avoid writing things like, "we don't know what we will do without you here," or "Mom cried all the way home after we dropped you off at camp." That may be true, but it will cause a child to worry about you and will promote homesickness.
- Get some projects done that you've been wanting to work on for awhile. At the end of the week, you'll have something to brag about, too!

Links to help prepare your camper for a positive camp experience:

American Camp Association

The Camp Resource for Families

<http://www.campparents.org/>

CampSpirit

Dr. Christopher Thurber

<http://www.campspirit.com/>

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<http://www.bobditter.com/>