

Homesickness Prevention Plan For Parents From your friends at Camp Piankatank

Resources from: American Camping Association; Camping Magazine May/June 2006, Christopher Thurber, PH.D. (more resources available from Camp Piankatank upon request)

Fact: While over 80% of first time campers report some degree of homesickness, homesickness is very preventable. Studies show that when children receive proper communication from parents, and the camp, the homesickness intensity rates drop by 50% in first year campers.

70% of what causes homesickness occurs before camp. There are certain factors that put your child at a higher risk of becoming homesick. We want your child to have a great time at camp! Here's what you need to know to help your child prevent homesickness.

Risk Factors that make your child more likely to become homesick

- Little or no previous experience away from home.
- Negative attitudes about camp and the separation from home, including feeling forced to go to camp
- High levels of parental anxiety expressed to the camper, including statements such as, "Have a great time at camp. I don't know what I'll do without you"
- The camper is expecting to feel homesick. This is based partly on insufficient understanding of the most effective ways to cope with normal feelings of missing home.
- Insecure attachment, meaning uncertainty about how reliably and positively adult caregivers at camp will behave, especially in their times of need.

How to Help Prevent Homesickness by targeting these Risk Factors

- Practice time away from home; practice sleeping the night at a relative's house or friend's house.
- Involve your child in the decision about which camp to attend.
- Let them know what we're going to do here: Show them our camp DVD and our brochure (available on our website or by request). Come to camper orientation day to meet the camp staff and see the camp or call to setup a personal tour.
- Have the camper help pack and shop for camp.
- It's very normal for parents to be a little anxious about this new experience. It's normal for parents to miss kids. It's best for the child for parents to share these feelings only with other adults. Parents need to show excitement about camp. This shows the child that you have confidence about going to camp and they can also.
- **DO NOT MAKE PICK UP DEALS-** meaning saying, "If you feel homesick, the camp will call me, and I'll come pick you up." There are many good reasons not to make these promises. The number one reason being that these deals do not allow the camper the opportunity to learn to cope with their feelings in a healthy way. This is a great learning opportunity for the child. You need to have confidence, that after your coaching (see below), they will be able to cope with their feelings of missing home in a healthy way that will mean you not having to pick them up. In the end, the camper will be a more independent and confident individual because of this experience. When parents make pick up deals it is practically impossible for our staff to help

teach your child how to deal with their feelings in a healthy way because you told them you will pick them up at the first symptom.

(Yes, as a policy in the rare situation that we feel a child has severe anxiety from missing home, and he/she has not responded well to our counseling strategies, we will call parents to ask your advice on how to further help the child. At this time you can decide if you think it's best to come pick him or her up. But, it's best that you as the parent should not make this a promise or a deal.)

- Teach your child how to cope when they feel like they are missing home- Some things you can tell them.
 1. Tell them that it's normal for kids to have feelings of missing home, especially in a new place.
 2. Tell them that if they feel like they miss home they can talk to an adult at camp about it. Our staff is trained to respond to these situations and can help them. We want to help them have a great time here.
 3. When they feel like they miss home they should try and remember a few things. Try to remember that in a few days they will be home and that while they are at camp they get to do things and be with friends that they can't do at home.
 4. Encourage them to try and remember that mom and dad wanted them to come to camp to have fun new experiences.
 5. Tell them to think about the fun things they've done at camp already (think about a funny moment or their favorite activity) and think of the fun things they get to do the next day.
 6. They can write you a letter to tell you all about the fun they are having.
 7. Bring a journal and tell them to write down all the things they want to tell you when they get home. And that you will take time to listen when they get back.
- Don't dwell on the subject of missing home. Give them these tips on how to respond to their feelings and encourage them that you know they can have a fun time.
- Assure them that Camp Piankatank takes good care of kids. We love children and want them to have a good time. Tell them that if they ever feel sick, scared, or sad they can talk to us and we will help them.
- Prepare for the island campout! The campout is a great experience for them to learn about outdoor experiences that they don't get to do anywhere else. Tell them what it's going to be like (we canoe with our friends to the island, learn how to make a camp fire, cook our food on the camp fire, eat, play games, sing songs, it will be dark, but they will have a flashlight and friends with them, they will bring bug spray, then we go to sleep in our sleeping bags, adults are with you if you need anything and emergency plans are in place if needed). We won't go if it's calling for bad weather. If mom and dad are excited and think it's going to be fun, kids will too. You may even practice sleeping in the backyard one night with a friend or parents.

The Camp Piankatank staff is here to help you and your child be ready for camp. If you have any questions please call 804-776-9552 or email niki.gourley@camppiankatank.org.