

Homesickness Policy

Many campers experience homesickness. It is healthy to feel a degree of homesickness because it means that your child is attached to you – this is a very good thing! We also want campers to have fun and enjoy the full camp experience. Here are a few things parents can do to set their children up for success leading up to camp.

Preparing your child for camp

- Involve your child in the decision about camp. While a camp experience is wonderful for most, it is not for everyone. If after your best efforts your child says “I don’t want to go to camp” look at an alternative for the coming summer. Maybe when his or her friends report back on their camp experiences, your child will want to be a camper next year.
- Help your child learn about Silver Lake before getting here: Look at pictures on the website and Facebook. Have your child talk with others who have gone to camp about what it. Read information that is on-line and discuss what their time at camp might include. Come to camp on a retreat or Family Camp weekend.
- For first time campers we recommend **mini-camp** as a great first-time camping experience.
- Mark a calendar with the camp dates so your child can visualize the beginning and ending of the trip.
- Pack together: Encourage your child to pack a picture, stuffed animal or other comforting memories.
- Help them connect: Send along paper and stamped, addressed envelopes so that your child can write home.
- Have a Heart-to-Heart: Explain that everyone gets homesick sometimes. Be positive and enthusiastic about your child’s independence. If you have your own separation anxiety, keep it a secret!
- Don’t promise an early pickup if your child is homesick: This puts your child’s focus on getting home – and it sends the message that the experience won’t be a success.
- Discuss ahead of time what to do if your child starts feeling homesick: Write down your ideas and pack it in their suitcase. Some ideas might be: talk to a friend or counselor, do something fun or new, look at a picture from home, think about something good that happened that day, or write a letter home to share your camp experience.
- Reassure your child that you will be fine while they are away. Many children worry about you and wonder if you are okay when they don’t see you. Send them encouraging, happy notes to be left with your child’s counselor.
- Have your child experience success in an overnight stay away from you – like a sleep-over – prior to going to camp.
- Have your child attend camp with a friend if you think it might help the transition.
- Give information to your child’s counselor beforehand about what works for comforting your child.
- Don’t linger at camp too long on opening day. Staying too long delays the transition to new surroundings and can add to your child’s anxiety level.

How Homesickness is Handled at Camp

Staff receives training on techniques to prevent and respond to homesickness. Very few campers need to leave camp due to homesickness. However, if a camper is inconsolable parents/guardians will be notified and consulted about how they would like to proceed. Camp is unable to keep children who are unwilling to stay. Please be advised that you may need to come to camp to pick up your child in these rare circumstances.

1. The first person to handle homesickness is the counselor.
 - They will spend one-on-one time with the camper.
 - They will find out what the camper likes to do and try to do it with them.
 - They will set short-term goals for the camper to reach.
 - Every effort will be made to have the camper make it through the first night, since that is the most difficult time.
 - Typically campers will not be allowed to call home before the next morning at the earliest.
2. If the counselor's attempt fails to resolve the camper's distress after a reasonable amount of time (generally 30 minutes with no evidence that the child is being consoled):
 - The camper will be brought to a head counselor or Assistant Director who will continue to work with the camper and relieve the time pressure from the counselor.
 - If the camper continues to be upset and still wants to go home, then arrangements will be made to contact parents as they know their child best and will be able to advise camp staff on how to proceed.
3. If the camper continues to be inconsolable, then, in the interest of the homesick camper, the other campers and the well-being of the camp:
 - The parents will be encouraged to pick up their child as soon as possible.
 - Once a decision for the child to go home is made, that decision is final.
4. In cases when parents are picking up their child, staff will make the following arrangements:
 - Where possible, parents will pick up the child in a location apart from the rest of the campers. Young children are easily influenced by the actions of others and may be tempted to go home if they see a cabin mate leaving early.
 - The parents should sign out the camper at the office.
 - The camper should be encouraged to try again next year. Letting them go home is not a punishment, but hopefully leaving them with some positive memories of being at camp and the belief it will get easier each time.