

Tips For Parents To Help Prevent Homesickness

- Involve children in the decision to spend time away from home, so that children have a sense of control.
- Make sure to tell children that homesickness is normal, but that they can use strategies like writing letters home, sharing their feelings with other people, and thinking about all the good things that camp or school is giving them, to help ease their worry.
- Arrange for a practice time away from home, such as a two or three day stay with relatives. If a child has reached high school without having gone to summer camp or more than a night away from home, this is especially important to prepare them for college or independent life.
- Practice writing letters and supply pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes and paper before the child leaves home.
- Work with the child to learn about the camp, school, or hospital ahead of time, so they know what to anticipate.
- If possible, try to introduce them to other campers, counselors or teachers ahead of time. A familiar face can make all the difference in the adjustment to a new environment.
- Encourage kids, even older teens heading off to college, to make friends with others and seek out trusted adults to connect to.
- Before the separation, don't make comments that express anxiety or ambivalence about the child going away. Even "I hope you'll be okay" or what will I do without you" can leave a child worried that something bad might happen to them or their parents, and make them preoccupied with thought of home.
- Use a calendar to show exactly the amount of time a child will be away, if that's known. Predictability and perspective on the length of separation is important whenever possible.
- Don't make a "pick up plan" or a deal with a child to bring him/her home if they don't like the experience of being away. This undermines the child's sense that their parents have confidence in their ability to be on their own, and set an expectation that they won't like the new experience.
- Warn children against keeping feelings of homesickness to themselves, doing something "bad" in order to get sent home or trying to escape.
- If your child takes medicine for attention, behavior or psychological conditions, don't use camp as an excuse to take a "drug holiday." Make sure that they, and the camp's nurse or counselors, know their medication schedule and the importance of sticking to it.
- If your child has special medical needs, such as diabetes or asthma, make sure that the camp or school they'll be going to has staff who knows how to handle day-to-day care and emergencies. Parents who have managed their child's care intensely can have an extra hard time giving up that control, and children can sense that anxiety.
- Above all, know whether your child is really ready for a separation. If you're not sure, ask their doctor - but not while the child can hear the conversation.

(Arbor, Ann. "Avoiding or Coping with Homesickness." *Intelligencer Journal* [Lancaster] 14 Mar. 2010: 2+. Print.)