

“Homesickness is a distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home. Homesickness is characterized by acute longing and preoccupying thoughts of home and attachment objects (parents, pets, friends).”

Christopher Thurber PHD Child Psychologist and Camp Consultant

WHAT MIGHT CAUSE HOMESICKNESS?

According to Chris Thurber, Child Psychologist, the following factors can contribute to homesickness...

PERSONALITY FACTORS

Children are more likely to become homesick if they perceive low control over their emotions, are anxious or depressed in the months before camp, and are insecurely attached (i.e. are unsure whether their caregivers will give them support when they need it).

FAMILY FACTORS

Children are more likely to get homesick if they felt forced to come to camp, or if their parents expressed doubt or anxiety about their going to camp. If there is something about their home situation that makes them worried such as an upcoming move, discord or divorce, an illness, or loss of a family member - a child will worry about leaving.

ATTITUDE FACTORS

Children are more likely to become homesick if they have low expectations of camp, believe their homesickness will be strong, and have a negative first impression of camp.

EXPERIENCE FACTORS

Children are more likely to become homesick if they are young, have little previous separation experience and have no previous experience at their chosen camp.

Your awareness of the above factors in your child's life may help our staff in guiding your camper through the transition from home life to camp life.

WHAT ADVICE IS THERE FOR FIRST-TIME ISTC CAMPERS?

The more you and your camper know about ISTC, the more comfortable you will feel about the upcoming summer. The following items can help to familiarize you with camp.

SCHEDULE A CAMP TOUR

We highly recommend coming for a tour because it familiarizes first-time campers with ISTC. Throughout the tour, campers and parents visit everything from the fieldhouse, to the cabins and showers, to the dining hall and everything in between. You also have the opportunity to view the camp DVD and sample some camp food.

Because the tour is so informative, it helps put campers at ease and can help eliminate anxieties. They will already have the answers to questions such as, “Will I like the food?”, and “What will the showers be like?” It also acquaints children with the camp environment and daily routine. For your convenience, we offer tour dates in the spring and fall.

VISIT THIS WEBSITE WITH YOUR CHILD

The ISTC website also helps to familiarize new campers with camp. Viewing camp photos and facilities, and reading through the First-Time Camper section helps to acquaint campers with ISTC.

CHECK OUT ISTC'S BROCHURE

Take a good look through ISTC's brochure! It is packed with information about camp and camp life. You can view daily schedules, check out all the recreation activities and so much more. Again, the more your child knows about camp, the more it helps to put him/her at ease.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREPARE FOR CAMP?

Talk about camp! Open dialogue between parents and children and talking with veteran campers helps children better prepare to fully enjoy their summer camp experience.

Speak openly about homesickness. Mention that most kids can feel a little jittery about going to a new place and inquire how they are feeling. Feeling nervous is normal. Reassure your child how you believe in them and their ability to make new friends and have fun.

Speak openly about your child going away. Check your own feelings about having your child gone for a week or more. Children are keen sensors of parents' anxieties. If you are not ready yourself, it may make it harder for your child to leave and feel like they have permission to have fun.

If there are other children from your child's school or neighborhood who have attended ISTC or another summer camp, talk to them. They can help fully prepare you and your child for their new summer experience.

Talk about some of the basic things you will be doing while they are at camp so your child has some idea of how everyone's time is going to pass. For example: "We'll be going to work and keeping busy, too, and before you know it, we'll be coming to get you."

About a week before going to camp, start talking about it. You can heighten your children's interest by pointing out some of the exciting things that you remember about your summer camp experience. Be sure to be positive. You can also talk about what they have to look forward to, what they want to do the most, etc.

In addition to painting a bright and promising picture of camp, do not forget to mention some other realities of camp life. In order to avoid any surprises, remind them of things such as, they are expected to clean up after themselves, there is no air conditioning, etc.

WHAT ADDITIONAL STEPS CAN BE TAKEN?

BEGIN HAVING OVERNIGHTS

If your child has never had an overnight, start with either a best friend in the neighborhood or with a favorite relative (grandma, cousins, etc.) Long weekend visits of three or four days also help to simulate the camp environment.

PREPARE YOUR CAMPER TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES

They can learn to make their bed, pack their clothes away, and clean up after themselves before they arrive at camp. If your child typically takes baths at home, have them begin "practicing" taking showers. ISTC only has showering facilities.

INVOLVE YOUR CHILD

Involve your child in the decision to go to camp, the timing, and the presence of friends. Including your child in these decisions lends to a sense of control and lessens the risk of homesickness. Have your child participate in shopping for camp supplies. The more they participate, the more likely they are to feel as if they are in control over what is happening to them. (Control and the loss of it are huge factors in homesickness.)

When packing for camp, ask your child what special (non valuable!) personal items they might want to take along. This is to increase comfort levels by having something familiar to help tolerate all the new things at camp.

ROLE PLAY

Role play and practice with your child on how they would respond in certain camp situations. Think about some anticipatory problems, "What if ... you lose your sneakers? don't feel well?"

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MY CHILD GOES TO CAMP?

CHECK-IN

Upon check-in you will be given your counselor's name and cabin number. Your counselor will be waiting in the cabin to meet you and help you get settled. It is at this point that we recommend you talk to your child's counselor about your homesick preparations. This way your ISTC counselor can partner with you.

All ISTC counselors are trained in dealing with homesickness. Therefore, while at camp your child's counselor can keep an extra eye on your camper in regard to homesickness. If a problem does arise, you are both on the same team, and you can work together by sharing information. Just like you, we want your child to have an awesome camp experience!

MAIL

You can have a letter ready to mail a day or two before your child leaves for camp so they will have mail when they arrive. In your letters describe what is going on at home, briefly, without inciting nostalgia. Do not write about how lonely you are, or that the dog has not left the door since they left. In addition, avoid long descriptions of all the things they might be missing, as this will make your child feel torn about missing out. Instead, fill the letter with questions like "What new things have you tried?", "What new people have you met?", and "What are your coaches' names?". You can also pack some pre-stamped envelopes so your child can easily write home.

Care packages are also welcome. You may purchase ISTC Care Packages that will be delivered to your camper's cabin on the day of your choice.

PHONE CALLS

First, we do not recommend calling your child. If you feel it is necessary, reach a reasonable agreement with your child about your calling, "I will call you on Wednesday afternoon during your free time." This allows your child to settle in and look forward to something later in the week. Also, you must follow through. Finally, you should let your child's counselor know you will be calling. That way, the counselor can follow up with your child about how they felt after the call, etc.

If you call and your child becomes distressed, offer calm assurance. Then, please call the camp office at (570) 620-2267 and speak with them about the situation. They will immediately speak with your child's counselor about your child's homesickness. Next your child's counselor will speak to your child and try to diffuse the anxiety or sadness that they may be feeling. Your child's counselor will follow everything up with a phone call home to you.

If your child is feeling "blue" at camp, your first thought might be to "rescue" your child by taking him/her home. In most cases of homesickness this should be avoided at all costs. Taking your child home from summer camp may solve a short term problem but can result in more long term difficulties. This action can give children the idea that any demands they make of their parents will be met instantly.

A camp "rescue" also prevents children from learning how to tolerate frustration and separation. Working through homesickness can help children adjust to being apart and teach them to cope with future separations. Many campers have cried at the beginning of the week because they wanted to go home, and then cried again at the end of camp because they did not want to leave!

IS THERE ANYTHING TO AVOID?

As a parent, emphasize that your child is "going" to camp rather than that you are "sending" your child to camp. It is advisable to avoid statements like "I'm going to miss you terribly" or "the house is going to be so empty without you." (Also, do not talk about "big" events they will be missing at home.) Camp is going to be a terrific experience so be careful not to make your child feel badly about going away.

Strongly avoid statements like, "If you don't like camp you can always come home." Children who are experiencing difficulties adjusting to camp will compound the problem by not giving it a fair chance. Often they will close their minds to adapting to camp and focus immediately on going home.

Don't bribe your child. "If you make it, I will buy you a bike", is the wrong message. The reward should be gaining confidence and the fun of discovery.

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