



Homesickness: guide for staff

Nearly all people miss things about home when they're away. Left untreated, homesickness can ruin a child's stay and soak up staff time. Here are some ways for recognising homesickness and treating it effectively. You will get various types of Homesickness from crying and missing Mum and Dad to "All the activities are stupid / it was better last year."

What do you do?

Don't leave a crying child alone. Try to distract them. When they are calmer, try to talk with them. Keep conversations to about 15 minutes – do not dwell on the child's homesickness and do not keep going over the same thing. Try to avoid the child becoming dependent on you: you have work to do and cannot become a replacement parent for one child.

Your aim is to help the child see the positive side of their stay, provide strategies for coping with their feelings of homesickness, encourage participation and the making of friendships. Once a child makes a friend (but not you!) the feeling of homesickness often magically disappears. Your conversation with the child should include things like:

- How are you doing? What do you like doing? What did you do in class this morning? What are you doing later?
- How are you feeling? Do you have something on your mind? Who are your friends?
- Provide empathy. It is normal to miss home / friends / dog etc. Everyone misses something from home, even staff. Different people show it in different ways. You know when I went to university I really missed..
- What have you done to overcome this? Did you feel better when....?
- Explain that homesickness won't last forever and that the child can learn to overcome it.
- Encourage them to stay busy, mix in order to make friends, talk to staff. Point out that there are great things that they can do at camp that they can't do at home. Point out that Camp is not forever. They have already attended for ... days / are halfway there, etc. Make a calendar to mark off days; put in activities to look forward to and tick off the days as they pass.
- End the conversation on a positive note. "We will meet in 24 hours and I want you to tell me what you have been doing. Come on let's find X to go (swimming) with." If they are still upset after the conversation be firm and encourage them to do something; take them to pair up with someone; do not prolong the conversation.

Well-meaning staff commonly make the mistake of extending conversations about homesickness to an unhealthy duration. This is not helpful.

Please make a note of homesickness in the Incidents Book so that other staff are aware of the problem and can liaise with parents.

Please also see our document [Homesickness: advice for parents](#)