



How to prepare your Child for Summer Camp

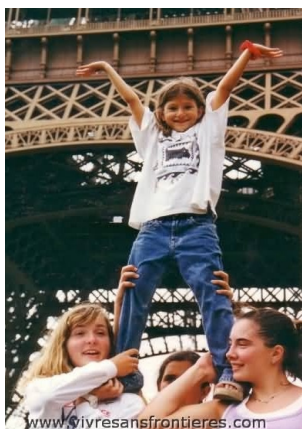
Following are some tips to consider before your child leaves for camp:

- If possible, visit the camp ahead of time so that your child will be familiar with the surroundings
- Send your child on the bus with the group rather than driving him to camp. Goodbyes will be easier, and your child will have a chance to get to know other kids during the trip. If you can, pick him up at the end of camp!
- Do not tell your child in advance that you will "rescue" him from camp if he doesn't like it. When a "rescue call" comes from the child, offer calm reassurance and "put the time frame into perspective".
- Discuss what camp will be like well before your child leaves.
- Send a letter or small package to your child before camp begins so he/she will have a letter waiting for his/her arrival.
- Allow your child to pack a favorite stuffed animal and pictures so that he will have a reminder of home. Finally don't buy a whole new wardrobe. Camp is more rugged than life at home. A child doesn't need new clothes... having well-worn clothes and familiar possessions will even help ease the transition. (This is especially important for first-time campers).

- If our child is attending camp for the first time consider arranging for him to attend with a close friend.
- For many children, camp is a first step toward independence and plays an important role in their growth and development! If your child is worried about being homesick, remind him/her about the excitement of going to camp, if you have been to camp yourself as a child, share your experience with him/her! There is a positive side to homesickness, and in case your child does get homesick and if it is dealt with in the proper way by you the parent this is what will create for your child an opportunity for growth, he will need to reach out to the other children and his camp counselors, creating strong bonds and this is part of the VSF experience!

If adjustment problems (such as homesickness) during camp:

- Talk with VSF's Program Director to obtain her perception of your child's adjustment.
- Acknowledge your child's feelings and communicate your love. You might say, "If you still feel this way at the end of the week, we'll discuss what we can do."
- Support his/her efforts to work out the problems with the help of the camp counselors who are trained to talk about feelings of homesickness.
- Remind him, if necessary, that he has made a commitment.
- **Encourage your child to make friends!** Suggest that he sits at the dinner table with a roommate or someone he likes and tell him to participate in all the activities.



The Good News...

Sure, they'll miss home, but with your help they will know exactly what to think and do when it bothers them.

Thorough preparation of the camp goes a long way in providing both parents and children with the comfort and security needed to cope with separation. If you are enthusiastic and confident with the camp selection, these feelings will be conveyed to your child. But if you are nervous please try to not communicate your anxiety to your child.

Chances are that at summer's end, you too, like hundreds of VSF parents will be able to welcome home with pride, a Happy Camper!

Homesickness is not a disease; it is a life experience that almost all children can master, given the opportunity. The solution for homesickness requires two parts: a great sleep-away camp (there are many) and a parent willing to let a child experience and master his own feelings. By learning that he can master homesickness, your child will become more self-confident and self-sufficient.

So send him/her to camp — he or she will be fine, but you should hang on to this article so when you get your first homesick letter you can reread it. Then you will be fine, too.

Camp truly is a classroom for life lessons!

Ref: Bob Ditter is a child and family therapist living in Boston who consults extensively with people who work with children. He was special consultant to the Disney Channel for their series "Bug Juice." Ditter has visited over 500 children's camps in the United States, has been quoted in Sports Illustrated, The New York Times, Parent Magazine, and the Ladies Home Journal. He has appeared on "The Today Show" and the "Evening News with Peter Jennings" and is considered one of the nation's leading experts on camp.

To learn more about camp and child development, please visit the American Camp Association's family-dedicated Web site: www.CampParents.org, or call the toll-free number, 1-800-428-CAMP (2267). Originally printed in *CAMP Magazine*, reprinted by permission of the American Camp Association; ©2006 American Camping Association, Inc.

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