

HOMESICKNESS—TIPS FOR NORTHWAY PARENTS **(Good Advice for Wendigo Parents Too)**

It is never too early to start planning for your daughter's summer at camp. There are many exciting things about going to camp for the first time—new friends, great adventures, and an opportunity for increased independence.

For some children, homesickness may also be a part of their experience. This is a normal and natural reaction to being away from home. Preventing or minimizing homesickness can be accomplished by using a number of practical steps before your daughter attends camp. A pediatric doctor and psychologist developed the following list of helpful tips, which may assist you in making your daughter's stay at Northway a great one.

1. Homesickness is normal. Children should be told that almost everyone misses something about home while away.
2. Arrange practice time away from home. For example, 2 or 3 day visits with relatives or friends.
3. Give your daughter a supply of pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes, paper and pens for writing home. (Please note: these items are available for sale in the camp store. American campers will need to buy Canadian stamps to mail letters to the U.S.)
4. Talk about what to expect with your daughter, and stress the positive. Express enthusiasm and optimism about the fun she will have at camp.
5. Do not make comments that express anxiety or ambivalence. Even “What will I do without you?” can make a child feel anxious.
6. Learn about camp with your daughter. Look at the pictures on the website (www.campnorthway.com); they are changed regularly.
7. Prepare and pack as a family. Taking part in even the smallest decisions increases a child's perceptions of control and confidence.
8. Pack a personal item from home, such as a stuffed animal.
9. Write early and write often. Sending a letter a few days before your daughter leaves for camp means she will receive it when she arrives, or shortly afterward.
10. Share the “Tips for Campers” with your daughter, if necessary. These strategies can help if your daughter feels homesick while away.
11. Respond to questions about homesickness with statements such as: “It's normal to feel a little homesick, but we've talked about ways to cope with those feelings. Remember that the staff will also be there to help you. You'll have a great time.”

12. *Do not* make a “pick-up” deal with your daughter. This decreases her likelihood of success at camp. It undermines your daughter’s sense that you have confidence in her ability to be on her own, and sets the expectation that she won’t like the camp experience. It also teaches her that her only solution is for her parents to “rescue” her.

Camp can be a great “life-training” experience for children, building their independence and teaching self-reliance and social skills they will use throughout their life.

TIPS FOR CAMPERS

These strategies can be used at different times, and will work in different ways. Some may work better than others for you.

1. Do something fun (like play with friends) to forget about feelings of homesickness.
2. Do something to feel closer to home, such as write a letter to your family.
3. Find someone who can talk with you to help you feel better (like a counsellor, or the Assistant Director).
4. Think about the positive things at camp. (Things like friends, canoe trips, or campfire).
5. Think about how the time away from home is actually pretty short.
6. Try not to think about home, to forget about your homesickness.
7. Think about your family, and figure out what they would say to help you when you feel homesick.

Letter writing can be a helpful way to maintain contact, because it requires narrative reflection, which promotes an understanding of one’s experience.