

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARENTS REGARDING HOMESICKNESS

### What is it?

Homesickness is a form of separation anxiety normally experienced by children (and often adults) when away from home for extended periods, especially those with little or no previous experience being away. A recent study showed that nearly 96% of boys and girls spending time away at camp reported feeling some degree of homesickness during their stay.

### Do's

1. Educate your child – explain that everyone misses something about home when they are away. Tell them that homesickness is normal – “It means that there are a lot of things about home that you love.”
2. Talk to your child about their upcoming trip. Ask them to imagine how it might feel to be away from home/parents, to hike on a mountain trail, to sleep in a cabin with other students, to eat three meals a day in a camp dining hall, to use school restrooms all week, and more.
3. The idea of showering while away may cause anxiety for your child. Remind your child that they will have access to an individual shower stall with a curtain at camp. Explain that they will not have to undress completely in front of others – have them practice getting undressed and dressed while wrapped in a towel surfer style (you may need to show them how to secure the towel).
4. Discuss coping strategies they can try if they do become homesick; keeping busy, reading a book, talking to friends, their counselor or their teacher, drawing a picture, writing a letter (send self-addressed stamped envelopes or postcards) remembering that they will only be away for a few days, and thinking about all the fun activities at camp.
5. Allow your child to practice with a sleepover at a friend's or relative's house.
6. Pack a personal item from home like a stuffed animal.

### Don'ts

1. Don't force your child to attend against their wishes – this leaves them feeling that they have very little decision control. You and your child should be in agreement about whether or not to attend.
2. Don't tell your child that you'll come get them if they get homesick – this conveys a message of doubt and pity that undermines their confidence and independence. Also, keep in mind that children cannot use the office phone during their stay and cell phones do not get reception. The camp nurse or the classroom teacher attending from your child's school will contact you if your child's homesickness becomes severe. At that time you may want to talk to your child to reassure them and remind them of the techniques to overcome homesickness. Do your best to hold firm, tell them you love them and that you will see them soon! You will receive a second call if the camp nurse

or your child's teacher feels that the plan is not working and that you may want to pick your child up.

3. Although you may be experiencing some separation anxiety of your own, don't convey those feelings to your child, this will cause them to feel unsure about going off on their own. Do not cry when saying goodbye to your child on the morning of the trip – this is not the last image they should have before going away. Be positive and upbeat, reminding them that you will see them in a few days.
4. If you write letters, keep them simple and positive. Say such things as: "How are things going?" "Have you made some new friends?" "I hope you're having a great time!" Avoid such comments as "I've cried every night since you left", "Your little sister/brother keeps asking where you are" or "we all miss you very much."
5. When children arrive at the outdoor school with a repertoire of coping strategies, they are ready for those normal feelings of homesickness. Sure, they'll miss home, but they'll know exactly what to think and do if and when it occurs. Overcoming a bout of homesickness can do wonders for a child's independence and self-esteem.

Camp Cuyamaca is truly a classroom for life's lessons.