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**Dear Troop 238 Parents,**

Welcome to Boy Scout Summer Camp!

You should know that most campers come to camp and have a blast. They come to just have fun, adventure, and make new friends. After camp is over, many parents notice a difference in their scout: their scout has grown, matured, seems stronger and more confident. As a parent, you don't even need to ask how it went: there is a sparkle, a glow in your child's eye that tells all. On the way home, the talk is all about the people and activities at camp.

We all have to adjust to new situations. Negotiating his first time away from home may well be your child's first big accomplishment. They have learned independence and probably will be better able to handle new situations and accept more responsibility from now on. This is a big win for your child in the game of life.

You can play a key role in helping your scout make a successful adjustment to camp. **Here are some suggestions that may help:**

**Don't... pre-program your camper for homesickness by telling them any of the following:**

- "You're going to be homesick."
- "If you don't like it, give me a call and I'll come and pick you up."
- "Just try it for a few days and then I'll come get you."
- "I'm really going to miss you."
- "You can call me any time"

**Don't... write letters saying...**

- ...What a great time you're having at home.
- ...What a great time brothers/sisters/friends are having at home.
- ...How much you miss them.

**Do... pre-program your campers for success by telling them...**

- ...How much fun they are going to have.
- ...How much fun you had at camp, at the lake, etc, when you were a kid.

**Do... send them a lot of mail: crazy post-cards, a snack to share etc.**

- ... Tell them "nothing's going on at home. All the neighbor kids are gone on vacation. It's real dead around here"
- ... Tell them how you envy them for all the fun you know they're having at camp.

*Thanks to Dave Moore, Camp Director of Camp Ajawah for much of the content*

## **Another good Read:**

### **Are You Emotionally Ready For Your Child To Go To Camp?**

**by Tish Davidson**

My son, Jacob, went to sleep away camp last summer. He had just finished fifth grade. He thought that he was ready to go, and that he wouldn't be homesick. I was the one who wasn't prepared for him to be away. I didn't realize how much I would worry about him and how much I would miss him.

Even though we had talked to the camp director, and the camp was only two hours from our home, I found I was uncomfortable turning over full-time care of Jacob to people I didn't really know. I worried about whether he would like the food. I wondered who would make sure he had clean clothes and that he took a shower every day. What if the other boys in his bunk teased him? What if he just didn't like camp? I told him that if he was unhappy he could call us and that we would come and get him and that I would call him to see how he was doing, but it turned out that the camp only allowed phone calls for emergencies.

I cried when we left Jacob at camp. And at home, the house seemed so quiet. Since we couldn't call, I wrote to him every day. The first letter we got from him sounded miserable, and I thought about going to get him and bring him home, but the next letter sounded like he was really having fun.

I thought that I would enjoy having Jacob gone, but I was glad when camp was over to have him come home again. He had such a good time that he wants to go again next year.

### **Letting Go**

Entrusting your child's care to others is always hard. When parents think about sending their child off for the first time, they are generally concerned about the child's welfare. Will he make friends? Will he have a good experience? Will he be safe and happy? What parents aren't prepared for is the lump in their own throat when it comes time to leave their child.

"Parents suffer from empty nest syndrome the first time their child goes to camp, and in my experience their suffering is in correlation to the age of their child. The younger the child, the more difficult it is for the parent," says Jeffrey Solomon, Executive Director of the National Camp Association, a camp advisory service. Parents of a young child worry more that their child may not be properly cared for, while parents of a teen usually feel more confident that their child will speak out if there is a problem.

"All parents experience a common feeling that something is missing when their child goes away to camp. There is a yearning and an awareness of the distance between themselves and their child," says Bruce Muchnick, EdD, founder of Summer Camp Resources in Glenside, Pennsylvania. Summer Camp Resources helps camps train the staff and prepare for special situations that may arise during the summer. It also provides counseling to parents of prospective campers. Realizing before the fact that you are going to miss your child, and that

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your child will miss you and probably experience some homesickness, helps parents make it through that first awkward week.

"Most parents are anxiously awaiting that first letter home," says Solomon. "Sometimes that first letter isn't too happy. But parents should resist the urge to race off to camp to bring him home. If you do, it is a message to your child that he has failed." It generally takes five days to a week for children to make friends and settle into the routine of camp. This is one reason why many camps recommend a minimum of a two-week stay. Some eight week camp programs embargo telephone calls for the first two weeks. That way the child has time to adjust before hearing mom and dad's voice.

Many parents prefer to send their children to camps close to home, thinking that the shorter distance will ease their homesickness and help them adjust better. "In my more than 20 years of experience, the concern with distance is an issue for the parents, not the child," says Muchnick. Parents have the perception that if the child is farther away, he will be more anxious. In reality, it is the parents desire to have their kid close. A child comes into the camp setting and begins to develop a support network around him, and the distance from home simply doesn't matter.

Another issue that bothers some parents is that they simply can't pick up the telephone and talk to their child whenever they want to get the reassurance they need that their child is okay. Most camps limit phone calls for a good reason - they interrupt the adjustment the child is making to camp and stimulate homesickness. Writing to your child as often as possible, however, is highly recommended. "Know what the line of communication will be so that both you and your child have realistic expectations," says Solomon.

Summer camp is a good way to practice separations between you and your child, separations that will eventually culminate in your child leaving home for good as an adult. A positive experience at summer camp gives a child confidence that he can cope without leaning on his parents. It also gives parents a break from daily parental responsibilities and a chance to recharge their batteries. Recognizing that separation will be temporarily difficult for both parent and child goes a long way in assuring that the summer camp experience will be a good one for both generations.

### **How to Help You and Your Child Have a Good Camp Experience**

Preparation is the key to a successful summer at camp. You are probably quite aware of preparing your child, but don't forget about preparing yourself. Here are some suggestions:

- Think positively. Most children thrive at summer camp.
- Don't communicate your worries to your child.
- Emphasize the new experiences your child will have rather than how much you will miss him.
- Ask the camp director as many questions as you need to before camp begins in order to feel comfortable. It is always better to ask than to worry.

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- Maintain realistic expectations. Whenever people work, play, and live together there will be occasional points of friction. Your child will have ups and downs at camp the same way he does at home and in school.
- Understand and respect the lines of communication that the camp has set up.
- Plan something interesting or special to do while your child is at camp.
- Plan a special welcome home celebration for your child.