

Tips for Communicating with Your Camper

Modified [from an article shared by the American Camping Association](#)

Homesickness Dos and Don'ts for Families Preparing for Camp

By Daniel Hammond

Homesickness is a fact of life. It is human nature to pine for what is known and comfortable. And a stay at summer camp — even for a seasoned camper — can generate pangs of longing for the comforts of home: the family pet, mom, dad, even a sibling that isn't favored when they are together.

At camp, we acknowledge homesickness as a valid emotion; we don't diminish the feeling. We use our own experiences as former campers and adults away from home to help guide campers through those feelings of unease and discomfort. We help develop the skills to conquer pangs of emotion.

Successfully navigating a sleepaway camp experience requires preparation for the family and the camper. The following tips will guide your camp preparations and ensure a camp experience that builds the skills to deal with setbacks such as homesickness, rather than one that is overshadowed by such emotions.

Before Camp

DO...

- **Your research.** Review the Merrowvista and Miniwanca communication policies and reach out to us if you have any questions. You need to know what you can expect as a family. You can find these policies on [page 17 of the Merrowvista Camper & Family Handbook](#) and [page 15 of Miniwanca Camper & Family Handbook](#)
- **Talk positively about the camp experience.** Let your camper know they are going to have an amazing time at camp and make some wonderful new friends, while trying exciting new activities.
- **Provide opportunities for your camper to practice being away from you.** Sleepovers with friends and family can be a great steppingstone toward a longer sleep away experience.
- **Provide opportunities for your camper to practice making new friends.** Set up play dates and other similar opportunities for your camper to meet new friends and practice the skills needed to introduce themselves and play cooperatively.
- **Visit the camp.** Take advantage of open house events or set up a private tour so your camper can become familiar with the camp facility and some of its staff. [Merrowvista's](#)

[Open House is Saturday, May 6!](#) To tour Miniwanca, email miniwancacamps@ayf.com to see if there is an opportunity to visit before camp starts.

DON'T

- **Don't talk negatively about the camp experience.** Avoid saying things like, "We will miss you so much," "I don't know what I'll do without you," or "I'll be counting down the days until you return." Comments like these will cause your camper to feel guilty if they are enjoying their time at camp knowing that you are at home missing them.
- **Don't offer a pick-up clause.** Please do not tell your camper, "Give it a try and if you don't like it, I'll come and pick you up." If you make a pick-up clause with your camper, you may be faced with the decision to either pick the camper up and rob them of a valuable growing experience or break your promise and damage your credibility with your camper. Neither outcome is positive and both can be avoided by refraining from offering a pick-up clause in the first place.
- **Don't promise that you will talk or write to your camper every day.** Merrowvista and Miniwanca do not allow families to speak to their camper by phone or a video call during their stay. Kids who are well adjusted and managing well at camp can develop feelings of homesickness simply by hearing the voice of a well-intentioned parent or guardian. Unless you can guarantee you will write every day, please don't promise that you will. If a letter or email does not arrive for whatever reason, feelings of worry and homesickness may set in.

During Camp

DO

- **Contact us if you want an update or have any concerns.** Our staff is here to support the families and the campers. Camp staff will be happy to provide updates on how your camper is adapting and answer any questions you may have.

Merrowvista can be reached at merrowvistacamps@ayf.com or 603-539-6607.

Miniwanca can be reached at miniwancacamps@ayf.com or 231-861-2262.

- **Trust that camp is doing its job.** Please trust we always have your camper's best interests in mind. We will work with your camper to help them overcome homesickness, develop new skills and friendships, and grow because of their experiences.
- **Remember: Homesickness is normal.** Everyone experiences homesickness to different degrees. If your camper becomes homesick, work with us to help them through it by providing information you believe may help your camper overcome the challenges they are facing.

- **Keep in mind that mail can be slow.** By the time you receive a letter from your camper, a few days have often passed, and a lot changes for a camper in just a day or two. A camper may write that they are homesick, and by the time you receive their letter, they have bonded with their group and are happy and having fun. If you receive a letter that says your camper is sad or otherwise struggling, please reach out to us. We want to keep you informed and work with you to ensure your camper is having fun!

DON'T

- **Don't promise you will pick up your camper if they are sad or struggling.** Much of the growth your camper experiences at Miniwanca or Merrowvista comes from giving them the space to grow. Camp is not perfect, but there are opportunities each day to test, try, fall, get up, face, conquer, learn, and grow.
- **Don't write negative letters.** Letting your camper know you miss them and cannot wait until they get home will only prolong and intensify any feelings of homesickness they may be experiencing.

By sending your camper to Merrowvista or Miniwanca, you have given them an incredible opportunity to develop new skills and abilities that will serve them for the rest of their life. While you may not be present while these skills are developing, you and your camper will benefit from their increased confidence, independence, and ability to problem-solve without your assistance.