

First - Time Campers

Sending your child away to camp for the first time is a major milestone for most families, one that is often marked by excitement, anticipation, and perhaps even some anxiety. Though camp is about making friends and having fun, it is also about being on your own and being a part of a community. The most important thing you can do to help prepare your child for both of these aspects of camp is to talk about it before he/she arrives. The following are some sample topics for discussion that will help prepare you and your child emotionally for their experience at camp.

Friends: *“Camp is about making new friends. If you are shy about meeting new kids, then learn to get to know others by being a good listener. Remember also that not everyone in your cabin or group has to be your friend, and you don’t have to be everyone else’s friend. As long as you treat others with respect, and they do the same, then having one or two friends at camp is fine...if more, great!”*

Activities: There are many exciting things to do at camp, many of which your child may never have tried before. If your child tends to be a bit homesick, remind them about the excitement of going to camp. *“Remember when you first decided to go to camp, what made you so excited? You may not like all the activities, or you may be better at some more than others, and that’s ok. I, however, hope you are willing to try. The more you put into camp, the more you will get out of it.”*

Cooperating: *“You, like every other camper there, will be part of a cabin or group. As your parent, I hope you will cooperate with others and help out. That’s part of what makes camp so special. It’s kids helping each other out. Most kids will help you if you are friendly and help them.”*

Give yourself time: *“One thing about camp is that almost everything is new--the kids, activities, routines, the bed you sleep in, the bathroom. It takes a few days to get adjusted, so be patient with yourself. Most of the time, you will be having so much fun you won’t mind all the changes, but if you do, remember that you will get so used to things that by the time you come home, you will miss all those things.”*

Getting Help: *“Everyone has good and bad days. If you are having a problem, your counselor is there to help you. You don’t have to wait to tell us if you are upset about something. If your counselor doesn’t know what might be troubling you, he/she can’t help. Be honest and ask for what you need. If your counselor doesn’t seem to help you, you can go to the Unit or Summer Program Director, etc.”*

Being Positive: It’s a great thing to remind your first-time camper about his/her strong points. Focus not just on what they do well, but their positive qualities as well, such as what makes them a good friend or the type of person other kids would want to know. Helping children identify their strengths can help them if they are having a setback.

Talking with your child is a great way to show support as your child gets ready to take this important step on the road to being more independent and resilient. For you as a parent, it can give you more peace of mind as you allow your child to participate safely in a broader world.