

ILC Approach to Homesickness

Homesickness is a common concern for parents when their child attends ILC. Homesickness is a feeling or emotion that most campers experience. In our decades of camp life, we have developed many tools and strategies to help campers successfully overcome homesickness. It is often our team approach at camp and a partnership with parents that best helps each camper.

Before your child comes to camp, there are a few helpful tips that can prepare your child for homesickness. If your child exhibits concern about going to camp, encourage him or her to talk to you about it. Often specific answers are not necessary after they have had the opportunity to express themselves to a receptive, understanding ear. Your child may be worried about the unknown and is looking for your understanding. It is helpful to tell your child that such concerns are normal and that many other campers feel the same way. If your child has specific worries about bunkmates, food, etc. let your child call or email the camp office or look for answers on our website and/or camper manual. Also, please let your child know that it is very normal to experience some homesickness, but you are confident that they will be able to find help while they are at camp. Sometimes when we are planning for camp we talk about how much fun our kids will be having and all the great opportunities they will experience. Be sure to include that it is normal not to feel happy or great all of the time at camp. Part of their experience is to gain independence at camp to handle situations (with the help of caring staff members) and figure out how to feel better.

Battling homesickness can be a very difficult time, but a very rewarding experience and time for growth. We are committed to help each and every camper have a successful experience during their stay with us. One of the most important keys to conquering homesickness is the joint approach between parents and the camp. We need to work as a team. Being on the same page is crucial. ***Please do not commit to your child that you will pick them up without our input.*** This may not be easy as children can be very convincing. If your child is contacting you to pick them up, please call us and keep us in the loop so we can work together to guide your child through a very difficult situation.

Also, please notify us of any upsetting or major event that may have occurred or is about to occur prior to, or during your child's stay at ILC. This may include family illness, death, poor school grades, divorce, or moving to a new home or city. This information can be included on your camper's online profile information sheet or emailed to us in advance. This information will help us with our individual strategy and plan for your child.

At ILC, we will work closely with you and your child to conquer their homesickness. Our counselors, head counselors, camper-advocates and management staff all work as a team to best help your child.

When your camper is able to conquer their homesickness, it will be one of their most memorable life experiences!

As adopted by our over 30 years of experience, and with some guidance from others camp professionals, here are some helpful homesickness' Do's and Don'ts:

PLEASE DO:

1. As you prepare + pack for camp, focus on the positive and fun aspects of camp.
2. Talk to your child about how all campers feel sad at times, miss home and it is *normal* and *natural*.
3. Tell your child you are confident they have the skills to make things better for themselves at camp.
4. Empower your child by discussing possible tools or strategies if they feel sad at ILC. Some examples include staying busy, finding a positive attitude, talking to a friend, sharing with a counselor or camper advocate, writing a letter or journal about their sad feelings, listening to music, reading books, trying a new activity, identifying when are the toughest times and then developing a strategy or goal.
5. Let your child know how proud you are of their independence.
6. Encourage your child to write letters to you about their new friends and activities they are doing at camp.
7. Write encouraging and cheerful letters or emails to your child.
8. Acknowledge your own feelings about your child being able to live without you for a few weeks.
9. Remind yourself that there are often more tears at the end of camp than at the beginning.
10. Expect a sad letter or phone call. Realize that letters and phone calls usually happen when campers are feeling more reflective and less busy. Typically, they are perfectly happy for most of the day.

PLEASE DON'T

1. Tell your child you will pick them up if they are feeling sad after a period of time. If they feel like they have the option to go home, they typically will not find the strategies they need to work through their feelings.
2. Express a lack of confidence in their ability to be away at camp.
3. Tell them you will be sad and miserable at home without them.
4. Write sad letters to your child telling them how much you miss them and describing all the events they are missing at home. It is extra tough for a homesick child to feel like they are missing out.

When to Contact ILC: If you receive a sad phone call or letter, please let us know. We will be sure to observe your child and speak with their counselors, head counselors and the camper-advocate team. We will get back to you with additional information about your child's camp experience, level of homesickness and adjustment. We will also work with your camper to find and use strategies to help them feel better.

When ILC will Contact You: If your child is visibly upset (crying frequently, not participating, having trouble eating or sleeping) and not getting adjusted to camp after a few full camp days, we will call you to let you know what is happening and discuss a plan for helping your child adjust.

Here are a few additional helpful articles that include tips for navigating homesickness with your child.

<https://sunshine-parenting.com/2017/06/10-messages-for-a-homesick-camper/>

<https://sunshine-parenting.com/2012/05/kidsickness/>

<https://sunshine-parenting.com/2012/07/messages-for-an-anxious-camper/>

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/119/1/192>

<http://sunshine-parenting.com/2012/05/02/kidsickness/>

<https://www.acacamps.org/campers-families/parent-blog/homesickness-dos-donts-parents-preparing-sleepaway-camp>