



REMEMBER

- Often campers feel a loss of control in this new environment, so help them choose what they can. As you talk, make sure they feel like they have options for what might happen. Ask 'Would you like to chat under the tree or go for a walk?' or 'Are you ready to talk now or later?'
- We can't actually talk someone out of what they're feeling because it's an emotion, but we can help them to notice other feelings they have. We can help a camper engage in activities that will help joy or curiosity or the feeling of fun to shout louder than their homesickness.
- With the right timing, share a story of a camper who felt homesick but managed to stay and ended up having a great week at camp. This can be a good inspiration for the camper to choose to push through and give this new experience a try!
- Include the rest of the team. Share the camper's struggle and plan for engagement with other staff (as appropriate). Your team leaning in to care for the camper will help them feel noticed and accepted.



RECOGNIZE

- Fear of the unknown is a normal, healthy response for kids & teens away from home for the first time (or the first time in a while!). Remind yourself of a time you felt uncertain or uncomfortable in a new place or experience so you can be prepared to recognize and empathize with this feeling in your campers.
- Homesickness is a temporary state of anxiety caused by being away from "the known" - family, friends, pets, regular surroundings, and routines. Campers often experience a sense of worry that isn't based in anything in particular - it just exists inside making them feel unsettled. This makes it a challenge to lean into the fun parts of camp.
- All of us are at our worst if we are experiencing B.L.A.S.T. times - Bored, Lonely, Anxious, Sad, Tired. These conditions put campers most at risk for homesickness as well.
- Homesickness may show up in tears, a reluctance to engage or seeming quiet and withdrawn, but it may also show up in defiance or angry words and actions. It is most often felt at the end of the day, and is heightened by stretched emotions and lack of sleep.
- If a camper perceives they're not fitting in, they have a heightened chance of experiencing feelings of longing for home and 'normal' life.



RESPOND

- **Talk about it.** When you're in a safe and quiet space, ask questions about how they're feeling. Make sure the camper gets to do the majority of the talking and let there be spaces of silences where they don't need to talk. Ask what their feelings are telling them and then invite them to consider whether their feelings are telling them the full truth.
- **Empathize.** Try to put yourself into their shoes. When you think you have a picture of how this feels for them, offer it back to them to see if you are actually understanding.
- **Break it down.** Kids will often be stuck on the idea of going home right now. Look for ways to break their day down into smaller chunks by focusing on short term plans. Try an invitation like, "How about we try and go to this activity with your cabin and talk about this again after lunch?".
- **Redirect.** Try to distract their focus with unusual challenges like "If you had five cats, what would you name them?" or "Try and spell your name backward." This can help move them

from a highly emotional state to a different brain space where their feelings aren't the only voice.

- **Make a plan.** Help them figure out when their homesickness is most difficult. Talk together about what they will do to move through that space, recognizing that it is difficult but possible. Let them know that you are walking with them, praying for them and celebrating their courage.
- **Create a connection.** Find them another camper to be their buddy, looking for a kind-hearted friend to be intentional about including them.
- **Look ahead.** Watch for a glimpse of fun or moments of success that you can highlight and enjoy with them. Tell them that you realize this doesn't take away their homesick feelings, but it reminds them that camp might have good things ahead that they would miss if they went home.



RESOURCES

- <https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/camping-magazine/helping-homesick-camper>
- <https://www.campkodiak.com/helping-with-homesickness/>



ENCOURAGING
FEARFUL/HOMESICK
CAMPERS