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Plan Ahead to Lessen Homesickness at Overnight Summer Camp

The Georgia Psychological Association offers tips to manage the summer camp blues

Atlanta, GA July 8, 2015 – As many parents prepare to send their children to overnight summer camp, it's important to remember that spending time away from home can be difficult for both child and parent. Receiving a tearful phone call or a sad note while a child is away at camp can pull at the heart strings. And though dealing with homesickness is often a source of stress, it's very common.

[Research has shown homesickness is a normal response](#) when separated from a familiar environment. About 90 percent of young people spending time away from home reported some sad feelings.

Homesickness can be a short-term interruption to an otherwise positive experience; kids often look forward to returning to camp the following year. Knowing this can put a parent's mind at ease. Before camp starts, here are some suggestions to help parents and kids prepare:

Decide in advance what to do. Since most homesickness subsides within a day or two, the initial plan may be simply to talk to the camp director and to encourage the child to stay at camp.

Make a backup plan. A small percentage of kids develop more serious symptoms such as incessant crying and disruptions in eating and sleep patterns for several days in a row. If that should happen, make a backup plan as to how it will be handled. This might involve pairing the child with a buddy who has been at camp before, daily check-ins with a trusted adult or extra efforts to engage the child in daily camp life.

Remind the child that camp is fun. Have the child imagine himself or herself in that environment, having fun and learning new things.

Resist the urge to offer a solution immediately. If the child has specific concerns, such as, "What if I miss you?" help him or her figure out a couple things that can be done if that happens. Letting the child partner in the creation of solutions empowers and develops decision-making skills and adaptive independence.

Parents, plan for the first days of camp. The house might feel empty after dropping off the child at camp. Knowing this in advance and making plans will help weather child-away-from-home sickness. Consider doing something nice and self-indulgent.

If parents would like additional strategies for addressing common developmental challenges, consult with a psychologist. A licensed psychologist can help parents develop a plan and strengthen parenting skills.

To learn more visit the American Psychological Association at www.apa.org/helpcenter and follow @APAHelpCenter. To find out more about the Georgia Psychology Association visit www.gapsychology.org and follow @GAPsychAssn.

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Since 1946, the Georgia Psychological Association has been heralded as a leader in advocacy, a pacesetter for public education programming, a provider of quality continuing education opportunities and a proponent for the livelihood of psychology. Our referral network not only assists members, but provides the public-at-large the opportunity to connect with psychologists. The membership of the Association is comprised of psychologists, graduate and undergraduate students across the state of Georgia.

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA's membership includes more than 122,500 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.