A Parent's Guide to Summer Camp 2026

www.rawhideranch.com

Mailing & Physical Address:
Rawhide Ranch
6987 West Lilac Road
Bonsall CA 92003

Ranch Email: info@rawhideranch.com

Ranch Phone: (760) 758-0083

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Cancellation Policy?

As stated in the Cancellation Policy Agreement form, in order to provide the highest quality camp program & staffing, we must plan well in advance based on confirmed reservations. The **cancellation policy** is as follows:

- **The Deposit is Non-Refundable AT ALL TIMES.**
- If you are cancelling more than 14 days before the start date of the registered session, you will be eligible for a refund of the remaining camp fee, minus the non-refundable deposit.
- If you cancel within 14 days of the session start date, the full camp tuition is non-refundable.

What if my camper needs to leave during camp, or arrive late?

We are not able to accommodate early/late arrivals or campers leaving and returning during the week. Please make sure that during the week your camper is attending, they are free from other commitments, requirements, or activities.
PLEASE DO NOT ASK US TO MAKE AN EXCEPTION.

How Can I Send Mail to my Camper?

Mail is delivered to the campers via the "Pony Express" after lunch (Monday thru Thursday only). Campers always look forward to receiving letters, funny cards, & photos from family & friends. Most campers receive one letter a day or every other day. You can mail letters ahead of time ***OR*** you can drop off pre-written letters during check-in (recommended).
Label each piece of mail with the camper's full name, session dates, and the day you want it delivered.

Mail Tips: Due to our rural location, send mail *at least* a week early. We deliver camper mail at noon, and USPS mail typically arrives after 2:00pm, so please plan ahead. ***OR* drop off mail for your camper during check-in (recommended).** Please do not use the ranch's email address for camper correspondence; we do not have a camper email service.

Care Packages: Due to an escalating issue with the volume of packages we receive (boxes, large stuffed envelopes, etc), we kindly ask that you please limit the number of packages and ensure that anything you send is SMALL AND LIGHTWEIGHT. Please NO BOXES or heavy items! Most campers receive a letter a day. Camper mail, including packages, is delivered on horseback. All mail and packages must fit in a saddle bag carried by one staff member and a horse. With around 200 campers here each week, the bulk of mail adds up fast. The mail delivery person & horse will thank you!

What To Send: Consider sending small gifts, games, cabin decorations for the weekly theme, photos, notes of encouragement, or additional "pony bucks" for purchases at the Country Store or Sweet Shop.

What NOT to Send: DO NOT SEND FOOD OR CANDY! Cabins have no storage for food and hidden snacks will attract pesky ants and mice into the cabin. When several campers in a cabin receive a well-meaning care package of candy or food to share, it goes to waste as it can not be stored or eaten during a short mail call time.

Camp Mailing Address:
Rawhide Ranch
"Camper's FULL NAME & Camp Dates"
(e.g. Sarah Smith, Aug 3-8)
6987 West Lilac Road
Bonsall, CA 92003

How do I Request a Cabin-Mate for my Camper?

During registration, **you may request a maximum of up to TWO cabinmates for your camper;** a **First Choice** and an **Alternate Choice**, in case the first is not available. To ensure your requests are accommodated, cabinmate requests should be mutual, the campers must be the same birth gender, and they MUST be within ONE YEAR in age. Cabinmate requests must be updated each season - they are not saved year to year.

WE CANNOT GUARANTEE MORE THAN TWO REQUESTS PER CAMPER! We try our very best to accommodate requests, but cannot guarantee more than two.

Program groups are pre-assigned based on cabin assignments. We are not able to accommodate group requests.

Negative Cabin-Mate Requests: If a camper requests to bunk with your child, and your child does not wish to bunk with them, we may need to inform that child's parents of the circumstances behind our inability to accommodate their request. Please resolve any interpersonal issues among the families before camp, or consider select another session if necessary.

Camper Communication

Are Phones Available For Camper Use?

No, campers do not have access to a phone. Cell phones and any electronic communication devices are strictly prohibited at Rawhide. We encourage campers to experience keeping in touch "the old-fashioned way"… writing and receiving letters. This helps build their independence and social skills. If a situation arises and we deem it necessary to contact the parent/guardian, one of our directors will call you.

How Do I Contact The Ranch In Case Of An Emergency?

- **Business Hours:** Call the Rawhide Ranch office at **(760) 758-0083**.
- **After Hours:** Call **760-758-0083** and **dial 9** to connect with the Camp Director (answering system will direct you).

⚠ **Please ONLY dial the emergency line for actual emergencies.** Callers needing general information, show times, trouble loading pony bucks, etc, are asked to leave a voice mail and the call will be returned in the morning.

Can Families Visit During Camp?

Sorry, no visitors allowed! Part of the magic of camp is making new friends while being away from parents and loved ones for a short time. We do not allow visitors or any other unscheduled guests during the camp session. This is for the safety of the campers in our care, as well as for the safety of staff and animals.

Time at camp plays a vital role in the social and emotional development of children. In todays fast-paced, media saturated world, camp offers a rare opportunity for kids to slow down, unplug, and truly connect with those around them. At Rawhide Ranch, campers will learn to build meaningful relationships, develop social and one-on-one communication skills, strengthen their sense of community, adapt to change and welcome new experiences, and grow as independent, confident individuals. Campers look forward all week to their family's arrival for the big show on the final day of camp…..see you then!

Are Laundry Facilities Available?

No, laundry facilities are not available at camp. Please pack according to the length of stay.

Does Rawhide Ranch Provide Transportation?

No, you are responsible for arranging transportation to and from Rawhide Ranch.

Is There a Camp Store or Snack Shop?

Yes! The Country Store & Sweet Shop will be open for the campers daily during scheduled "Coffee Breaks". They can purchase snacks, drinks, souvenirs, and much more! The Country Store will also be open during check-in and on the last day of camp for families and guests to visit and shop.

Does My Camper Need Spending Money?

Spending money is optional, but most campers enjoy having some funds to use during their stay. The suggested amount is around $50-$90 for a week of camp (depending on what you think they'll want to purchase). Campers will have up to 3 "coffee breaks" per day. Most campers buy a cold drink and a snack during each break, running about $10-$15 per day.

Pony Bucks & Fun Fangle - The Camp Currency

Rawhide Ranch uses a **cashless spending system** which allows parents to add funds to their virtual bank. Instead of carrying cash, campers can access their spending money with the simple scan of their wristband, which will be given to them upon arrival.

How to Add Funds:

- An activation email & set up instructions from **Fun Fangle** will be sent to the primary account holder's email (the same email address used for your Rawhide Ranch registration account).
- If you don't see the email, check your spam folder or contact the Ranch office.
- Only one email per family can be used to upload funds and view balances.
- **You can also add money in person here at Rawhide on check-in day.** We take cash or card & will load the funds to your camper's account.

What Happens to Un-Used Money?

- If the remaining balance is **MORE than $5** in a camper's account, it will be automatically refunded to your original payment method (via electronic refund or mailed check) at the end of the camp season.
- If the remaining balance is **LESS than $5,** it will be donated to the Rawhide Ranch Campership Fund. Every cent goes toward sending kids to camp the following year!

Wondering what your camper's day will be like?

Here's a sample of a typical day (actual schedule may vary):

6:45 a.m. Wake up call
7:30 a.m. Breakfast
8:00 a.m. Animal Care
8:30 a.m. Class/Elective 1
9:15 a.m. Class/Elective 2
10:00 a.m. Coffee Break
10:30 a.m. Class/Elective 3
11:15 am. Class/Elective 4
12:00 p.m. Flagpole/Lunch
12:45 p.m. Rest time/Mail call
1:15 p.m. Class/Elective 1
2:00 p.m. Class/Elective 2
2:45 p.m. Coffee Break
3:15 p.m. Class/Elective 3
4:00 p.m. Class/Elective 4
4:25 p.m. Animal Care
5:15 p.m. Flagpole/Dinner
6:00 p.m. Organized free time & activity
8:15 p.m. Coffee Break
8:30 p.m. Cabin Time
9:30 p.m. Lights Out

The daily core classes include western style horseback riding, animal science, horse science, and equestrian vaulting (gymnastics on horseback). Regularly scheduled electives may include swimming, riflery, archery, vaulting, laser tag, driver's ed (harnessing pony carts), climbing tower, drama, roping, sports, country dance, craft, movie, and much more! Campers will have both core AND elective classes each day.

If there are any electives that you prefer your child not select, please discuss this with your child ahead of time.

Extra Camp Options…

During the online registration process you can add any of the following optional items to your cart. Not sure yet? No problem - you can log into your online account any time after registration to add them later.

Camp Photo: A camp or cabin photo will be taken during the week. Photos will be handed out to the adult on check-out day. Photos are **$15 each** and they are **non-refundable.**

Vegetarian Meal Option: Available at no extra cost. Be sure to select this option during registration.

Visitor Meal Tickets - Friday Lunch: After the closing show on the final day, campers and their families are invited to enjoy lunch together (see page 8 for show/meal times & info). Camper meals are included in their camp fee. Visitor tickets can be purchased during online registration or in person on check-in day.

Meal Prices:
Adult (ages 8+): $18
Child (ages 3-7): $10
Ages 0-2: FREE

How to Add Extra Options After Registering:

- Login to your account at www.rawhideranch.com
- Under **View My Submitted Applications** click **"view details"** for the current season
- Select **"Add people, sessions, or options"**
- Click on your camper's registered session. Choose and add the extra options you'd like.
- NOTE - Be sure to add the extra's under the CAMPER'S name & registration.

Lost & Found

Rawhide Ranch is not responsible for any lost, damaged, or stolen items. To help prevent loss and ensure recovery when possible, please leave expensive or irreplaceable items at home. Avoid sending your child with their favorite clothing or items. Label all items and bags clearly with your child's full name.

All lost and found will be held for two weeks, and will then be donated to a charitable organization. If you request an item to be returned, you will be responsible for return postage costs.

Please remember, we are a working ranch with many animals & outdoor activities. Items may get dirty, broken, or misplaced.

Packing List…

Leave those "favorites" at home! If you'd hate to lose it, don't bring it to camp!

Bedding

- ☐ Sleeping Bag & large trash bag for re-packing sleeping bag (**PUT NAME ON BAGS!**)
- ☐ Pillow

Clothing

- ☐ Jeans (2–3 per week) – Must be full-length; capris not allowed
- ☐ Shorts (2–3 per week) – Modest length; no short-shorts
- ☐ Spandex/athletic shorts or pants – For vaulting and activities
- ☐ T-shirts (6–8 per week) – No spaghetti straps or offensive logos
- ☐ Pajamas
- ☐ Socks & Underwear – 1 per day or more
- ☐ Jacket or Sweatshirt
- ☐ Swimsuit/Trunks – One-piece or tankini preferred; 2-piece must be worn with T-shirt/rash guard

Footwear

- ☐ **Tennis Shoes/Sturdy Sneakers ~ Required for Vaulting & General Daily Activities**
- ☐ **Boots ~ Required for Horseback Riding & Animal Activities** (Western/Cowboy, Hiking, Riding/Paddock Boots all OK)
  - Boots should have a closed toe and adequate ankle support/coverage, to provide protection around horses and other animals. **If they don't have boots, sturdy sneakers will be ok, too.**
- ☐ Shower shoes/flip-flops (for showers & pool use only)

Accessories

- ☐ Hat (Cowboy and/or Baseball-style)
- ☐ Bandana(s) – Helps with dust or under helmet
- ☐ ***ASTM Certified Equestrian Riding Helmet** ~ ***REQUIRED**
  - Must be ASTM equine-approved & under 5 years old (they expire). **Our staff MUST be able to verify this!**
  - Name should be clearly labeled on/in helmet
  - Helmets will be available for purchase at County Store during check-in. We do not have a pre-order option.

Personal Items

- ☐ Bath Towel & Pool Towel (one for each)
- ☐ Toiletries (soap, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, lip balm, etc.)
- ☐ Small toiletry bag or tote for trips to/from bathroom
- ☐ Sunscreen, Bug Spray, Hand Sanitizer (hand washing stations also available)
- ☐ Ear Plugs (optional, for light sleepers)
- ☐ Flashlight (with extra batteries)
- ☐ Small Battery-Operated Fan & extra batteries (clip-on recommended for bunks)
- ☐ Refillable Water Bottle – Labeled with camper's name
- ☐ Camera (label with name; no expensive digital cameras please)
- ☐ Stationery, pen, and pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes
- ☐ Bag for Dirty Laundry

What to Leave at Home:

At Rawhide Ranch it is our endeavor to create a safe space for every camper. Therefore, the items listed below, or anything that may be deemed unsafe, are strictly prohibited and violation may result in the camper being sent home, without refund. If a prohibited item is brought to camp, it will be secured in the camp office and will be returned to the authorized adult at check-out. **Please do not ask your camper to hide a cell phone in their luggage, as this can lead to conflicts, dishonesty, or misuse by others.**

Prohibited Items:

- ⊗ **Cell phones or any type of communication device**
- ⊗ **Laptops, tablets, MP3 players, video games, any electronics**
- ⊗ **Personal sports equipment**
- ⊗ **Drugs, marijuana, cigarettes, alcohol, any illegal substances**
- ⊗ **Matches, lighters, or anything flammable**
- ⊗ **Knives, blades, weapons of any kind**

We appreciate your partnership in helping us create a fun, respectful, and safe camp experience for everyone.

Camper Health, Medication, & Dietary Needs
IMPORTANT INFO - PLEASE READ!

A health care staff member is in residence at Rawhide Ranch and will be available during check-in.

ALL MEDICATIONS MUST BE BROUGHT TO CAMP IN THE ORIGINAL CONTAINER (as purchased or issued) AND TURNED IN TO OUR HEALTH STAFF UPON CHECK-IN. This includes prescriptions as allowed by Federal law or over-the counter drugs, vitamins, and all other supplements.

IF YOU DO NOT BRING THE ORIGINAL CONTAINER, WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ADMINISTER THAT MEDICATION!

To reduce the amount of medications being given out during camp (which can be very time consuming for our staff and the campers) we ask that you **please do not send vitamins or over the counter medication, unless *absolutely necessary*,** with your child. Please refer to the online Medical Form for a list of OTC meds that we provide, and give your consent to administer.

Containers must detail the name of the child, name of medication, directions for dosage, and the name of the person ordering the medication. **It is important for the safety of all campers in a cabin that ALL medications (even over-the counter medications) be kept with the staff; medication that is safe for one child may not be safe for another.** To avoid any unforeseen health issues we also ask that parents not use camp sessions as a time to try new dosages or new medications for their child. **For easy access during check-in, do not pack any medications in your camper's luggage. Have it out and ready to check-in at the Health Lodge.**

As part of the camper medical form you must complete (in your online account), you must list any medications that your child will be taking at camp and the dosage instructions. If you need to edit or update your online medical form at any time after it's submitted, please contact the Ranch office and let us know.

Parent/guardian(s) of campers will be notified of all injuries and illnesses that require the medical attention of a licensed Physician. In the case of a medical emergency, the parent/guardian will be contacted as part of the emergency plan. If the injury or illness is not an emergency but in the opinion of Rawhide Ranch's lead health care staff member a Physician needs to be consulted, the parent/guardian will be contacted as to their wishes regarding the situation.

We reserve the right to send a child home if our health care staff member or a physician so advises. If you plan to be away for any length of time during your child's time at camp, please arrange for a relative, friend or neighbor to be available to pick up your child should they become ill. Please indicate this person on the "Authorized Camper Pick-Up" form or as an Emergency Contact person, which can be done at the time of registration through your online account. Or you may contact the Ranch to add an authorized person.

Dietary Policy & Needs

☑ **The kitchen CAN ONLY accommodate NUT ALLERGIES and VEGETARIAN DIETS.** All meals served by our kitchen are nut free. Peanut butter & jelly supplies may be available on a separate table for self-service. These items are not included in the kitchen prepared meals. Camp stores may sell individually packaged items that contain nuts. Vegetarian meals are available **by request.**. Please select this option during online registration, or contact the ranch office to add this option for your camper.

☒ **The kitchen CANNOT accommodate other dietary needs (e.g., gluten-free, vegan, dairy-free, etc).** Families must provide **supplemental food** for these needs. Supplemental food can be stored in the dining room, where a fridge, freezer, and microwave are available. There is no direct access to the kitchen (no oven or stove). Counselors can assist campers if needed. **Please contact the Ranch office for details or if you have questions.**

In addition to the main dishes served at each meal time, we also have a salad bar & fresh fruit at lunch and dinner. At breakfast we have cereal (single servings), milk, oatmeal packets, yogurt, bagels, fruit, etc.

Sunday Check-In… Howdy!

Camp Check-In Information

Day: Sunday
Time: Between 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

All campers MUST arrive during this time window

No early or late arrivals can be accommodated

Important Reminders:

- Camp staff will not be available before 2:00 PM for early check-ins.
- Late arrivals cannot be accommodated due to the structured check-in and orientation process.
- **No exceptions** – please do not request early or late check-in.
- Ensure all forms are submitted online before arrival (contact the office if unsure). If forms are missing, you will be required to complete them on site.
- Pets are NOT allowed on ranch property for safety reasons. Please leave them at home (service animals are welcome).

Arrival & Check-In Process:

- **Check-in starts at the Ranch entrance on Main Street.**
- All campers must be accompanied by an adult (regardless of age).
- You & your camper will make your way through our check-in stations, where you will review and sign the **Zero Tolerance Agreement** with your camper, learn your camper's cabin assignment and counselor's name, and more.
- Drop off any medications (including over the counter, vitamins, etc) at the Health Lodge with our health care team.

What to Expect:

- Be prepared to walk with your camper to their cabin area to help them settle in.
- Meet your camper's counselor & cabin mates.

Stop by the "Stockman's Hotel" to:

- Drop off camper mail
- Purchase a Camp Photos
- Purchase Visitor Meal Tickets for the lunch on Friday
- Load Pony Bucks (Spending Money)

Friday Check-Out… Happy Trails!

Check-Out & Closing Show Information

Check-Out Begins at 11:00 AM (Fridays)

- Stop at the **Stockman's Hotel** first, to complete the check-out process. Have your photo ID ready.
- Then, you may proceed to the **Rodeo Arena** for the closing shows.
- **Do not enter camper housing areas before the show** — campers will be changing and preparing during this time.
- Your camper will meet you at the show arena after their event.
- **Please leave pets at home.**

Photo ID Required for Check-Out

- For camper safety, a **government-issued photo ID** is required at check-out.
- Only adults listed on the **"Authorized Camper Release"** form will be allowed to check-out a camper.
- If someone else needs to pick up your camper, please list them in advance.

Closing Shows - Friday at the Rodeo Arena

All campers will participate in **one show on Friday,** based on their **RANK status.** Campers may choose to earn ranks during summer or winter camp. **If you are unsure whether your camper is ranked, please contact the Ranch office by phone or email.**

- ALL **first-time campers** AND all **un-ranked campers** will participate in the **Ranch Hand Show.**
- Returning campers may or may not hold a rank (**not all returning campers are ranked**), so please confirm if needed. Your camper should also know if they are ranked.

11:30 AM - Ranch Hand Show

- For First Time and/or Un-Ranked Campers

1:30 PM - Advanced Ranked Show

- For Ranked Campers Only

Please be supportive and encouraging of your child in whichever show area they may be participating. Each camper has worked hard and is proud to show their progress!

Wild West Lunch

Parents, friends & family may join their campers for a casual lunch served under the shade!

- Lunch will be served from about **12:15 - 1:30 PM.**
- Lunch is included for campers.
- Guests meals may be purchased ahead of time through your registration account, or on check-in day.

Lunch Prices:

Adults (ages 8+): $18
Kids (ages 3 - 7): $10
Ages 0 - 2: Free

Homesickness

Preparing Your Child

For most children (including those who have been to camp before), homesickness is part of the baggage that accompanies a stay at camp. Parents can play a big role in helping their child to overcome homesickness, both before and during camp and, in doing this, grow even closer to their child. New campers enter a situation where they do not know the routine; they do not know other campers' names, counselor names, the geography of camp, etc. Once campers have a couple of days to adjust to the new setting and learn the basic routine, they usually shed their homesickness. Homesickness that lasts beyond the first few days is rare. In the unlikely event that homesickness lingers, you will be the key to your child's adjustment to camp life. When we are aware of severe homesickness, we will notify parents and keep them posted on their child's progress. We ask that you work with us to help make the camp experience as rewarding as possible for your child. Many campers are secretive and are afraid to share their feelings of homesickness with the staff. In such cases, we rely on parents to inform us when they detect or suspect homesickness through mail communications with their children. **However, please be aware that mail can take up to three days to arrive home from camp and many changes can take place in three days time at camp.**

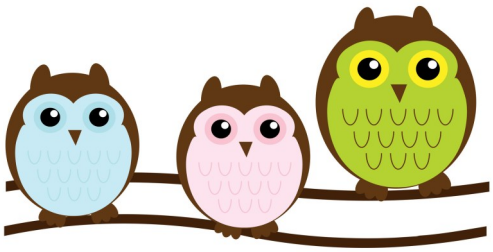
Our approach to homesickness is one that we have found very successful and have compiled through many years of experience. We feel it is important to listen to and acknowledge a child's feelings, but it is also important for parents and counselors to focus on the many positive aspects of camp, such as exciting activities and new friends. Please do not make any "private deals" such as "Just call me if you are unhappy and we will drive up and take you home". These "deals" tend to undermine a child's ability to get through any initial homesickness period. For a parent, it is naturally difficult to not give in to a homesick child's wish to leave camp. We have found that campers make the best of their summer experience when parents fully support their efforts to gain independence and strength while spending valuable time away from home.

Develop Realistic Expectations

Developing realistic expectations about camp is very important. Parents can sometimes over-glamorize the camp experience. ("You're going to have the best time of your whole life!" or "You'll make the greatest friends!") Obviously, going away to camp will be fun and worthwhile, but it is important to make sure your child understands it may not be fun every minute.

Go ahead and talk about the fun they will have; about liking some people more than others; and how hard it is to do everything that is offered at camp. Discuss worries they might have about not being "good" at an activity or about making friends. By doing this, you help "inoculate" children with their feelings so they are better able to recognize and cope with them.

Have you read……
"P.S. I Hate It Here! Kids' Letters from Camp" by Diane Falanga?
A fun & insightful book for new camp parents to put those letters into perspective.



Visit Camp Early

Some children fare better at camp if they are able to actually see where they will be staying. Consider taking a trip to visit the ranch to give your child an opportunity to see the facilities and program in action. Call for details about a camp preview visit. Camp preview visits must be scheduled ahead of time.

Cautious children especially need to know: what a cabin looks like inside and out; where the bathrooms are; where they will be eating. Be sure to visit places of particular interest to your child.

Explain to your child that twinges of homesickness are common and nothing to worry about. Reassure them of your confidence in their ability to overcome the normal problems of separation. Together, draw up a set of procedures for being at camp in advance. ("If you're feeling homesick, what do you think you could do about it?") Have the child work out a plan. It could include some of the following elements: talk to her/his counselor; write letters to parents, grandparents and friends to ensure a steady supply of return mail; bring some hobby materials or some favorite games to play with others during free times in the day (free time is often when homesickness crops up. They are all ideas that Counselors and the Camp Director will also suggest and help to facilitate, but it helps a camper to think about them in advance with his/her parents.

Kids are often able to link home and camp more readily if they bring a "transitional" object with them. This can be a photograph, a favorite teddy bear, a good luck charm or even a blanket. Such transitional objects keep the connection with home fresh. Writing letters home also makes their time away easier.

Practice Separation

It is recommended children and parents practice separation well before camp begins. Children can start gradually with an overnight away and work up to weekends (perhaps at their grandparent's house or with a good friend from school).

When is my child ready for camp?

There is no formula, but some signs that point to a good first experience:

- The child enjoys spending the night with friends or relatives.
- The child has been to day camp and did well.
- The child feels comfortable in new situations apart from the family.
- The child can go to camp with a friend and stay in the same cabin.

Other Tips

- Send your child to overnight camp only when he or she is ready, not when cousins or friends are ready. There is no "right" age, just the right time for each individual child.
- Before your child goes off to camp, reassure your child: "Yes, you can succeed and have a wonderful experience." Do not discuss how much you will miss him/her.
- Write and send letters before camp begins so your child will have them when they arrive, but do not talk about fun things he/she is missing/missed or tell them how much you will miss them. Keep the letters fun and light-hearted.

Homesickness While At Camp - What to Expect

When children are first away from home, they may experience several days of mild to severe homesickness until they become adjusted to camp. Letters written during the first few days of camp may reflect this. Children generally gain independence and self-reliance from seeing their camp experience through to the finish. We will help your child feel connected to and supported by camp. If you anticipate or sense homesickness in your child, please speak privately with your child's counselor during check-in.

How Parents Can Help

At camp, many children will test their effect on their parents and their own capacity to separate. At these times, it can be difficult for parents to insist their child follow through with camp. However, for school-age children, helping them deal with frustration, disappointment, conflict and sadness while remaining in their situation is appropriate. Giving your child confidence in their ability to cope with the difficulties of daily life and experience in handling an appropriate degree of discomfort and problems is good parenting because it helps them be independent, separate and strong.

In speaking to a homesick child, the best thing a parent can say is "I know you're feeling homesick. It's normal to have those feelings. I want you to make the adjustment and I feel confident that you can and that you will. I want to help you in any way I can to settle in. I don't expect you to be happy all the time or to stop missing us and missing home, but I do expect you to stay there and deal with the feelings you have. We'll write to you often and you will see through the commitment you made." Let your child know that camp is a commitment and that he/she is a person who respects and honors their commitments and gets satisfaction from following through (even though it might not always be easy all the time). Once the option of going home is closed, the work of adjusting to being at camp can begin. Most cases of homesickness fade away rather quickly, if treated with a little attention and recognition. We try to help the camper to make a place for him/herself within the camp community. Tough cases require a triple dose of effort, involving cooperation between parents, the camper and staff.

Common Pitfalls

With the "try it for one more day" approach, we find campers typically stay exactly one day longer and then demand their parents make good on their promise. When they do, the loss is many-fold; the camper has uncertainties about their capacity to handle independence and has lost out on a great learning experience from which they had begun to gain many new skills and friends. It may be a long time before they will feel ready to break away.

Another common mistake is to "bribe" a child into staying at camp. Linking a successful stay at camp to a material object or other experience sends a message that camp is worth it just for a material object. The reward for fulfilling their commitment to stay at camp should be their new found confidence and independence.

There is a loss at camp, too. The amount of energy that staff and campers put into helping a homesick camper creates close ties. That invested energy pays off in great emotional involvement when homesickness is overcome. We hate to see campers leave camp early and we miss them when they go. Finally, other campers may become homesick or have their homesick feelings magnified by their friend's departure.

Tips for Parents Coping With Homesickness at Camp

- If your child sends letters saying "I hate camp. I cried last night. I can't sleep at night," **DO NOT PANIC.** Send reassuring, supportive letters and talk candidly with the Camp Director to obtain their perspective on your child's adjustment. Homesickness is not a 24-hour-a-day affliction. It comes in temporary waves at odd moments of the day. Most homesick children have fun most of the time. Their fellow campers and counselors see their whole range of feelings and behavior – the parents hear only of the miserable moments in the most recent letter.

- Our experience at camp is that telephone conversations with parents tend to encourage homesickness in campers, so campers are not permitted to initiate telephone calls home. Do not forget to **reach a verbal agreement ahead of time with your child to honor our "no phone calls" policy**.

- If your child asks to speak with you on the phone, we will talk with you in advance about it. When speaking with your child, offer calm reassurance and put the time frame into perspective. Avoid the temptation to take them home early. Let him/her know it will be an adjustment for the whole family, but it is a worthwhile experience and part of growing up. Speak with your child for a moderate amount of time. Reinforce the positive aspects of camp.

- Do not feel guilty about encouraging your child to stay at camp. For many children, camp is a first step toward independence and plays an important role in their growth and development.

- When it is time for the call to end, ask your child to pass the phone to the staff person, who will be there for the duration of the call. This will give you a chance to talk with a staff person and make for an easier transition than hanging up on your child.

- Trust your instincts.

- If all efforts fail, your child may go home. If their stay at camp is cut short, focus on the positive and encourage your child to try camp again next year. We will never make them feel guilty about it and we hope you will support us in that. Say, "I'm proud you stayed as long as you did". If your child says, "Never again," while you are hugging him/her quietly say, "Never is a long time. Perhaps, one day you will tell me that you are ready to go to camp."

Article: *"You Can Try or You Can Just Give Up: the Impact of Perceived Control and Coping Style on Childhood Homesickness" by Christopher A. Thurber, Ph.D. and John R. Weisz, Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, in Developmental Psychology, Vol. 33, No. 3. Complete text available from American Psychological Association Public Affairs Office. Phone: (202) 336-5707 or e-mail: public.affairs@apa.org.*