



Homesickness and Preparing for Camp

Missing Home

Homesickness is fairly common at overnight camp. Many campers feel a sense of missing home at some point during their stay, although the vast majority of homesickness is overcome after the first few days. Children who are missing home often need the support of their counsellors and fellow campers to feel better. If a child is homesick, we endeavor to identify it and give them the support they need right away.

The predominant symptom of homesickness is preoccupying thoughts of home. Other symptoms may include being withdrawn, headaches or stomach aches or other body complaints, and crying.

Preparing for a camp experience at home will help prevent homesickness. Here are some suggestions of things you can do with your child at home before they come to camp:

- Learn about Camp Chief Hector YMCA with your camper so that they can anticipate what it will be like. This can include coming to:

- **PARENT AND CAMPER INFORMATION NIGHT – Queen Elizabeth High School, 512 18 St NW, Calgary**

Date, 2017 - 7:00pm

- **OPEN HOUSE - Camp Chief Hector YMCA, [map and directions], Date, 2017 – 2:00 - 4:00pm**

For campers who are adjusting to a new environment, it is helpful to know what the camp will look like and recognize a familiar face from one of these events.

- Talk about the activities that will happen at camp and ask your camper what they are looking forward to at camp.
- Arrange for your child to spend a night or two at a friend's house.
- If your camper is worried about missing home, talk about it with them. Let your camper know that homesickness is normal and tell them about strategies they can use to help ease their worry. Common ways of addressing homesickness at camp include writing letters home, sharing feelings with their friends and counsellors, hugging their favourite stuffed animal and thinking about the activities they are most excited for at camp.
- Use a calendar to show the amount of time that your camper will be away. Predictability and perspective on the length of the camp session is important.
- Pack a personal item from home such as a stuffed animal or picture of your family. This can help to ease the transition from home to camp.
- Send pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes and paper for your camper to send letters home. (Letters to other family members are helpful too. Again pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes are required).
- Before your camper departs for camp, avoid making comments that may reflect your anxiety about your child being away. Phrases such as "I hope you'll be ok" or "What will I do without you" may leave a child worried that something bad might happen to them or their parents and can preoccupy their thoughts. An example of a positive send off is "I know that you're looking forward to a lot of the activities at camp. I can't wait to hear your stories!"



- Avoid making a “deal” with your camper to bring him/her home if s/he doesn’t like the experience of being away. This may undermine the child’s sense that their parents have confidence in their ability to be on their own. It may also set an expectation that they won’t like the new experience and the child may not give the camp experience a chance. If they are homesick, all they will think about is how their parent(s) said they will come get them right away.

How we support homesickness at camp

We are committed to creating a positive, caring community at Camp Chief Hector YMCA and, through this, focus on the prevention of homesickness.

- We work on creating a positive community on the first day of camp by planning games that will help the campers get to know each other and the site, and by discussing group expectations together. Each group’s schedule is posted for all campers to refer to so they know what to expect each day.
- A Director meets with each group within the first 24 hours of camp to discuss what campers can expect from their counsellors, who they can talk to if they need help, and that they can call home if they feel it will help them to have a more enjoyable camp experience.
- We have great counsellors and camp staff who care about your camper’s experience and well-being. All staff are specifically trained on identifying homesickness and have strategies to help campers cope with being away from home. Most of the time, campers just need someone to sit with and talk to about how they are feeling.
- If a child is persistently homesick and not willing to participate in camp activities, the support given will adapt for each circumstance. A section director or camp director will call home and let the parents know what is happening. The purpose of this initial call is to brainstorm coping strategies with the parents/guardian and give us more insight into what the camper may need. From this point, if homesickness is continuing to pull the camper out of programs, the parents/guardian and camp directors will decide if the camper would benefit from a call home, an afternoon visit from a family member, or in serious cases, leaving camp. Calls home will always take place during the day as evening calls tend to make homesickness feelings much stronger.

We are looking forward to supporting and caring for campers and working with families to ensure that the camp experience is a positive and exciting one. Please contact us if you would like more detailed information about homesickness and preparing for camp.

- **For Yamnuska, Mistaya, Kananaskin, Pioneer and Leadership campers:**
Vanessa Townsend, Camp Director
email: vanessa.townsend@calgary.ymca.ca, phone: 403-673-3858 ext. 301
- **For Bowfort campers (Day Camp, Chiniquay):**
Anja Vreeker, Program Director
email: anja.vreeker@calgary.ymca.ca, phone: 403-673-3858 ext. 300