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Avoiding & dealing with homesickness



Homesickness happens to children every now and then, especially during extended camps in tents or houses. Sometimes it's hardly an issue, sometimes homesickness spreads like an epidemic.

In this article, you'll learn how homesickness develops, how to reduce the likelihood of it happening in the first place, and what to do when a child is homesick.

Causes of homesickness

Homesickness has the following particular causes:

- **unfamiliar surroundings**: instead of being in familiar surroundings at home with mom, the child finds himself in a previously unfamiliar place, with often unfamiliar people (children/leaders), with unfamiliar daily routines, etc.
- **Heavier stress**: in a camp the days are often unusually exhausting (sometimes also thanks to J&S programs ...) and the recovery phases relatively short (night's rest short, sleeping in a new place difficult, disturbances due to many people in a tent), psychological stress can happen via the weather: if it rains for days the "homesickness rate" sometimes rises to over 10%
- **Fights among children**: are often not openly acted out/visible to leaders, may simply consist of one child being shunned by the others
- **Going home as an option**: if, for example, it is suggested to the children by their parents from the outset that they can go home again if they do not like it, this option is sometimes very present for the children. At the first negative experience (e.g., bad weather), the desire to want to go home comes up so quickly.
- **Contact initiation by parents**: if the parents make contact with the child and perhaps still ask how the child likes it, longing for the familiar environment
  often arises

- **"Contagion"**: if a child is homesick, this often has a contagious effect and the idea of simply going home spreads to more and more children
- **other "camp factors"**: bad weather, bad food, boring program, insufficient supervision by leaders

Avoiding homesickness

The following are some tips on how homesickness can be largely prevented:

- **Choose the location of the camp consciously**: If possible, avoid areas where the weather is always changing or where it rains regularly
- **Program very varied design**: It should be for everyone again and again something that he / she particularly lies

- **Don't make the program too intense**: As a leader, you can plan some more challenging activities. Your kids can't take as much as you can!
- **Strenuous and relaxed phases should alternate**: Every strenuous day, such as a day with a half-day hike, should be followed by a much more relaxing day. So the kids can recover again.
- **Planning alternative programmes for bad weather**: If sports programmes in particular (keyword "Y+S") have to be carried out on several consecutive rainy days as they are planned for good weather, this sometimes has a severe impact on the mood of younger children in particular. One to three alternative sports blocks should therefore always be planned. Sometimes there is the possibility to carry out such sports activities in a large barn, protected from the weather.
- **Care for children during free time**: Homesickness does not usually arise during activities, but during free time periods. Leaders should use these to look after the children. It may sound strange, but at the camp the leaders temporarily take over the role of the mother of each child. This should be actively performed.
- **"Energy management" for each leader**: Since towards the end of a strenuous camp even the leaders are often "through", each leader should make sure to take recovery periods early on. These should be coordinated as a team. If the leaders are exhausted, these can no longer actively enough against emerging homesickness counteract in the so critical second half of the camp.
- **Stop teasing immediately**: Teasing should generally be addressed immediately and put to rest.
- **Regulate contact by or with parents clearly from the outset**: Parents should be made aware that/why contact on their part is not desired during camp except for the last day or two. Most parents will readily understand and respect this no-contact policy if it is explained to them. One option is to write a letter to parents prior to the camp explaining the important information about the camp. The topic of contact/homesickness can be integrated there very well.
- **Mobile phone ban for children**: A general mobile phone ban for the children is advisable, parents can contact in case of questions, etc. at communicated mobile phone no. of a leader.
- **Inform parents that leaving camp early should not be expressed as an option to children.**

Managing homesickness

A child is homesick, what now?

- **Take child/homesickness seriously, carefully analyze reasons**: Maybe it is the first time the child is away from home for a long time? Is he being teased? Does he have friends in the camp? Has he had contact with his parents? Is he afraid of sleeping in a (dark, unknown) tent? But don't go too much into homesickness here, because attention creates reinforcement.
- **Distract, occupy, do something, take time**: Expressed homesickness is sometimes simply the request "take care of me a little". We leaders should do this to a reasonable extent throughout the camp. However, children who are homesick should not be given special treatment. Often the key can be found in asking ourselves where the child's interests and talents lie and launching activities accordingly, especially during free time.
- **Responding to the child**: Sometimes it makes sense to let the child's tears run free once, comfort him a little and then talk to him about how to cope with homesickness. After all, every child has to experience this sooner or later.
- **Talk to parents on the phone**: Assuming it all did not help and over several days the child suffers from homesickness. In this case, after internal team consultation, the parents should be contacted and further action discussed. Some parents do not see it as an option to pick up the child and/or convince him/her on the phone to continue staying at the camp.
- **Having the child picked up or brought home**: If a pick-up by the parents is finally organized (or if the child should be brought home), this should be done as inconspicuously as possible, e.g. by having the child stay in the camp during a part of the program that takes place outside the camp and being picked up there by the parents without the rest of the children noticing. Basically, letting the child go home but should be the very last option, because we do the child and the rest of the camp kids so in the long run usually no good.

The worst mistakes in 'homesickness management'

- **Putting up the possibility of eventually going home**: Once you put it up, most kids won't rest until they're let home. In addition, the other children almost always pick up on this - and want to be treated the same. An early departure should be avoided as far as possible and if it is unavoidable, should be as unobtrusive as possible. This may also mean that I do not inform the child of this until shortly before departure.
- **Mothering the child too much**: Younger leaders who are under a lot of stress themselves often try to compensate for their own problems and rarely do the child any good. Because not seldom the homesickness is strengthened thereby still. An "extra sausage" there can be in certain situations once, but this should be "not too big" and also remain the exception.
- **Giving in too quickly**: In principle, all children should remain in the camp during the entire camp period. Exceptions to this principle should only be made in special exceptional cases.

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Weitere Informationen

Tags
Homesickness

Age
8–12 years
13–16 years

Number of participants
1–20
20–30
30 – 100

Material
Almost effortless

File download
No file downloads

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Tags
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