



Preparing Your Child for Residential Summer Camp

If your child is heading off to a residential camp—also known as “sleep-away” camp—this summer, you will need to help him or her pack as well as prepare emotionally for the experience, especially if this is his or her first time away from home. This guide provides general guidelines for packing and tips to help you ease your child’s anxieties and combat homesickness. *Note*—For tips and information on types of camps and selecting a camp for your child, please refer to the guide *Summer Camps*.

Packing Guidelines for Camp

Residential camps generally have policies, procedures and requirements for packing. What you need to pack—and how much—will depend on the type of camp your child is attending and the duration of his or her stay. Most camps will send campers a packing list citing specific needs, but here are some general guidelines to follow:

- **Clothing** should be comfortable, durable and expendable. Pack shorts, T-shirts, sweatshirts and jeans; plenty of socks and undergarments; several bathing suits; a raincoat and hat; and a jacket for cool nights. Consider labeling everything you pack with your child’s name using a marker or sew-in labels.
- **Shoes** that are comfortable and durable are a necessity. Pack sneakers, sandals, water shoes and any special shoes or boots that may be required for activities such as tennis or hiking.
- **Towels** are usually supplied by the camper. Determine how many your child will need based on the duration of his or her stay and the laundry services provided by the camp.

- **Bedding/sleeping bags** must usually be packed. Some camps supply linens, but most suggest campers bring sleeping bags, sheets, blankets and pillows. Most beds are twin size or smaller, and in many cases are bunk beds.
- **Equipment** such as a flashlight with extra batteries, canteen or water bottle, and a camera may be a good idea. Ask what special equipment your child will need if he or she is attending a specialty camp.
- **Toiletries** such as soap, toothbrush/toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, brush and comb are essential.
- **Insect and tick repellent** is a must. Ask your doctor which product is best for your child.
- **Sunscreen and lip balm** are essential to protect against sunburn. Waterproof sunscreen is the best. Consider packing sunglasses as well.
- **Spending money** should be given to your child. Make sure there is a safe place for him or her to keep it.
- **Medication** for your child should be sent in the original bottles along with dosage instructions to the camp nurse or health care facility. Alert the camp director and/or medical facility about any medical conditions or special needs your child may have.
- Check your camp’s communication policies and preferences. Many camps prohibit Internet access and limit phone calls. **Pre-addressed, pre-stamped postcards and envelopes** may encourage your child to write to you and other relatives about his or her experiences. Some camps will allow parents to send e-mails to their children which are printed out and given to them.
- **Special needs** equipment or augmentative communicator devices your child may need should also be packed. If your child is attending a special needs camp, ask the camp director for packing specifics.



Preparing Your Child Emotionally for Summer Camp

Your child may experience some anxiety prior to leaving for camp, especially if it is his or her first time away from home. Even children who have attended camp for several years may need some reassurance and help making the transition. Here are some tips on how to ease your child's anxieties and make his or her camp experience memorable:

- **Talk about concerns in advance.** As the first day of camp nears, many children feel some trepidation about what lies ahead. Encourage your child to talk about these feelings and convey your confidence in his or her ability to handle being away from home.
- **Have realistic expectations.** Camp, like the rest of life, has good and bad aspects. Acknowledge that there will be ups and downs to the camp experience, and help your child have a realistic view of what to expect. Do not pressure your child to succeed at camp, but encourage him or her to have fun and try some new things.
- **Build support in advance.** If possible, arrange for your child to attend camp with a close friend, relative or "camp buddy" from a previous summer. Mail letters, postcards or a "care" package before your child leaves home so he or she gets it the first day of camp.
- **Visit the camp in advance.** If possible, take your child to visit the camp so he or she knows what to expect.
- **Expect some adjustment difficulty.** Many children need a few days to adjust to being away from home and living in close quarters with other people. Be supportive, but do not offer to come get your child unless it is an emergency or your child's care needs are not being met. Reassure your child that these feelings will probably dissipate in a few days.

Make sure there is a well-equipped medical facility with a highly trained staff on or near the camp. If your child has any allergies (to medications, bee stings, foods, etc.) alert the camp director and medical center before your child attends camp. Don't wait for an emergency to communicate important information about your child's special needs.

- **Have a strategy for how to handle homesickness.** Some children have physical symptoms of "homesickness" that may include stomach problems, headaches and difficulty sleeping. Others may act out or say they "hate" camp. If your child is homesick and wants to come home, acknowledge his or her feelings and communicate your support, but encourage him or her to stick it out for a little while longer. Talk with the camp director and try to work out the problems with the help of camp staff. If your child is truly miserable, then by all means have him or her come home.

Staying Safe at Camp

Summer camp offers numerous outdoor sports, games and activities for campers while under the supervision of trained counselors and staff. Although counselors will enforce the camp's own set of rules and safety regulations, it is also a good idea to teach your child general tips for outdoor safety before he or she leaves for camp. Please refer to the guide *Outdoor Safety* for tips on teaching your child about water safety, insect stings, Lyme disease, poison ivy/oak/sumac and more.

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