

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT HOMESICKNESS

What is it?

Homesickness is a form of separation anxiety normally experienced by children (and even adults!) when away from home for extended periods, especially those with little or no previous experience being away. The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that 90% of children who attend overnight camps feel some level of homesickness, but being at camp builds children's self-esteem, relationships skills, independence, and leadership skills.

Homesickness Do's:

- Discuss homesickness with your child – explain that everyone misses something about home while they are away. Let them know that homesickness is normal – it means that there are a lot of things about home to love!
- Talk with your child about their upcoming trip to Sly Park. Ask them to imagine how it might feel to be away from home and parents, to hike on a trail, to sleep in a cabin with other students, to eat three meals a day in the dining hall, to use school restrooms all week, etc.
- If the idea of showering or using the restroom while away causes anxiety, remind your child that they will have access to an individual shower stall (with a curtain) and restroom stall (with a lockable door). Have them practice getting undressed and dressed while wrapped in a towel or in their sleeping bag.
- Have your child practice being away from home by sleeping over at friends' or relatives' homes.
- Discuss coping strategies they can use if they do become homesick: stay busy, read a book, talk to friends or an adult, draw a picture, write a letter home (send self-addressed, stamped envelopes or postcards), and think about all of the fun activities they have and will be doing.
- Pack a personal item from home, such as a stuffed animal or a favorite blanket.
- Call ahead to Sly Park to arrange for any special dietary needs or medical conditions your child may have.

Homesickness Don'ts:

- Don't tell your child that you will come to get them if they get homesick – this conveys a message of doubt and pity that undermines their confidence and independence, as well as the efforts of your child's teacher/s and the Sly Park staff to help your child succeed while at Sly Park. Also, keep in mind that students are not allowed to have cell phones or use the Sly Park office phone to call home. A teacher from your child's school will contact you in the event of a serious issue or emergency. Homesickness is considered routine (not urgent) and will be handled with care.
- Although you may experience some separation anxiety of your own, don't convey these feelings to your child – this may cause them to feel unsure about going to Sly Park. Do not cry when saying goodbye to your child on the morning of the trip; instead, send them off with a positive image of you being upbeat, reminding them to have fun and behave, and that you look forward to hearing all about their trip when they get home.
- If you write letters to your child, keep them simple and positive. Ask questions such as: "How are things going?" and "Have you met new people and made new friends?" and write comments such as "I hope you're having a great time!" "We're looking forward to hearing what you've been learning!" Avoid writing comments like: "I've cried every night since you left," "Your little brother/sister keeps asking where you are," or "We all miss you very much and can't wait for you to get home."
- Don't force your child to attend against their wishes, but do encourage your child to attend.

When children arrive at Sly Park prepared with appropriate coping strategies, they will know what to expect if they do experience feelings of homesickness. Overcoming homesickness is a huge boost to a child's self-esteem and independence and gives them a sense of pride and success!