

The Camp Readiness Checklist

We usually think of getting ready for camp as getting our packing checklist of physical items, and stuffing them in a duffel bag. That step is important, but it's just as important to check that your camper knows the concepts and skills they'll need to get off to a smooth start. Since most kids missed a year or two of spending-time-away-from-family skill development during the pandemic, checking on camp readiness skills is extra relevant. The good news is that just like packing a bag, you can get your camper mentally ready for camp in the months and weeks before arrival.

Camp Readiness Checklist

- Camper understands homesickness and what to do about it.
- Camp-ready bedtime routine
- Confident at sleepovers
- Practiced self-advocacy and consent skills
- Have a mental wellness plan

Tip: If your camper is anything like mine, talking about this stuff is going to elicit some eye-rolls. That's ok. Spread it out over several days, talk in the car, or write it in a letter if you need to. We've also included some helpful comic books and videos to share.

- Camper understands homesickness and what to do about it.**

Talk to your camper about homesickness before camp. Below are some talking points.

- Because we like our homes, families, and usual routines, it's totally normal to miss those things when you're away from them. That's what we talk about when we say we're "homesick." Most people will miss home sometimes when they are at camp. That doesn't mean that we can't be having fun and making new friends at the same time, that we don't like camp, or that we're "not doing it right." That just means you like your home!
- If missing home is stopping you from having fun at camp, reach out to a counselor or director. They will help you engage with something fun and distracting and set goals to help you get back on track.
- It may seem counter intuitive, but calling our families when we're homesick ALWAYS makes everyone feel more sad. It just reminds you of those things you miss even more. That's why we won't allow homesick campers to call home. (However, we will let families at home know if your child is suffering from homesickness.)
- Don't tell your camper you'll pick them up if they are homesick. Almost always, campers will try to "wait it out" until you'll pick them up instead of trying to engage.
- Kids may ask: "Why put ourselves through this? Why don't we just stay in our comfort zone?" Because, putting ourselves in a new situation, even though it will feel a little uncomfortable sometimes, will give us some pretty awesome rewards including friendships, fun experiences, and new skills that we can

use to do even more awesome things in the future. In fact, we're really lucky that we have a super safe, supportive place like summer camp where we can practice being on our own.

Camp-ready bedtime routine

Having a routine at bedtime can be helpful for kids who have trouble getting to sleep. But it can lead to a lot of anxiety for the camper if that routine isn't workable at camp. Set your camper up for success by adjusting their bedtime routine now so they feel confident at bedtime. **Anything involving electronics (white noise machines, listening to music or podcasts, meditation apps)** is not going to be available at camp. Here are some camp-ready substitutions:

- Meditating without an app
- Mindfulness or breathing exercises, such as relaxing one part of the body at a time - these are often presented as a video or guided meditation, but a short one is easy to memorize to do on your own. [Here are three to check out.](#)
- Reading to sleep
- Journaling before bed
- Sleeping with earplugs
- Snuggling with a special blanket or stuffy

Let your camper know that it's pretty normal to have trouble sleeping the first night or two. However, campers tend to get very tired from all the physical activity at camp, so usually it's not hard to fall asleep after that.

Confident at sleepovers

Many kids haven't had much (or any) sleepover experience thanks to the pandemic. When campers have had experience sleeping away from their families before camp, they feel more confident when they arrive. Now is a great time to arrange some practice overnights (or even better - multi-night stays) with friends or family! Sleepovers may also flag other areas that need more practice, such as bedtime routines away from home; and help children realize that they will be OK even if they don't get a perfect night's sleep.

Practiced self-advocacy and consent skills

Self-advocacy is a skill that can really grow at camp; and consent is a topic we will cover with campers when they arrive - but it's helpful to plant the seeds before arrival. There will be campers from all over the country and world, from many different backgrounds, and with different ideas of what is acceptable behavior. Campers move around campus on their own, and though counselors are always near-by, they are not in the room with campers during cabin time and after lights-out. Activities offered are based on what campers request. That's why it's important that campers know how to advocate for themselves and others. Remind your camper that counselors are never more than a few steps away, and are trained to help them. If they feel uncomfortable with any adult at camp, they should reach out to another staff person right away. You may even want to role-play asking an adult for help.

Respecting others and asking for their consent before touching them are concepts that we work to teach at camp. You can help by introducing those concepts at home. For instance, we ask before giving someone a hug. [This movie is a great intro.](#) as is the comic book *Consent for Kids*, by Rachel Brian.

Have a mental wellness plan

If your camper feels anxious regularly, it's a pretty safe bet they'll have some anxiety about attending camp or while attending camp. Anyone - adults included - is going to feel a little anxious when going to a new place with new people where you don't totally know what to expect. Camp is frequently a loud and boisterous place, and there is little personal time or space. This can sometimes feel a little overwhelming. Remind your camper that all those feelings are normal. At the same time, talk about what they are excited for at camp, and what tools they have for getting back on track.

- Teach your camper how to calm their breathing ([this video explains 5-finger breathing](#) which is an often-used technique)
- For campers who need a quiet space, there are many quiet and peaceful areas outdoors at camp. There will be designated quiet zones during loud, indoor events.
- Many campers read or draw during free times or during lunch as a way to have quiet "alone time" to recharge.
- Share with our staff what helps your camper regulate at home (on the camp form)
- Remind your camper that they can reach out to the camp nurse, a counselor, or a director for help
- We're a fan of the comic book *The Worry Less Book* by Rachel Brain for teaching tools to help with anxiety

That's it!

If you have concerns in any of these areas (or others), or feel like you can't check all these boxes before camp, please reach out to us. Our camp directors are happy to help talk through your child's situation, and we have more tips and tricks to share. Having a plan in place in advance is the best way to ensure we can meet your camper's needs.