

What will happen when we arrive at camp on the first day?

After you turn onto the camp driveway and drive a few hundred yards into camp, you will be greeted by several staff members, who will welcome you, find out who you are, tell you where your child will be staying for the week, and give you directions to a parking spot (they'll also give you a really handy card containing the name of your child's counselor and cabin, along with step-by-step directions for navigating the check-in process, so you won't have to memorize all of this!). Once you park your vehicle, someone will help you find your cabin, and you can take all of your stuff there. Let the fun begin! You get to meet your child's counselor and help your child pick out a bunk and get settled in the cabin. The counselor will ask you to sign in your child, and will ask you for some more information.

After your child is settled, he/she will be asked to change into a swimsuit (some campers wear a swimsuit under their clothes, just to be prepared) and head to the pool for a swim assessment (Pathfinders will do this on Monday afternoon). This *required* assessment helps our staff get a handle on each camper's swimming proficiency, and helps us determine who is eligible to swim in the deep end. The swim test is one full length of the pool and tread water for 30 seconds. Campers who are unable to do this will still get to swim, but will be required to stay in the shallow end of the pool. If your child is nervous about this, please assure him/her that it's OK to not be a great swimmer at camp, and that he/she will be able to go swimming each day.

On the way to the pool, you will be asked to check in, with your child, at Helen Hall and the Pavilion. The staff there will make sure that all required forms are completed and signed, and that any outstanding fees are paid. At this time you can sign up for and pay for horse rides, tower climbing, a group photograph, a photo CD, one-way emails, email service, and add to your child's canteen store balance. Then, you and your child will visit with the nurse, who will make sure your health form is complete, find out how your child is feeling, collect any medication, and discuss any health concerns that you have. Now, it's off to the pool!

After leaving the pool, your child will be asked to join the cabin group for a tour and general orientation to camp. This is a good time for parents to say goodbye (you may leave before the swim assessment, if you want to). After learning more about camp and playing a few games, we'll head to the Pavilion for dinner, followed by a "rip-roaring, foot-stomping" campfire filled with singing, stories, and funny skits. The day will end, like each day, with special cabin group devotion time in the cabin. Then, it's time to get some sleep and get ready for another fun day!

What if my child is homesick?

Here's a few things to note about homesickness:

- *Mild homesickness is normal. Almost all children have some mild homesick feelings when they are away.
- *Severe homesickness is rare.
- *Talking about homesickness does not cause homesickness, nor make it worse.
- *There are many things to think and do before leaving home to lessen homesickness.
- *There are even more things to think and do during camp to lessen homesickness.
- *Homesick feelings reflect the love you have for things at home.
- *Homesickness, and getting over it, is a normal process that helps children develop independence and self-confidence.

What can we do to prevent strong homesickness?

- Include your child in planning for camp – they feel more comfortable if they have some control over what’s happening.
- Talk with your child about homesickness – it’s best to acknowledge that it might happen, that it’s normal, and that there are things that we can do to handle it. You can address any fears your child might have such as bedwetting, fear of the dark, unfamiliar people and surroundings, etc. Please call us if you have any questions or concerns regarding camp.
- Use a calendar to plan for camp. Show your child when camp starts, how long it lasts, and when you’ll pick him/her up. For younger children who don’t have a well-developed sense of time, it can be helpful to put the length of their stay in perspective (“It’s just like the amount of time we spent at grandma’s last Christmas.”). The fewer surprises, the better!
- Keep doubts to yourself – try not to say things which will make your child worry about how you’ll feel when he’s at camp. Better to say, “Of course I’ll miss you, because I love you. But I know that you’ll have a great time at camp,” than to say, “I don’t know what I’m going to do while you’re gone at camp. I’m going to miss you so much, but I’ll survive somehow.”
- Find out if a friend or sibling can attend camp at the same time.
- Please encourage your child to participate in camp activities, as this will help him or her relate with other campers.
- Arrange for practice time away from home. Consider planning an overnight stay for your child at the home of a friend or relative.
- Anticipate changes in your child’s daily routine, and allow your child to try new procedures at home. For instance, if your child is used to taking a bath, encourage him or her to try taking a shower.
- Write your child a letter that will arrive early in the week (or leave it with the camp staff to give out on Monday).
- Provide your child with materials, including your address, for writing letters home.
- Do not overreact to an unhappy letter. A child may go through emotional ups and downs at camp. If, however, you are concerned about your child, please call the camp office. This way you can check on your child without his or her knowledge.
- Please send letters that do not cause stress. A letter telling your child how much he or she is missed and how much fun everyone is having at home may bring on homesickness. In your letters encourage your child to have fun; share with them how happy you are that they are able to have fun for a week at camp.
- Please do not encourage your child to call you, or make pickup deals with him/her. This conveys a lack of confidence in his/her ability to handle the separation, and can discourage him/her from investing in the group and can contribute to homesickness.
- Check out books from your local library such as, *Summer Camp Handbook*, by Dr. Christopher Thurber & Dr. Jon Malinowski
- Attend the Camp Gray Open House on Mothers Day, from 11 AM until 2 PM. This will allow you and your child to meet some of the camp staff and become more familiar with the camp.

How does the Camp Gray staff deal with homesickness? Our staff are trained to make the cabin group a welcoming, safe place. Staff establish routines, especially at bedtime (stories, prayers, etc.) to make campers feel more comfortable. Homesick campers are encouraged to try activities and to stay involved. Staff praise campers for their growth as they become more comfortable at camp. If homesickness is severe and persistent, we will call you for advice. We appreciate your help as the people who know your child the best. You can make the decision about whether or not to talk with your child, as this can be either helpful or detrimental, depending on the individual child. We truly see this as a partnership!

Tips from the Veterans

These are a few tips from families who have been coming to camp for a few years.

Smart Packing

PHOTO INVENTORY: As a key to making sure that your camper comes home with what they took to camp, organization is very important. Instead of making a list for your camper of what is in each pocket or bag, try taking a picture of it. Lay out all of the items that are going to go in each pocket of their bag or zip lock bag and take a digital picture of it. You can then print off the pictures and put it in each bag. That way your child can easily sort through their bag to find what they need.

SELF-SERVICE: One problem some families have had in the past is that their camper cannot find what they pack, or forget what they have in their bag. In order to prevent this have your camper pack their own bag and then double check it with them. By doing this they will know what they have and will be more likely to use it.

Keeping in Touch

FUN FORM LETTERS: This one is great for the boys. Sometimes campers get so wrapped up in the fun and excitement of camp that they forget to write home. One way to help them out is to send form letters with them, so all they have to do is circle a choice or fill in the blank. For example: Today for breakfast we had _____. After that I went (circle one) swimming/horse back ridding/canoeing. Something my counselor did that was funny today was _____.

HIDDEN NOTES: One way you as parents can keep in touch without writing letters, is to stick little notes and treats in your camper's things. You can hide little notes of encouragement or also small gifts such as stickers or a small favorite toy.

POSTCARD KIT: In order to make letter-writing easier, prepare a kit for your campers. This kit can include markers, pencils, pens, and fun stickers. Also put preaddressed postcards or envelopes in the kit.

Heading off Homesickness

PILLOWCASE PALS: Craft stores sell special transfer paper to run through your home printer and then iron onto cloth. Try printing off pictures of friends and family and ironing them onto a special pillow case. You can also have your camper's friends sign it. It serves as a good reminder of home and also as a good conversation starter for your camper to get to know the other campers in the cabin.

PILLOW HUGS: Suggest that your child, before going to sleep, hug his/her pillow. Tell your child that this will represent him/her hugging you, and that you will hug your pillow each night, to represent hugging your child.

HOMESICKNESS KIT: You can make your camper a little kit of small symbolic or sentimental treasures. The kit can include a family photo, a tissue to wipe any tears, and rubber band to remind them of your hugs. If the kit is small enough it could be squeezed into a pocket or water bottle holder, so they have it with them at all times.

Please contact us if we can help you in any other way to prepare yourself and your child for camp. We look forward to seeing you this summer!

Call us at 608-356-8200, or email bigfun@campgray.com (check out www.campgray.com, too!)